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85
86
87
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89
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93
94
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98
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100



Engraved and Printed in Colours by Vizetelly Brothers and Co

REPPING.—FLOURING.



THE BOYS' SPRING BOOK

Descriptive of the Season,
Scenery,

Rural Life, and Country Amusements.

BY THOMAS MILLER,

AUTHOR OF "PICTURES OF COUNTRY LIFE," "RURAL SKETCHES," &c. &c.

WITH THIRTY-FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS,

Engraved on Wood, by HENRY VIZETELLY and Others.



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Contents.

BEAUTY OF SPRING DESCRIBED—SONG OF THE SKYLARK—HAPPY LIFE OF THE BIRDS—PLOUGHING—COTTAGES AND COTTAGE GARDENS—THE VARIETY OF BEAUTIFUL SCENERY TO BE FOUND IN AN ENGLISH LANDSCAPE—WHY ENGLAND IS SUCH A GLORIOUS COUNTRY—GATHERING PALM AND EARLY SPRING FLOWERS—POETRY TO BE FOUND IN RURAL SCENERY—DESCRIPTION OF ROOKS; THEIR QUARRELS, AND WHAT THEY SAY TO ONE ANOTHER—AN OLD-FASHIONED ROOKERY—CARRION CROWS—VILLAGE STREET ON A SPRING EVENING—AMUSEMENTS OF POOR CHILDREN—SOME ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR'S PLAYMATES—STIR THAT SPRING MAKES AMONGST BOYS—WHAT THE BIRDS SAY TO ONE ANOTHER; THEIR KINDNESS TO EACH OTHER—MY BOYISH HAUNTS—PLEASURES OF MEMORY—AN APOLOGY FOR REARING YOUNG BIRDS—BIRDS'-NESTING DESCRIBED; BEAUTY AND VARIETY OF THEIR NESTS: NEST OF THE THROSTLE; SAND MARTIN; SKYLARK; MISSEL-THRUSH; WOODPIGEON; GOLDFINCH; MAGPIE—HOW I BROUGHT UP YOUNG BIRDS—HIVE-BEES; NURSE-BEES; WAX-WORKERS AND QUEEN-BEES—ROUGH, HEALTHY, OUT-OF-DOOR GAMES—AN ADVENTURE THAT BEFEL THE AUTHOR—THE STOCK-DOVE; BEAUTY AND VARIETY OF SPRING FLOWERS—PROGRESS OF SPRING—SOME ACCOUNT OF A BUTTERFLY THAT WENT OUT FOR A DAY'S PLEASURE—BARK-PEELERS AND WOOD-CUTTERS; THEIR WOODLAND LIFE—DESCRIPTION OF SNAKES AND VIPERS, WITH A CAUTION TO AVOID THE LATTER—STORY OF LITTLE NELL; HER BROTHER; THE PONY AND THE CART; WITH THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF LITTLE NELL—THE CURLEW—HABITS OF THE NUTHATCH AND WOODPECKER—YOUNG LAMBS AT PLAY—BLOOMFIELD'S BEAUTIFUL DESCRIPTION OF YOUNG LAMBS—BULLFINCHES GREAT DESTROYERS OF BUDS; THEIR NEST DESCRIBED—THE RINGED-DOTTEREL

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CONTENTS.

—MAY-DAY IN THE OLDEN TIME, IN SURREY; HOW WE CELEBRATED MAY-DAY IN THE COUNTRY—DESCRIPTION OF A WILD, LONELY COTTAGE IN A WOOD—ANGLING IN SPRING—THE OLD BRIDGE, A POEM—ENGLISH HISTORY; THE PLEASURE TO BE DERIVED FROM READING IT—GOLDEN PLOVER—THE OLD SLUICE GATES—RETURN OF SWALLOWS—NEVER-SWEAT-A-HAIR, OR THE MAN WHO NEVER DID ANY THING IN A HURRY—FLYING JEMMY—THE OLD SAW-PIT AND SEE-SAW—WHITSUNTIDE GAMES: CLIMBING THE POLE; HUNTING THE PIG; JUMPING IN SACKS; THE WHEELBARROW RACE, BLINDFOLDED; EATING HOT HASTY-PUDDING; THE DONKEY RACE—A VILLAGE SCHOOL, AND WHAT PROGRESS THE SCHOLARS MADE, WITH A DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOLMASTER—LIFE OF A COUNTRY BOY, AND WHAT HE DOES UNTIL HE GROWS UP A MAN—THE OLD RATCATCHER—DESCRIPTION OF A LITTLE VILLAGE SHOP, WHERE THEY SELL EVERY THING—EASTER HOLIDAYS—THE KNOT AND TEAL—PLEASURE DERIVED FROM A STUDY OF NATURAL HISTORY—WHY SPRING IS THE PLEASANTEST SEASON OF THE YEAR—THE CHANGES THAT MARK THE APPROACH OF SUMMER—THE END OF SPRING.





A FEW WORDS TO MY YOUNG READERS,
WHETHER AT SCHOOL, AT HOME, OR ABROAD.

MOST RESPECTED SIRS:

LIKE a garrulous old gossip, I am about to tell you how I came to write this work—what doubts I set out with—what fears I had at the commencement—and what pleasure it afforded me when I at last sat down earnestly to my task. First, then, I felt fearful, having written so many books descriptive of the country, and country life, that I should find it difficult to produce any thing new and interesting on a similar subject. “But,” argued a grave and learned friend, who has ever the welfare of youth at heart, “you have not yet written any thing for Boys; and as you were once a country-boy yourself, you must have seen and heard of many things which would be alike interesting, amusing, and instructive to them, were you to tell all you know in a light, agreeable manner,—not in that silly, childish style, which is

called the simple school of writing, but, if aught, rather above than beneath their capacities; for a clever lad will always manage to get at your meaning, when it is not buried beneath technical phrases: so do not fear being a little poetical and imaginative now and then—he will like your work all the better if a few such flowers are thrown around it judiciously. You can do it, if you will.”

Well, I thought at last I could; so throwing aside all my doubts and fears, I at once began to tell you what I did, what I saw, and what I thought, when I was a country-boy: and so fresh, and vivid, and life-like, did many of the old familiar scenes rise again before me whilst I wrote, that I felt the warm sunshine playing about my heart, bright, and light, and beautiful, as it did twenty long summers ago; and I was thankful that there was still so much of the old boyish feeling within me, which fitted me better to become your gay companion, than your grave tutor. And when I found how beautifully my respected Publishers were determined to illustrate and bring out “The Boy’s Own Library,” I not only resolved to amuse and please you, but also to blend useful knowledge and agreeable instruction with my country rambles, boyish games, and rural tales; so I began “to brush up my larning,” and to hunt about for information respecting the habits of beasts, birds, insects, and flowers, and all sorts of country things which had interested me so much when a boy. I also read many valuable works, such as you would not yet understand in their original forms; and these I adapted to your comprehension, and endeavoured to show you how the smallest flower that blows, and the tiniest insect that flies, are a part of one great and grand system, which is through-

out stamped by the CREATIVE POWER of GOD. That the more we study Nature, the greater our pleasure becomes; and that the paths which lead to such knowledge are the most delightful of all: and that the labour of gathering it in such pleasant places, as the green out-of-door world, is to lead a happier life than either a bee or a butterfly, who are always hovering about amongst the sweet flowers, though they cannot, like you, appreciate the wonderful works in which they find so much delight.

I have also shown you that the country can never become wearisome; that throughout the changes of every Season, you may always find something to instruct and delight you: and I believe that there never yet was a boy in whose heart a love of the beautiful country had been firmly implanted, who, when he became a man, could ever in after life stifle that inward yearning for those green, old, familiar places. For he who has once watched the birds build in Spring, and felt a pleasure in listening to their "wood-notes wild;" who has wandered for miles, ankle-deep, in the waving flowers of Summer; rambled through the woods when the solemn winds of Autumn strewed the entangled pathways with yellow leaves; or seen the untrodden snow lying broad and white upon the ground in Winter, as if the fields were paved with spotless marble, can never forget that

"God made the country, and man made the town."

To increase your love for the beautiful scenery of England—to make you fonder of its wild green woods, flower-covered hills, pastoral plains, pleasant walks, and sweet river-side scenery—I have written these books; conscious that you will feel much pleasure in reading

them, and in becoming better acquainted with many things, which are to be found in the country, that will be entirely new to you. I also have my pleasure in knowing that I have done something for the youth of Great Britain, that will make them more attached to their native land,—that little island like a

“Precious stone set in the silver sea,”—

whose renown the winds and waves have wafted to the uttermost ends of the earth.

And now, my much approved young Masters, with my kindest wishes I bid you, for the present,—Farewell.

Yours Truly





W. H. P. 1811

When daisies pied and violets blue,
 And lady-smocks all silver white,
 And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
 Do paint the meadows with delight,
 The cuckoo then on every tree
 Sings cuckoo, cuckoo.—SHAKSPEARE.

WHAT a pleasant sound
 there is about the word
 Spring, or Spring-time!

How sweetly it falls upon the ear, bringing also with it visions of primrose-covered banks, and primrose-coloured skies, just warm enough to tempt "those little angels of the trees," the birds, to come back again from over the sunny seas, build in their former haunts, and sing, in their old familiar hedgerows and greenwood shades, all the sweeter through having been so long away from us! Oh! how dull would appear

those great, solemn, cathedral-looking forests without these little winged choristers to warble in them, and break the silence by the sound of their sweet notes—sweeter than the jingling of a thousand silver bells, all chiming with one accord! What beauty now breaks upon us on every side! what pleasant objects greet the eye! what a lightness and buoyancy there is about our hearts! the very soul seems as if it longed to escape, fly abroad, and mingle in the sunshine with the breeze, the birds, and the flowers! Up springs the skylark from among the young daisies, where it has slept all night long, shaking the beaded dew-drops from its wings, as it soars singing into the clear and sunny blue of heaven, seeming to beat time to its own music by the motion of its pinions as it rises higher and higher, until it looks no larger than a bee, then diminishes into a mere speck, so small, that if the eye but loses sight of it for a moment, it vanishes amid the floating silver of the cloud, and its note sounds fainter and afar off, as if it were singing, at the same time, both to earth and heaven!—and we might almost fancy that there were angels' faces looking down and listening to its music, as they leant over the golden edges of the sun-dyed clouds, even as we look upward, and try in vain to catch another glance at the little chorister, who sings, as Shakspeare says, "at heaven's gate." Further on, you hear a whole choir of linnets calling to, and answering each other, from every budding spray, and opening hedgerow; and so much does their song harmonize with your own feelings, that you seem to hear them say to one another, "Oh, what a lovely Spring this is!" For all you fancy they can find to sing about, is their nests, the flowers, the budding may-blossoms, their young ones, the sunshine, morning, and the hushed twilight of evening, what buds they will feed upon, and what spots they will visit on the morrow. And what greater enjoyment can a boy wish for, than thus to ramble through the fields, and woods, and beside clear and pleasant rivers, at this delightful

season of the year, indulging in all kinds of wayward fancies, in watching the flowers and young buds as they blow and blossom, thicker and sweeter every day; or in endeavouring to distinguish the note of a particular bird, which has newly arrived from some far-off and foreign shore, and flown for many a mile over the ever-beating billows of the deep-voiced sea, to join the great band of winged musicians, who have come to play all the long summer in our green old English woods. There is something cheering and refreshing about even the smell of the earth as it is turned up by the ploughshare: it throws a countrified air all around, and it is pleasing to watch the heavy furrows as they move and fall over each other, then rest like the ridges upon the sea-shore, as wave after wave retreats, leaving only behind its footmark in long trails upon the sleeping sand. In passing the cottage gardens, too, you cannot resist stopping to peep over the railed fences, or through the half-naked hedges, for the golden crocuses attract the eye whether you look or not, and tell you that Spring has come again. Even the doors and windows of the cottages are thrown open, as if to invite you to peep inside, to see how clean and cheerful the sunshine, which has stepped in before you, has made them; for it is the gold which God scatters out of heaven upon the very poor to comfort them.

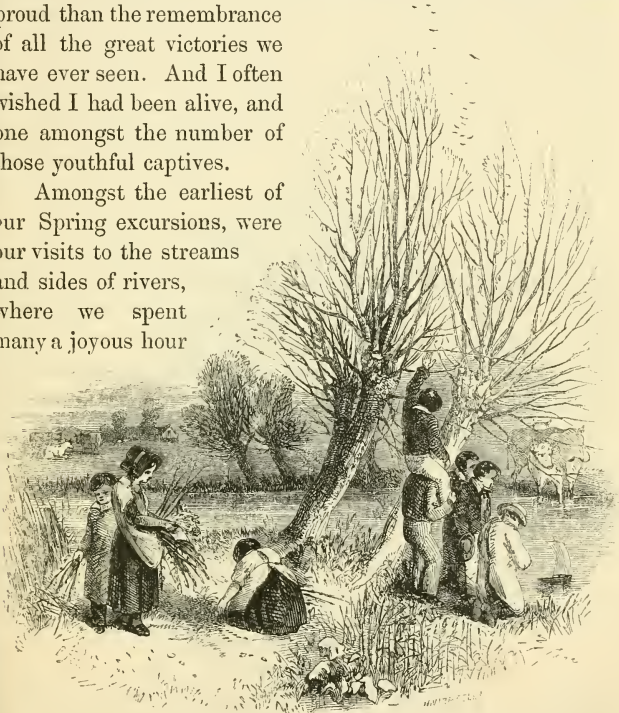
Oh my boys, what days of pleasure have we now before us! what delightful walks through healthy meadows, where we shall hear the golden-belted bee go humming over the blossoms, and see the gaudy butterfly resting like a folded pea-flower upon some newly opened bud! What concerts are already preparing for us in the woods, what sweet music now rings through the valleys, what green leaves are growing longer every day, to make an embowered shade for us to sit under, when we are weary through walking! What a drowsy murmuring there is about the rivers and streams, as if even the waters felt joyous in the warm sun-

shine, and could not refrain from telling the smooth pebbles, over which they passed, and the great golden marsh-marigolds, whose images they reflect back, how happy they have felt since Spring broke loose their icy fetters, and left them once more to wander "at their own sweet will!" For our England is a beautiful country, the climate so sweetly tempered, such gradual transitions from heat to cold, and cold to heat; such healthy breezes sweep over it from the wide and open seas by which it is every way surrounded; and its scenery is so delightful, and so varied with its rising hills and sunken valleys, and sloping uplands that seem neither hill nor vale; its lovely green woods and broad pasture-lands, through which rivers go winding like silver braids, running over a ground of rich velvet; and then over all these reigns such peace, that for miles and miles away, the country looks like one great garden—and while you gaze over such lovely scenery, you seem to ask yourself, that since the earth is so beautiful, what must heaven be? And this very England I would have you love more and more, however far away circumstances may remove you from it. I would never have you forget the country over which Alfred reigned; and for whose religion Latimer died; the land in which Shakspeare was born, and buried; where Milton sung; and Newton made such discoveries, as astonished the whole world. Such is the country to which you and I belong, the proud mother that nursed us, and that numbers amongst her children more noble names, than ever enriched the annals of any other kingdom in the whole wide world.

Nor ought we to feel less proud on account of our wave-beaten island having been first invaded by the Romans, when we remember that no less a genius than Julius Cæsar first taught our ancient forefathers civilization, and brought to our shores the very laws and government, by which classic Rome was herself ruled; and that, throughout all the changes of time, these have never been lost sight of by our legislators.

And, but for that invasion, those beautiful English boys, which attracted the eye of Gregory the Great, would never have stood in the slave-market of Rome ; nor would he, probably, ever have thought of sending missionaries to instruct our ancestors, in the Christian religion, but for them. What a thrill did it send through my heart, when I first read that passage in history, to know that nearly fifteen hundred years ago a few beautiful English boys were the cause of Christianity being first taught in this island ! That thought often made me feel more proud than the remembrance of all the great victories we have ever seen. And I often wished I had been alive, and one amongst the number of those youthful captives.

Amongst the earliest of our Spring excursions, were our visits to the streams and sides of rivers, where we spent many a joyous hour



GATHERING PALM,

SPRING.

as we called the budding willows and sallows, which were covered with golden and silver-coloured catkins; and these we carried home to place among the few flowers which we had found scattered upon the lap of Spring; for we never fancied the cottage looked as it ought to do, unless it was ornamented with a nosegay against Palm-Sunday; for it was an old and simple custom, endeared to us all the more through those beautiful passages in the New Testament, which describe Christ's entry into Jerusalem on that holy day. It seemed also a gathering together of the first offerings of Spring, for around the palm we planted the long green silken leaves and pearl-like flowers of the lily-of-the-valley; and these we surrounded with wild blue-bells, and spotted cowslips, and pale primroses, which we hemmed in by a narrow border of violets, sweeter than all earthly perfumes, and daisies rimmed like the little stars of heaven. And when we looked upon all these treasures so neatly placed in the rich china jug, or rude earthen vessel, they recalled the green and secluded places where we had gathered them,—the dim woods, “ankle-deep in lilies-of-the-valley;” the warm primroses, that peeped out like buried treasures, from their Winter hiding-places amongst the moss and dead leaves; the cowslips that nodded on many a sunny and breezy hillock; the violets that nestled about the stems of large old forest-trees, and seemed to creep under their own broad dark leaves for shelter, as if they feared their sweetness might betray the place of their concealment; blue-bells that grew in moist and hidden spots, where, saving their own presence, and the pale pearly cups of anemone, which ever waved their delicate and drooping heads before the gentlest breeze that blew—there was

“An eternal April on the ground
That made it all one emerald.”

For many a journey had we in Spring to gather cowslips; the fields all about Park-house were covered with them; and

often have we pulled up one of these beautiful roots, and counted more than twenty buds which sprung from the same stalk. What a huge handful have we sometimes culled within an hour or two! all smelling so sweet, and looking so lovely, with their deep golden cups spotted with ruby, bedded and resting together, and appearing a thousand times more beautiful than the richest ornament that was ever cut out of the purest gold. Then what a pleasant task it was when we got home, to pull the delicate peeps, or buds from out of their pale emerald sheaths, and to know that when we had gathered and picked a sufficient quantity, they were to be made into that most delicious of all home-brewed beverages, sweet and fragrant cowslip wine! Often, too, at some unexpected corner of a field, during these rambles, we came unawares upon a country maiden



MILKING THE COWS,

and singing as cheerfully over her labour, as the birds that were hopping about upon the boughs among the blossoms: and then we purchased of her many a draught of the warm new milk, which we drank through the creamy foam, that broke, like opening may-buds, about the transparent edge of the snow-white wooden dish; for we knew that the cow which yielded it had herself fed upon the sweet yellow cowslips; and the very flavour itself was rich as honey steeped in a bowlful of delicious flowers. And sometimes across the road, and up a lane that led nowhere but to green fields, to a country that seemed too beautiful ever to be broken up into roads, where it would have been almost a sin for a wheel ever to have crushed those endless and lengthening lines of white daisies, that seemed to stretch onward and onward for evermore, as if they were trying to find their way to the beds of primroses and violets in the distant wood; as if they had for ages formed an old highway of flowers, over which had marched the feet of many thousand bees and butterflies: sometimes crossing over one of these beautiful pathways that lead to the little quiet heavens of this green and beautiful world, an innocent shepherd-boy would pass, driving before him his snow-white lambs, to bleat and feed upon some new and untrodden pasture; or seated sideways upon one of his sleek and well-fed horses, a ploughboy, in his weather-stained smock-frock, would ride whistling along, the long whip dropping listlessly over his shoulder, and we heard the jingling music of the harness, until the sound died away in the distance: and then, saving the singing of the birds, the whole wide landscape would again lie buried in its green stillness; a stillness, amid which even the murmuring of the far-off bee became audible. And ever there went singing along, with low and subdued voice, some clear brook that could only be heard when a rounded pebble checked its course, as if it murmured at being kept away from the flowers that grew beyond, and had come a long way down the hills to look at them, from where the breeze

had first blown the tidings about the beauty of the spot in which they grew; and ever over the stream the drooping maybuds waved, as if they tried to match their whiteness against the silvery cloud that was mirrored below; and here and there great trees threw their green arms across it, chequering its onward course with cooling shadows, as if to give it for a little time a pleasant resting-place, before it went on again to where the golden and unclouded sunshine fell. And where it went broadening out, the gaudy dragon-flies met together to play; and where it went narrowing in, the tufted bulrushes, and the feathery reeds, and the yellow flowers of the broad-leaved water-fags, nodded, and bended, and rustled together, as if they were never weary of telling each other, how pleasant was the spot in which they grew; and little birds took up the tidings, and told them to the blossoms, and the blossoms repeated them to the bees, who were ever murmuring about their fragrance; and the bees whispered the tidings back again into the bells of the flowers; and the flowers breathed them back again to the butterflies, as they sat swinging upon their honied bells with folded wings. Then the rounded dews of twilight came dropping down to see if they were true; and all night long the stars of heaven stopped out to look at them; and the bright moon hung with delight over such beautiful scenes, and the golden beams of the early morning came out of heaven to play there, as if they could find no place so bright and beautiful about the sky. And so do I still look upon the beauties of Nature—to me they are ever clothed in rich and fanciful colours, the flowers have a language which I seem to understand more clearly every time I look upon them; they have made my mind

“ A mansion for all lovely forms;
 My memory a dwelling-place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies.”

I can conjure them up before me at any moment; I can see

them all as clearly mapped out in my "mind's eye," as when I last looked upon them; and such pleasing visions never allow me to feel sad or lonely for many moments together. It is as if my heart in its boyish delight had opened and taken in all these beautiful impressions; and night and day, through all the changes and troubles of life, they are still there, and I can gaze upon them at my will. They are treasures no living mortal can deprive me of.

If you have never seen a rookery, I would advise you, the first time you get into some old-fashioned neighbourhood, where one of these airy cities are built, to visit it without delay, for there you will find much to amuse you. The rooks are all thieves, every man-jack of them! and they think no more about walking off with a beam from another rook's house, and strengthening their own nest with it, than a big thief of a boy does of snatching up some poor little fellow's marbles, putting them into his pocket, and walking away with them. Then these rooks quarrel dreadfully; often getting from words to blows, and, I dare say, abusing each other heartily, in their way, before they begin to fight. I have sometimes amused myself by trying to find out what they were quarrelling about, and have often fancied, when I have seen a couple of poor rooks, returning home with a stick apiece in their mouths (reckoning, no doubt, in their own minds, how many more trips they would have to make before their nest was completed), what must have been their conversation, when, instead of finding the foundation of their nest as they had left it, every stick had been stolen during their absence by a couple of lazy vagabonds, who were too idle to go and fetch the materials with which to finish their building, so stayed at home to steal whatever they could lay their evil hands upon, while their more industrious and honest neighbours were busily employed in rummaging about amidst the fields. I have fancied how annoyed they must have felt when, return-

ing with their last two sticks, they have, perhaps, said to one another, just before they reached home, "Well, never mind! though it is hard work flying such a distance, and bringing back such pieces of heavy timber, yet we have already made above a hundred journeys, and as many more will complete our task; then we shall have such a nice nest of our own, and can go to bed when we like, and get up whenever we please, or at least lie awake; for those low-bred people, who live above our heads in the attics, are always up and quarrelling at the first peep of day, and there is no getting a wink of sleep after; and—but, bless me! how is this? we must have mistaken the bough; and yet that can't be, neither! That must be Black-cap, peeping out over his house-top there; and I know Splay-foot, who lives next door, by his claws; and the other nest belongs to the long-nosed fellow I had such a battle with last Spring—I know him by the scar above his eye, which I made with my sharp beak when we fought, and which he'll carry to his grave with him. Well—what a shame! I declare, if some of the thieves out of the next street have n't been here during our absence, and carried away every stick and stake that we had piled together, even to the very scaffolding! It's too bad; that it is! and I wo'n't stand it any longer; so, come along." And they spread out their black wings, and away they sail to the next tree, and alight on the bough next to that occupied by the robbers, whom they have no difficulty in detecting, for the very bulk into which their nest has so suddenly grown, plainly tells that they have not come by the materials honestly. "What do you mean, you scoundrel, by coming and carrying off the whole of my house, while I was away?" commences the bolder rook of the two. "Beg your pardon," answers the black rascal, whose very looks condemn him; "but I thought, as you were so long gone, you had perhaps left this place altogether, to reside in some more peaceable neighbourhood—

for this is but a sorry spot to live in; so, making sure that some other rook would be stepping in and taking possession, why, I took the liberty. Beg pardon; but hope there's no offence." "No offence!" exclaims the injured rook, "take that, you thievish-looking fellow," and he fetches him such a bat on the head with the point of his beak, as sends him spinning on the other side of the nest. "I will thank you not to strike my husband," cries out Mrs. Rook, who has hitherto remained in silence. "Your husband deserves it, and you too, madam," exclaims the injured lady, who has accompanied her husband; "for you are, both of you, dishonest persons." "I would thank you to keep your impertinence to yourself," replies the robber's wife; "for if you do not, you will put me under the painful necessity of compelling you." "You compel me! you dirty, black-looking hussy! You! When did you wash your face last? I'd box your ears for two straws—that I would, you saucy madam, you!" "At your peril dare to lift up your hand against me!" replies the other; for if you do, I'll call my relations, and give you in charge, that I will!" "This stick's mine," says the other, hopping down, and planting her claws upon it; "deny it, if you can. It's mine, and I'll have it!" "Not by my consent, madam!" answers the other, also planting her claws upon it. Then battle-royal commences; they pull, they peck, they strike, they thrust; they stop a moment to take breath, and at it they go again. Their husbands are also fighting: all the neighbourhood is up! from every nest there are a couple of heads poked out, looking on the combatants—some crying, "Serve 'em right! Well done! Give it 'em!" Some hovering about in the air, and exclaiming, "Bless me, what a disagreeable neighbourhood this is to live in! nothing but fighting and quarrelling, picking and stealing; really, Mr. So-and-so, I think it's high time you and I moved to a more respectable place; but I'm glad the honest people have

thrashed 'em, and recovered their own again; and, as the whole colony seem to be up, driving these low, thievish people away, I think it our duty to join them in showing our disapprobation, lest, by our standing aloof, we should be suspected of countenancing the delinquents." There is something pleasing about a



ROOKERY,

when the windy tall elm-trees on which they build overlook some ancient and picturesque hall, where you can catch glimpses, between the openings of the trees, of large bay-windows, and clusters of tall twisted chimneys; where the brown, winding carriage-path runs in and out between the embowered avenue, while behind lie sweeps of soft velvet greensward, which go down to

some smooth sheet of clear water, on which the stately swans are sailing about like little silver ships, so small and indistinct do their forms appear, when seen from the remote distance. In such a spot, with the grey old tower of the village-church heaving up behind the trees, a rookery seems in keeping with the scenery. The drowsy cawing which they make gives a soft and dreamy sound to the landscape, and there is something poetical in the very thought that their ancient household has been reared there, time out of mind,—perhaps ever since the first stone of the old building itself was laid,—and that generation after generation of their dusky race have been swept away, like the long line of heirs who have succeeded each other, have had their births, their marriages, and their funerals; have come in, and gone out from the doors of that ancient hall; even as the rooks themselves have done, between the openings of those tall old trees, which still stand green and high, and looking as unchanged as the building itself, as if the same inhabitants still moved, and dreamed, and lingered there, unaltered amid the brooding quietude, which has slumbered over so many centuries. They also pay visits to the old church, peep in among the inhabitants of the neighbouring village, move and forage and walk about every acre of the estate, as if to see that all was going on as it ought to do,—for no one ever disputed their claim to the proprietorship of the soil, and they look out over the wide estate, as if they were alone the sole owners. Nor will they allow any strangers to build or settle down upon their ancient property; for although they often quarrel among themselves, still, if any intruder dares to occupy a branch within their broad boundary, the whole colony are up in arms in a few moments, and away they rush with their dusky banners outspread, uttering their hoarse war-cry, and sailing on with sharp-pointed beaks, and wing to wing, like brave soldiers who are resolved to storm the enemy's citadel, and carry it at the point of the bayonet.

There is a great difference between the habits of rooks and

crows ; the latter are a wild restless race—wandering Arabs, who pitch their tents anywhere in the great desert of the world, enemies to all order, all rule, and all society ; they build their nest upon some solitary tree which commands a wide look out, and will sally forth at a moment's notice upon any peaceful passenger, be it a young hare, or a sickly lamb, a stray chicken, or a wandering pigeon, who are unfortunate enough to pass within eyesight of their evil neighbourhood. Nor will they hesitate to give battle to either a hawk, a kite, or a raven, should they venture to approach their nest ; and so highly are their fighting qualities estimated by the country-people, that when the cruel and murderous pastime of cock-fighting was more in vogue, it was a common practice to place hens' eggs in the nests of these crows, after having taken away those which the crows had laid, and leave them there to be hatched ; and from these eggs were the finest breed of fighting-cocks produced. This is a fact which I have often witnessed, and which I have never yet found mentioned in any work on natural history. Their eggs are rather large and long, and are of a beautiful green colour marked with dark and irregular spots. They are not easily distinguished from the rooks, saving that the bill is more bent, and that there are a few bristle-like feathers growing about the base of the beak. The rooks however, feed on insects ; while the crow gorges itself with any kind of animal food it can alight upon ; hence it is called the carrion-crow.

What a change has Spring produced both in the streets of the towns and villages ! You feel happy whilst gazing upon the number of poor children it has released from the cold and darkness of Winter, amid which they were pent up like so many prisoners. And you can tell by their merry shouts, and the eagerness with which they follow their childish amusements, that the warm cheerful sunshine has caused them to forget for a time all their poverty and suffering. Even the smallest of all, who have not been able to run for more than a few

weeks, have found pleasure in piling up tiny hillocks of dirt; while their little brothers and sisters are busily employed in arranging the buttercups and daisies, which they gathered in their pinafores, heads and tails together, with handfuls of weeds and grass in the green and pleasant meadows: sweet places! Oh! how different to the smoke, and dirt, and squalor, which are found in too many of their miserable homes. The warm Spring evening has, like a friendly voice, called them all forth; and although there are traces of dirt on their young innocent faces, which show how they are neglected by their poor parents, still they bear not now about them those marks of care, which give to ragged and hunger-bitten children such an old, grave, and heart-aching look. What boy, during his walk on a fine Spring evening, has not observed these children of the poor, and watched them engaged in their out-of-door amusements, an hour or so before bed-time? Has not seen two little bare-footed creatures, whose frocks kept slipping from off their shoulders every now and then, busy and happy at their game of battledore and shuttlecock; one, perhaps, had got an old book-cover, the other the hard crown of an old hat, and these were their battledores; while the shuttlecock, which they struck with so much delight, one after the other, was, perhaps, formed of a cork, in which they had stuck a few feathers that had fallen from the half-starved hens which pecked about that poor and wretched-looking neighbourhood. And yet those children were just as happy with such make-shift toys, as they would have been with the grandest that ever came out of a tempting toy-shop. They jump up just as high at each stroke, and laugh just as loud as you would do were you playing with the richest presents that you ever received on your birthday. And is it not a pity that those poor children, who are now so happy and so innocent, will, for want of that education which you are favoured with, and for that watchful care which your fond parents keep over you, be left to wander about wherever they choose: untaught and uncared

for, will many of them run from street to street with Lucifer-matches to sell, or from door to door begging a mouthful of bread; or mingle with other children, who through bad examples have fallen into evil ways; who never had a fond mother to kneel down before while they said their prayers, ere they retired to sleep, or a kind father to take them in his arms and bless them when they arose in the morning. Oh! you would shudder if you could but trace the future career of many of those poor children whom you see on a warm Spring evening so playful and happy, in spite of all their dirt and rags, as they emerge from the courts and alleys where they have been shut up all the winter long. I know I am writing to warm-hearted English boys, possessed of noble feelings, and I am sure that when they pass these poor neglected children they will feel sorry for them; and that if ever they possess the power in after-life, they will lend their aid in establishing schools, and endeavouring to alleviate the misery which hangs about those wretched courts and alleys, and such kind actions will bring their own reward. For who can tell how many children might grow up to respectable men and women through being able to read such books as are written for you; but who, for want of education, wallow in the filth, and darkness, and ignorance amid which they were born: and where no one ever came to teach them right from wrong, or good from evil? And when you are men, and in business, if some poor little fellow comes, with his hair peeping through the hole in his cap, his little cold toes showing like the heads of mice through the holes in his boots, his jacket shorn of half its buttons, and his corduroy breeches fastened up with string, do not, if he inquires whether you want an errand-boy, speak cross to him, because he is so meanly clad, or send him away because he has never before been in a situation; for you know not how good, and willing, and honest, and industrious a boy may be found under that ragged covering. In the dark and dirty mines they dig for, and find, gold;

amongst the dead leaves and withered weeds are the sweet violets often hidden; in the shells of ugly fish are found pearls; and if from the good old proverb you are taught that "every thing is not gold that glitters," so may you, on the other hand, be sure, that every thing is not dross that looks like it; and that many a good boy has been a lost man because he was unable to make a respectable appearance at his outset in life. I would not give a pin for a boy who has not courage enough to judge for himself, and to form his own opinion, even when it differs at times from that of others.

I remember, when a boy, wearing my father's cap and feather, and sash and sword, for he had been an officer in the volunteers; but whether I played the part of Napoleon or Wellington, or led on the French or English in our games, I never would countenance the rejection of a poor little playmate because he wore a ragged jacket; but rather would decorate his torn sleeve with white paper, and make a sergeant of him: and no boy could muster so large an army as I could, through enlisting such lads as prouder boys were ashamed to play with. Their little hard dirty hands never hindered me from placing in them the white broken bits of pot which enlisted them for soldiers; no, not even if they wore the coarse grey livery of the workhouse; for workhouse children were allowed to come out and play in those days: and many a time have we exchanged our white bread for their brown; ay, and eaten it too. They knew where the choicest birds built, and the finest flowers grew; and who like them to climb the high hawthorn hedges, and bring down the sweetest boughs of may, branches on which the first sunbeams of morning broke, and on the topmost twigs of which the little birds got up to sing their morning hymns. Was I better than they were, because my father had once been a merchant, and owned ships, and called wharfs beside the river his own; and kept a banker's account, and had once carried his head high amongst the people.

who, because they are rich, the world considers them alone respectable? Not at all. His ships were wrecked, the bank broke, and I became one of the children of the poor; their companion, their playmate, the leader of their games; for they loved me, and I loved them. No rich boy could have been happier than poverty made me. I often thought of the once wealthy banker, who became a drivelling idiot, and went about with his hat turned upside down, with his stockings hanging about his heels; and who, when asked why he wore his hat so, would reply that "the world was turned upside down with him." Poor fellow! our little fortune was lost through his failure, and he became an idiot, and I one of the children of the poor. But for these changes I should never have been able to write for you as I do now—never, perhaps, have been nursed in the iron school of adversity.

How merrily do those little, ragged fellows trundle their hoops along! I wonder what they did with themselves during the long winter-nights! Perhaps, poor things, they were sent to bed soon after dark, to save fire and candle, as is frequently the case amongst the very poor. Here they are spinning their tops. How kind it was of that old gentleman to step off the pavement, rather than tread within the ring they have made! Depend upon it, from the smile which passed over his good-natured countenance, so pleasing a sight recalled his own boyish days. Here, again, they are busy at hop-scotch, or hop-bed, as it is called in some parts of England. How beautifully that little girl balances herself on one foot! with what judgment she strikes the smooth piece of broken pot with her shoe, as if she could feel the distance, as she struck it from the centre of one figured square to another: it passes even the narrowest of all, for none are difficult to her. What a colour such healthy exercise brings into her fair face; and how soundly she will sleep under the thatched roof of her little cottage, after her play

is over! Marbles are turned out of their hiding-places; drawers are hunted over for fishing-tackle; bows and arrows are once more called into use; the skeleton of the great kite is taken down, and covered with paper; and one thing after another is brought forth, to be again cast aside in its turn, for Spring has brought with it such long days, and so many pleasures, that, out of such a number, we scarcely know which amusement to follow first. There is the little garden to dig up, and the seeds to be sown, and there are wild flowers to gather in the fields, and birds'-nests to peep into in the hedges, and the osier-peelers to watch beside the river, and the bark-peelers, who are at work in the great woods; to look at, and see them strip from off the trees all their beautiful mossy bark, and leave their trunks white and naked upon the ground: and anglers are now busy among the streams, and the bees will be swarming, and the young rooks dropping out of their nests, and, above all, the old birds have begun to lay. And some of them sing so sweetly that you might almost fancy you could understand what they say! that one was calling to some near neighbour, and exclaiming, "Just come and look, and you'll see the sweet blue-violets, and the pale golden-primroses, peeping out from amid their green leaves, and sending up such a delicious perfume all about my nest, that I cannot sleep a wink after day-dawn. So sweet is the scent which breaks my slumber, I'm forced to get up, and sing for joy." "I cannot come now," answers another; "I am watching the white blossoms on the hawthorns break through the snowy pearls and green emeralds in which they have been so long wrapped up; and I love to count how many pink, and how many pale ones, blow together in the morning. And there is a little bed of blue-bells at my feet, which are growing more blue, and more beautiful, every day; and all under the bank above which I have built, the ground is golden with the sunshine of the celandine; and the

little buds keep breaking out of their green sheaths about every minute, and I must watch them until they have covered my nest all over with green; for when my young ones come out of their shells, I should not like their chamber-window to be without a curtain of leaves to screen the strong light from their dear little eyes. And they may not grow right if I leave the young shoots to run about as they please; but when I have trained the leaves to fall and open where I wish them, and got this bunch of may-blossom, which is just blooming, to fall over my head while I sleep, then will I come, neighbour, and peep at your primroses and violets, and some day bring my young ones with me, when they are big enough, should they escape the keen eyes of



BOYS BIRDS'-NESTING:

and while they chase each other in and out, among the may-bloom and the woodbine, we will sit apart, and watching, teach them the same sweet tunes which we were taught to sing, and which are as old as the hills, and yet ever fresh as the flowers of Spring."

For assuredly the birds must think of something while they sing; and what can it be, unless it is about their nests and their young ones, and the flowers, and the cheerful sunshine, and the rounded dew-drops which fall all night long on the silken plumage of their wings? Some think that the birds sing only to express their love to each other, and to tell how happy they are together. Perhaps it may be so; for it has been remarked, that they often sing all the sweeter after they have had a quarrel and a fight, and perhaps that is their way of making it up again. For we know that, even amongst ourselves, little brothers and sisters will sometimes peck at each other; then kiss, and become friends the next minute. But to show you how kind birds are to one another, I must tell you, that whilst the female bird is sitting upon her eggs to hatch them, the male bird seldom stirs far away from her; but will perch upon a bough near at hand, and sing to her, seeming to say, "I know, my dear, you must stop at home and keep your eggs warm, or the young ones will all die; but never mind, it will not be for long, and when they are able to fly, and provide for themselves, we will have many a happy ramble again through the green woods; and until that time comes I will never leave you." Some think that the old birds teach the young ones to sing, the same as mothers teach their children to talk. But this can hardly be true, for their young ones are only just able to chirp whilst they are under the care of the older birds; nor is it until the following Spring that they begin to break out into song. We might as well conclude that they also taught their young ones how to build their nests, which we know is not the case. Trifling as these things may appear, they serve

to convince us that there is some great and secret power at work "who doeth all these things;" and that power can be nothing less than the wonder-working hand of God. Oh! what happy days did we spend during the primrose season of Spring! what rambles we had down Humble-car Lane, and Lea Marshes, and up Foxby-Lane, and over Double Hill, and by White's Wood, and Somerby Wood, and over Corringham Scrogs, and among the dark trees in Long Plantation, and up Thonock Lane, and among the hedges on Castle Hills: over the bridge, and in the fields about Beckingham, and Bole, and Sawnby, and Wheatly; by the Delf Banks, among the water-flags and bulrushes; past Cape's ropery, with its high old hawthorn hedges, in Parnell's osier-holt, with its crumbling brick bridge, and weather-stained sluice-gates! Oh! I feel as if I could jump up out of my arm-chair now, and run off, without once stopping, to visit those dear old sweet familiar places, and hunt every hedge and bush once more for birds' nests, as I did a quarter of a century ago. I will no more believe that my heart whilst ever it beats, can either grow old, or cold, or cease to pant and yearn for those delightful spots, which are ever green with the pleasant memories of my boyish days, than that they will cease to be covered in Spring and Summer with milk-white daisies, and sun-dyed buttercups, or hemmed in with pleasant hedges, powdered over and perfumed with the blossoms of may. I will never believe but what the river sings and murmurs as sweetly through those evergreen and winding banks, as it did when I was a boy; and that the silver-sounding bells ring as cheerfully from that old grey and weather-beaten tower, as when I listened to them in my childish years, and sighed, because my companions could not feel so happy as I did. I can never think that the water-flags around that deep, silent pond, will ever be without a reed-sparrow's nest, or that the hedge-sparrows will ever cease to build, and lay their sky-dyed eggs, in the hawthorn hedges, which surround Gate Burton.

I cannot think that the throistles will ever forsake those dark firs in the old plantation; or the



BOTTLE-TIT'S NEST

be ever found so beautifully built, as amongst the thick under wood, which grew over the wild blue-bells that waved there; or that the blue-winged jay will ever fly away to build any where but in Lea Wood; for although I have grown older, the fond remembrance that is yet rooted there, is still ever young, and dances its fresh, green leaves in the wind and sunshine, as if the bark on its stem was yet unwrinkled, and not a tuft of moss had clung to its storm-beaten trunk. I would gather all the birds that ever sang about me in my boyish days, if I could, and thought that they would become my companions, without either repining or complaining; for I should fancy when they sang to me, that they were telling me all about the old hills and woods we wandered over years ago, and for which our loves would still be mutual; and sometimes we should be very glad, and very sorrowful together, and close our eyes in the same twilight, and dream about the same old familiar scenes, for we should be all prisoners alike, longing for the same summer green, they and I, sending every beat of the heart after things that were far away. And yet, not so! for even with closed eyes I can look through the dim avenues of

old years, down the grey twilight of time can I gaze at my will, for nothing there is wholly dark; the sinking sunset is gilded over with pleasant memories, and even in sleep they steal forth, to visit those beloved haunts, to bring me back tidings about the flowers that are budding, and to comfort me when I awaken; and this is my reward for never having forsaken them. I never threw my dead flowers away to be trampled under foot by the rude passer-by, but laid them reverentially aside, covered them with dead leaves, and buried them in Autumn under some favourite bed, believing that they became a portion of those which appeared again in the following Spring. If I carried home a little bird, and brought it up tenderly, when I heard the rough winds piping over the grave of Summer, I knew it had no stormy sea to pass over, to escape from the biting cold of the coming Winter; and I consoled myself through knowing that I had saved its tiny wings from many a weary beat; and then I could carry my prisoners whenever I pleased into a large and pleasant garden, and hang up their cages in the thickest green of the trees, and that made them more happy than if they had only unmeaning dead walls to look upon. I knew that no sharp-toothed martens, such as skulk about the shadowy branches in the woods, could spring upon them unawares and devour them; that they would never want for food, however severe the winter might be; that I was kinder to them than the elements, which forced them to seek a change of climate over wide and perilous seas; and, if they seemed very restless when the sweet Spring came, and hanging them up amongst the beautiful apple-blossoms made them no happier,—if they would not come to me when they were called, and hop, and peck, and gambol in my presence, I invariably restored them to liberty.

Hawks and owls I dealt less tenderly with: I knew they were cruel by nature; that if once free they would commit murder by wholesale, that many a mouse would cease to

squeak, and many a bird to sing. Over these I reigned with an iron hand; and sometimes when I heard a sweet bird sing, I said to myself, "Perhaps the prisoner I have now in safe keeping would, had he been abroad, have put a stop to thy sweet piping;" for I had, during my rambles, seen many of these sharp-beaked, and strong-winged fellows, take a walk through the sky, and look round as if they were only admiring the prospect below, when pop, without leaving the little songster time enough to say "Oh deary me," they would drop down like a stone, and commence murder, with no more compunction than a fallen apple would feel for the poor caterpillar it had crushed to death.

And now, before I offer any further defence about capturing and caging birds, I shall endeavour to make you acquainted with their habits, conscious that no kind-hearted boy will ever voluntarily neglect or injure one, after he has read all I have got to say about them; but that if he ever does take, and confine them, it will be for the love of having such beautiful and wonderful companions about him, that he may become better acquainted with their habits, and watch their little ways: for I believe such objects tend to soften, instead of harden the heart; and shall, after having described their various methods of building, give my reasons for such belief.

To make you acquainted with those wonderful structures, birds' nests, I must first endeavour to point out the difference of style in which they build; showing you how some, like masons and miners, hew and cut their way into rocks; how others imitate carpenters, and saw, and measure, and fit; while a third follows the example of plasterers, and mixes together a strong cement, which it spreads smoothly over its little chamber; a fourth imitates the manufactory of hats and cloth, by felting and working together the materials into a solid body; others, again, are as clever as if they had served a long appren-

ticeship to weavers, so beautifully do they work together their habitations; while some are excavators, and make holes in banks, or in the earth; and many there are who, following the examples of the basket-makers, cross and weave the twigs together in an endless variety of strong and beautiful forms. All these builders on trees, on banks, on the faces of rocks, on the eaves of houses, upon and within the ground, I shall endeavour to make you acquainted with. Hurdis, in a beautiful little poem entitled "The Village Curate," written about half a century ago, in describing a bird's nest, has said,

"Mark it well, within, without,
 No tool had he that wrought, no knife to cut,
 No nail to fix, no bodkin to insert,
 No glue to join; his little beak was all,
 And yet how neatly finished! What nice hand,
 With every implement and means of art,
 And twenty years' apprenticeship to boot,
 Could make me such another?"

Amongst the mason-birds we must place the window-swallows, about which you will find a long account towards the end of the book of Autumn, where I have entered fully into the way in which they form their cemented nests, their habits, and the manner in which they assemble together before their migration. Of these Shakspeare has said that there is

———— "No jetty, frieze,
 Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
 Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle."

And to this class of builders belongs the thrush, whose sweet music is scarcely excelled by any singer in that large and beautiful band which every day give free concerts to their assembled audience of leaves and flowers, in the green old summer woods: for the throstle forms her nest among trees and shrubs, first building the round outward structure of moss, straw, or hay, then lining the inside with a coating of rotten wood, which it

again covers over with a smooth lining of soft manure, that, when hardened, is almost as clear, and level, and round as the inside of a teacup; all this it accomplishes with only its little feet, breast, and bill, and thus is formed the



NEST OF THE THRUSH.

I shall select from the number of mining birds, who like the rabbit burrow and make holes in the banks, a species of swallow, different from that which builds on the eaves of houses, and which is known to naturalists by the name of the bank-swallow, or sand-martin. The bill of this bird is short, strong, and sharp as the points of a compass; and, by planting its sharp claws firmly on the face of a sand-bank, it will peg away with its little head and bill, which it brings down every time like the fall of a pointed pickaxe, loosening the sand at every stroke, that comes rolling down into the ditch or road below, as fast as it is loosened or pecked away. In order to form the whole of its nest round, its claws are planted in the centre, as you would fix one of the points of a pair of compasses; and thus it stands, working its head round and round, its feet acting like a pivot, on which it turns, and so forms a perfect circle; and works on, until it has formed a hole of from two to three feet deep, by

scratching out the sand which its bill has loosened, with its claws. It then places at the bottom of the hole a little dry grass and a few small feathers; and in this cavern, which its little beak and feet have hewn out, it there deposits its eggs. Frequently, however, when it finds the face of the quarry or sand-bank too hard, after having commenced its hole, it will fly off in search of some spot where the embankment is of a softer nature, leaving the old hole unfinished, and commencing a new one. They are naturally social birds, and hundreds of them will build their nests together within the space of a few yards, thus forming a colony under ground, as the rooks do in the trees above the earth: numbers of them build about the neighbourhood of Greenwich and Blackheath. The grebe, which is also another ground-builder, I have given a lengthy description of in my book of Summer. The stormy petrel, a bird which the sailors meet with miles out at sea, in the roughest weather, also builds its nest in a similar manner. Jackdaws, too, occasionally build in the holes in rocks; and the beautiful kingfisher, also, makes its nest in some hollow of the bank beside a stream. The skylark evinces great wisdom in building her nest upon the ground, so that the wet shall either be drained off, or by forming the coarse and loose foundation to absorb the moisture without penetrating to the warm inner ground on which its eggs are deposited.

Amongst the basket-making birds are the jay, the bullfinch, the red-winged starling, the raven, the crow, and the rook; together with several of our smaller singing-birds; such as the whitethroat and yellowhammer. Nor do they select such materials as the willows or sallows which are woven into baskets; but often with only dead, broken sticks, or twigs, they contrive to weave together a strong skeleton of basket-work, which it is almost impossible to take to pieces without breaking the materials of which it is formed.

But, perhaps, the neatest of all our basket-making birds is

the missel-thrush. It weaves together the stems of plants, grass, and moss, somewhat carelessly at first on the outside, though nothing can exceed the neatness with which it twines and smooths together the rough ends in the interior of its nest; carrying neatly round the longer stalks of dried grass, and even interweaving the slender twigs of the tree on which it builds, without breaking them off. The



WOODPIGEON,

which also belongs to this order of builders, erects so slight and open a nest, that I have frequently, while standing beneath the tree, seen the two white eggs shine through the skeleton floor of basket-work. I have also occasionally seen the eggs lying down broken at the foot of a tree after a high wind; for so flat and shallow was the nest built, that when the branches rocked to and fro in the breeze, the eggs rolled off as they would do from a plate when it was tilted aside; this you will not

wonder at when you come to examine the engraving of the



NEST OF THE WOODPIGEON.

I also well remember, when a boy, picking up two unfledged young ones, which had fallen out of their nest, one windy afternoon in Spring. One was killed by the fall, and as the other was too young and naked to carry home, I placed it carefully in my cap, climbed the tree, and deposited it again in its cold open nest. A few days after, I paid the tree a second visit; and on climbing up, found that the other nestling was also dead. Whether the weight of my hand had disturbed the form of the nest, and caused the old birds to forsake it, and thus leave their little one to perish, or whether it received such injuries through its fall as prevented its recovering, I could not tell; although I have known several instances of birds forsaking their nests through the hand only having been inserted while searching for eggs, even before the bird had commenced laying; and this I believe is particularly the case with the wren and the neat-building pink, who, if she only finds a flake of moss standing different to what it did when she quitted the nest, invariably forsakes it. Indeed, all the felt-making birds, to which class this belongs, and which are the prettiest of all builders, as you will see by the following engraving of the



NEST OF THE GOLDFINCH,

can, from the peculiar neatness of their nests, easily detect the slightest disarrangement. They are called felt-makers through the texture of their nests resembling that of a hat, or a piece of woollen cloth; for so are the materials interwoven together, each minute thread or hair being worked or bedded in, even as a hatter would commence forming the woollen body of his work. Wool, moss, lichen, tufts of cotton, and the barked scales of trees, and spider-webs, are all massed and matted together in beautiful uniformity by these wonderful birds; and so particular is the goldfinch in putting a high and smooth finish to her work, that she will scarcely leave one single fibre of moss projecting beyond another, so neatly and smoothly is the material fitted together. All boys know, who have examined fur, wool, or hair, through a microscope, that they present a very different appearance to what they do to the naked eye; being full of fibres and rugged projections, all admirably adapted for bedding together, when they are once pressed down and rolled in. Hence the firm adherence and beautiful appearance which the felt-making birds are enabled to give to the smooth and finished linings of their nests.

MAGPIE'S NEST.

Another class of birds are called dome-builders, because they erect a roof over their nests; and the most commonly known to country-boys, amongst these, is the nest of the beautiful little jenny wren; this bird will sometimes carry a piece of moss in its beak nearly as bulky as itself. Amidst the larger birds which are dome-builders, may be classed the magpie; and every boy who has been a birds'-nester is aware of the difficulty of getting at the magpie's eggs, on account of the small aperture, and the sharp prickly roof which the bird has thrown over its nest; and I well remember seeing a



MAGPIE'S NEST

in a crab-thorn hedge, which ran beside my uncle's orchard at Thonock, so large, through the immense roof which was piled above it, that altogether it would almost have filled a good-sized sack. But the magpies who had brought up, and had driven out, several successive families of young ones in the same nest, seemed to know that they were allowed a long lease of the premises, so had added to their old nest, and built and repaired it year after year, until it was almost impossible to approach the inner chamber of their building.

And now I am sure I have said enough to prevent any boy

from ever wantonly taking a bird's nest, merely for the love of destroying it. I will not say that he ought never to take one at all, because I think it would do him more good than harm to become acquainted with their curious structures; and if he brings away an egg now and then, but leaves one or two behind, the bird will never miss it; though if he takes them all, she will forsake her nest. As to young birds, I have taken and reared many in my time; and now I will enter into my reasons more fully for so doing.

I know that there is no end of well-meaning people who raise a cry against birds'-nesting as a great evil, and a great sin, and one which is ever accompanied by excessive cruelty. Against all this outcry I have many good reasons to oppose. A kind-hearted boy would as soon think of killing one of his little brothers or sisters, as an innocent bird;—nay, he would shed tears even for the death of the latter; and if he was instrumental in killing it at all, it would be through excess of kindness. All children love rabbits and birds, and kittens, and little dogs. No fond mother can use her babe more tenderly than they do all these little things; and I firmly believe, that those who have been most indulged in keeping such little pets about them in their younger days, can never, as they grow older, become hard-hearted. I kept and reared young birds when I was a boy, got up at daybreak to gather them worms, fed them with a little at a time, many times within the hour, and placed them by my bedside at night, so that I might, with the first peep of dawn, or even before, if I heard them chirp, get up and feed them. True, I never took them from their nests until they were almost able to fly, and could nearly peck, and provide for themselves: then I had also the experience of older people, who had reared young birds for years, and I obeyed the instructions they gave me, and no boy lost fewer birds than I did in a season: and as to young blackbirds and thrushes, I verily believe that I kept

them better than ever their parents could have done; for I loved them: and oh, how proud I was when they could peck, and would take the food out of my mouth, as many have done! Remember, I never took the half-naked little unfledged things, not even when they were "double-penned," as we used to call it; and through this forbearance I allowed many a nest of young ones to escape: nor would I meddle with the smallest birds. They were generally great gaping throistles, and blackbirds, which I took: red-throated fellows who could devour almost any thing; and I seldom lost one, for I used to turn out in the cold grey dawn of morning, and get them such a can full of nice fresh worms and grubs from under the dried manure in the fields, that they lived like princes. And where could their mothers get such melts, and bits of red raw beef, and choice white bread to feed them with, as I did? Then I had such cages! so large, that they were as much as I could lift up, to hang them on the nails out of doors in the morning sunshine; and those cages I cleaned out every morning, sanded them, and put in fresh water, and covered the tops all over like beautiful arbours, with such green plants as the birds loved to peck, so that the people who passed by used to envy my birds; and I have often seen the wild birds settle down upon the cages. Mind, I never took young birds till they could almost peck. Some say, their parents moan and pine after them. So they might do for a week or so; but after that time the old ones would not care at all about them; for when they have once left their nest, they never return to it again, and I don't believe the old ones ever care a straw for them a month after they can provide for themselves. While they are very young, their kindness and attention is unlimited; but I have seen old magpies fight and peck at their young dreadfully, if they offered to come near the old nest after they were once turned out to provide for themselves. I never tried to rear very little birds, saving once a nest of grey linnets; and

I kept one of the brood about seven years, and all the rest lived for a long time. The hens, of course, we turned loose after the first year, when we found they did not sing. I do not believe that it is either wicked or sinful to keep and rear young birds, if a boy does it for the love he bears them. The cruelty consists in making them prisoners, and then neglecting them; but only a bad-hearted and unfeeling boy would act so. A kind lad would care more for his birds than his play. And oh, what pleasure it used to give me to see them come hopping off their perches, and hold their heads, first on one side and then on the other, when I called to them; and to see the delight they showed when they heard my voice, and the flutter they made to get nearer me! and I believe now that they were as fond of me as I was of them,—that they knew I kept them only for love, and felt that I behaved as well to them as their fathers or mothers would have done at that age: for to me they were ever young. I never went out for a walk without bringing home something nice for them. I never let a morning pass, no not even the sabbath, without attending to them. While Spring or Summer produced any thing green and beautiful, I decorated their cages with it. In Winter I kept them warm and comfortable; and while many a bird perished with cold and hunger in the fields, mine were fat, and warm, and well housed, and well fed. If one chanced to die, I made it a coffin, dug it a little grave, engraved its name on a piece of slate, and placed a monument over it,—nay, sometimes honoured its memory with the best verses I could write,—missed it, and felt unhappy for days after; and I am sure its parents could have done no more, if they would have done so much. Surely this was neither cruelty nor unkindness; and if it was a sin, I am sure I shall be forgiven for it; for if one or so did die rather young, and a jury of old birds could have sat upon its body, and I had been allowed to make my own defence, they would have returned a verdict and said, “This little bird

died through excess of love, and through having been brought up too kindly; and although we do not agree altogether with the diet it received, yet many a humane nurse has erred through the same kind feeling, and sent many a pretty babe to kingdom come, through over-dosing it with Godfrey's Cordial." In a word, I have still the same boyish feelings now; and I can no more help hunting for birds' nests when I go out into the country for a ramble, than I could twenty-five years ago; and I have several boys and girls who in this take after me; and not long ago one dear boy lay sobbing and crying all night long, because one of his rabbits had died—through excessive fatness. But I never allow them to take very young birds; and our prisoners have generally consisted of such as we have purchased from men and boys in the streets. If I have taken a few eggs, and a few nests occasionally, it was never through motives of cruelty: "not that I loved them less, but nature more;" and, as good old Izaak Walton says about fishing, "I always handled them as if I loved them, tenderly." Although I would not kill a little white innocent lamb for the wealth of the world, unless I were famishing with hunger, and nothing else could be had, still I would keep a bird, and treat it as tenderly as I would a dear little child; believing that if it is a vice, it is a very innocent one, and that a boy will have to journey a long way through life to find a less. All young girls have fond and tender hearts, and I would have you ask your little sisters if it is wrong to love, and feed, and rear, and keep, beautiful little birds; if they say it is cruel, and unkind, and sinful to do so, never on any account keep them: for depend upon it they are right, and I am wrong. If they earnestly dissuade you from keeping them, do so.

But I must tell you something about the habits of hive-bees; for Shakspeare has beautifully called them the "singing masons," that "build roofs of gold,"—has compared them to

“soldiers that sally out, and rob the velvet buds of summer of their sweets,” which, he tells us, they “bring home with merry march;” and poets, in almost every age, have enriched the beauty of their descriptions, by images drawn from the habits and customs of bees. Often, before they swarm, an unusual silence has been observed in the hive, which, naturalists have supposed, is caused through their feeding, and making a hearty meal, and resting themselves before they set out on their journey. And, as a proof of this, the crops of those which swarmed were found filled with honey, while such as remained behind were comparatively empty. Also, previous to swarming, a number of male-bees may be discovered on the outside of the hive, as if waiting until the sun shone out that they might take their departure. When the queen-bee first breaks out from her cell, she endeavours to get at the cells in which the rest of the queen-bees are enclosed, that she may destroy them; for, by some unaccountable instinct, she cannot bear to have a rival queen near her. She is prevented, however, from destroying them by the male-bees, who are on the watch, and who, whenever she approaches the cells in which her rival queens are enclosed, pull, and drag, and bite at her, until they drive her away: and a pretty rage she gets into I can tell you; for she runs about from one bee to another, as if she said, “Am I to be mistress here or am I not? because, if I’m not, I’m off; and that’s the long and the short of it. I’m not a-going to be annoyed by those lazy hussies who are in bed, I can tell you, and who, when they get up, will be turning my house topsy-turvy. A pretty hive, indeed, we should have of it, with three or four mistresses, all ordering about! But really, I’ve worked myself into such a passion, and am so hot, that I must go out and have a mouthful or two of fresh air.” And out she goes, accompanied by a whole regiment of bees; and this is the first swarm. A few days after her departure, up stairs march two or three more heavy bees; and,

knocking at the chamber-door of another of the queens, who still remains behind, they exclaim, "Come, madam, get up: there's too many of us here—you must be packing. We've so many lodgers in the house that we're forced to sleep two or three in a bed; and that'll never do, you know, this hot weather; for the close breathing of so many of us causes the wax to melt and run down the bed-curtains: so get up and get your breakfast, and be off with you; for there's a whole lot of idle fellows who have done nothing but eat and sleep for this last day or two, and the sooner we are rid of them and you the better." And up she does get; and you may fancy in what sort of a temper after so much abuse as this; and after trying, but in vain, to get at the rest of her sisters, who are still in bed, to kill them, she is also driven out, as the queen was before her; and this completes the second swarm. Sometimes, during the summer, three or four swarms will, in this way, leave the hive, each party headed by their queen-bee, until the numbers are so much thinned within, that they are no longer enabled to prevent the remaining queen-bees from quitting their cells; and then it is that battle-royal commences. Nor is there ever a moment's peace in the house while two queens remain alive under the same roof; but when all the rest are killed, the surviving queen sits quietly down upon her throne, and, for another season, reigns peacefully over her loving subjects.

The working bees are divided into two classes,—namely, into nurse-bees and the wax-workers. The nurse-bees feed and take care of the young grubs, also putting a finishing touch to the combs and cells which the workers have commenced; confining themselves, also, more within doors, and seeming to throw all the care and trouble of bringing in provisions to the hive, upon the wax-workers, as if they had quite enough to do in looking after the baby-bees. When bees begin to build their hive, they divide themselves into various companies,—one brings in materials for the labourer, another

band places them in a proper form, and a third company supplies the labourers with food; for they are not allowed to leave off work and go to their dinner. When a labouring bee is hungry, he bends his trunk down, which is quite as well understood as if he rang the bell, and called "Waiter," the attending bee comes up, opens his honey-bag, gives the labourer a few drops, then hastens off to another; and so on, until the whole are supplied. But, were I to tell you half the wonderful things I have heard of and read of about bees, the subject would occupy many pages of my book: I shall therefore recommend you to read "Rennie's Insect Architecture," where you will find all about bees, and many other insects, clearly and simply described. I must not, however, omit to tell you, that when the bees quit their hives, and begin to swarm, the old women in the country rush out with their frying-pans and warming-pans, and commence beating upon them, and kicking up such a ran-tan-tan, that the sound is almost loud enough to break the drum of a deaf man's ear; but whether it causes the bees to settle down any sooner, or not, is a subject which I cannot undertake to decide. When, however, the bees have once settled down in a heap, like a great bunch of raisins stuck together, there is no difficulty in whisking them off, all of a lump, into an empty hive, covering them over with a cloth, and carrying them safely home; when, in a few days after, you will see them issuing out of their hive and buzzing about among the flowers, and returning home again laden with honey, just as if nothing had happened. I have described the grand state in which the queen-bee rides forth, surrounded with her troop of attendants, in the "Book of Summer."

Many a healthy out-of-door game had we in Spring, when we used to set each other "craggens," as we called it, although I never heard the word used anywhere but in the north of England; and a crag, you know, is rough and difficult to get over: hence, I suppose, the origin of the word, from our tasks being

rough and difficult, and often hard to accomplish. Many a time have I led the way in



LEAPING OVER A FENCE:

and it was not the lot of every little playfellow who had the courage to follow me, to escape as I did; for some of them would, perhaps, graze their legs, or come tumbling across, head over heels, or catch the top of the fence with the soles of their shoes, when, if the rail was tender or rotten, down it came before them; and oh, what bruises and falls they sometimes got! and although the pain often forced the tears into their eyes, still they had courage enough to laugh, rub their ankles, and set off again at full speed. So we went over hedge and ditch, bush and fence; nor was a good-sized gate any bar to us, for, by placing our hands on the topmost rail, long practice had

enabled us to throw ourselves clean over it, and across the fields we scampered; our speed increased all the more, perhaps, through hearing some farmer hollaing to us from the neighbouring farmhouse. And, oh! you have no idea how the barking of a great dog helped us across wide dikes, which, at any other time, we should have shrunk back from; for it made us prefer the risk of a ducking, to a bite in the heel; and more than once have I known the old farmer, who pursued us with a long whip in his hand, pluck up courage enough to leap; and, not being so light-footed as we were, splash he would sometimes come into the middle of the dike, while we ran away, laughing, and left him to get out as he best could. Nor would we, if once a fair distance from him, and a good stick or hedge-stake chanced to lay near at hand, hesitate to turn round upon the dog, who, when he found that we presented a bold front, would turn tail, and hurry off back again as fast as he came; for a dog seems to know a coward by instinct, and, unless urged on by his master's voice, will generally decline the contest when he finds that resistance is offered. Not that we were ever taken up for trespass, if even we were caught; for I believe many of the old farmers liked the run as well as we did; for, after all, we but trampled down a little grass, or broke a rail now and then, which was soon repaired where timber was so plentiful: besides, we enjoyed our amusement all the more when there was a little risk to be run; for we really did no serious injury, and such escapes only added to that courage which it is necessary every brave-hearted boy should possess, who has to battle his way through the difficult ins and outs of this busy world. A whimpering, fearful boy could never remain long our companion, without catching some spark of that fearless disposition which we prided ourselves in possessing. A dishonourable action we would never for a moment countenance;

nor would we ever desert a brave companion because he had fallen into some innocent scrape: and if, during these harmless trespasses, they captured one, they captured all—for we never ran our heads into the slightest danger without first binding ourselves to be true to one another. It is true we sometimes got into a scrape, and perhaps all remained prisoners together, for half an hour or so, in some barn or outhouse; and then, perhaps, the old farmer's wife would intercede, would bid her husband remember, that "boys would still be boys;" that it was as natural to them to run over fields and hedges as birds to fly, and that he was just as bad when he was a boy: and then we were liberated, under condition that we were not to jump over or break down the fences again; which promise we generally kept until the following Spring. Not that I would wish boys wilfully to trespass or take the liberties that we did, unless, like us, they were well known to the parties, who were more ready to look over than punish our little delinquencies. "Could n't we confine ourselves to the footpaths?" the farmer would argue. We promised that we would try; but, bless you! it was of no use; our feet fairly itched again to be beating about the long grass and the trailing flowers. Besides, how could we get to the hedgerows to look for birds'-nests, without first trespassing by crossing the fields? And then, again, we argued, "What harm could we do?" for, by such time as the grass was long and ready for mowing, most of the young birds had flown; so that, when we really should have been doing an injury, the occasion which tempted us to trespass had passed away. Such were our boyish arguments; for what clever lad cannot find a reason for what he does, and level down some little rough point which stands between him and his boyish pleasures? And I am sure my young readers will not like me a jot the less, if I make a clean breast of it at once, and tell them that such actions as these never either lay

heavily upon my conscience, or broke my sleep; and if I look upon them now with a feeling of regret, it is only because they have passed away, and that many of my brave companions, whose laugh was the loudest while they joined in these bygone and harmless sports, are now numbered with the dead. And I doubt not, but that the daring spirit which those robust exercises tended to foster, have, in an after day, caused many a bright eye to look calmly out upon the angry ocean, when its heaving waves rose high, and to stand, with unblanched cheek, in the stormy front of battle; for the heart that never quailed in the boy, would be the last to sink when danger fronted the future man. Nor less amusing was our game of



THREAD-MY-NEEDLE;

or, as it is called in the country, "Duck-under-the-Water-kit;" and often at the Christmas and Easter holidays, our fair cousins and sisters were permitted to join us in this healthy exercise, for which we required a good range of ground. The way in which we played at this old-fashioned game was this,—two of us held up a handkerchief at arms'-length, one taking hold of each end, and keeping it nearly tight; under this the next couple passed, and, halting two or three yards from us, they also held up their handkerchief, as we did ours; a third, a fourth, and a fifth couple went under in the same way,—sometimes as many as fifty of us; and a pretty sight it was to see that long arcade of handkerchiefs, of all colours, arching across a country road, and held by as merry a group as ever sent their deep laughter through the green lanes. When all had passed through, it was then their turn, who had stood up first in the game; and away they went, at full speed, beneath that varied avenue of silks, cottons, and lawns, and soon came out at the far end, where they once more took their station, and formed an arch for the others to pass through. Few, unless they had seen us, would believe how soon we managed to run over a mile of ground: as to cold, we were too agreeably occupied to think about that, and too much in motion to feel it.

But I cannot part with my boyish companions without making you acquainted with an adventure which befel myself, conscious that every right-minded boy would have acted as I did, had he been placed in a similar position. And thus it happened, on a Christmas-time, many long years ago, that I had gone out to spend the evening with a party of young friends, to which other of my schoolfellows and playmates were also invited, and where, by the permission of their parents, we were allowed to stay rather late. All boys who are at all acquainted with old books, or old country customs, must have heard of the mummings and maskings which take place at Christmas; how the shades of Robin Hood, and Maid Marian, and Friar

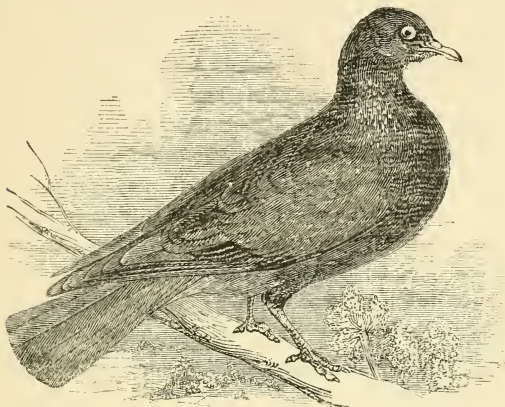
Tuck, and Little John, are again revived ; and how many an old wardrobe is ransacked of its antique finery for such occasions. One of my boyish companions who, alas ! is now dead, had joined a party of merry maskers at another house, and, as he had to represent the character of Robin Hood, I lent him my father's sword to give a finish to his warlike appearance. It was agreed upon between us, that he should leave his party at as early an hour as he could, and come to ours, and there return the sword which I had lent him, instead of taking it to my home. All of which was done as we had decided. We broke up at a late hour, for Christmas comes but once a year, and, although it was not past midnight, it was late for us. It was a fine moonlight night, and as the snow lay white, and bright, and beautiful upon the ground, some of the boys who were before me could not resist snow-balling one another ; and as one was attempting to give the other a roll in the snow, they chanced, amid their good-tempered struggle, to tumble together with a loud bang, against the front door of a house, in which another party were also spending their merry Christmas. By such time as the door was opened, they were off round the corner, and out of sight ; and there was I alone, unconscious of what had happened, with my hands in my pockets, and the naked sword thrust under my arm ; for during the many games we had had in playing at soldiers, the leathern scabbard had long before been worn out. Out rushed two or three gentlemen, and without making any inquiry, all began at once to accuse me of knocking at the door. I, of course, denied it ; when one young gentleman, not much older than myself, using very harsh language, seized hold of me ; and, in the excitement, I struck his arm with the pommel of the sword. Three or four men's hands were upon me in an instant, and inside I was dragged, and the door closed, even before my companions had missed me. "Would I beg pardon?" "No ! I had done no wrong." I refused. "If I did not strike the door, would I

tell who did?" "No." "Was I not sorry that I had struck the young gentleman who had seized on me?" "No; he had called me a liar, and were my arms at liberty, and he were to repeat the accusation, I would strike him again." "I would do nothing, then?" "No; I had nothing to beg pardon for; neither would I betray, or give up the names of my companions. I had done no wrong, and they might do their worst." For, although not more than thirteen years of age, I had a proud and stout heart in a good cause. The constable lived but a few doors off, and he was sent for. Poor old fellow! I think I see him now, in his rough shaggy coat, with a spotted cotton handkerchief tied about his ears, the staff of office with the awful crown upon it in his hand, gaping as if not well awake, and wondering whether it was for robbery or murder that he was dragged out of his warm bed at that untimely hour. There stood I, the daring culprit, wanting some inches to make me five feet high. The charge was repeated. "I had said my say; I had no defence to offer; no apology to make; I had done no wrong." The gentleman, in whose house I was now a prisoner, was a man of great influence in the town; and it was more than the poor constable's place was worth to refuse to take me into custody. My English blood was now up, and after again refusing to beg pardon, and boldly telling them "a piece of my mind," I strode off, with a proud step and a haughty heart, cheerfully to prison. I could have run off if I had chosen from the poor, pousy, short-winded old constable, and soon have left him far behind, but my proud soul rebelled at such an act; I knew I had done no wrong. Poor old fellow! he followed, coughing at every step, his perforated lantern throwing a hundred rays of light upon the snow; he put in the great key, and with a harsh grating sound the heavy door flew open, and there was I a prisoner. After lighting a good fire, and asking me if I should be frightened to be left alone for a few minutes, while he went home to get a drop of something to

comfort him, and to fetch his tobacco-box, he departed; and there was I, at last, a real solitary prisoner, made fast by bolt and bar. I well knew that my mother would feel no uneasiness about my absence, as I had frequently slept at the house where I had spent the evening; and as to my companions, I had no doubt that, after having run on a little way and not seeing me come, they had concluded that I had returned home in another direction. The old constable returned, and bore me company; and after chatting with me a little time, whilst he smoked his pipe, and finding that I began to grow sleepy, he persuaded me to lie down upon the trucklebed which stood in the prison, and throwing his rough coat over me, I was soon sound asleep. With daylight came my mother, for I have no doubt but that the party who had caused me to be so unjustly imprisoned began to feel uneasy about the matter, so had told her where I was. I was firm, and determined to see the end of it. And although the worthy old magistrate lived above two miles off, he was sent for. He came, and I appeared before him. I need not say how he reprimanded the party who had so unjustly caused my imprisonment; nor how the kind-hearted old man read a portion of a long act to me, out of an old law-book, to show that I had done wrong in carrying an unlawful weapon through the streets at midnight. And so, after many apologies from the party who had so wrongly acted in causing my brief imprisonment, my adventure ended. But it was with great difficulty that my uncle could be dissuaded from bringing an action against the party, for he vowed he would see me righted if it ruined him: although I endeavoured to persuade him that all the wrong I had suffered was in sleeping for a few hours on a strange bed in a prison; and for this I had my reward, in the consciousness that I had neither done any harm, nor yet betrayed my companions; who, I must add, came nobly forward the next morning, and pleaded guilty to the paltry offence of which I was accused.

THE STOCK-DOVE.

But the narration of my boyish adventures is carrying me away from my descriptions of Spring, with all its birds and flowers, beautiful scenes, and sweet sounds, none of which delighted me more than the low dreamy cooing of the



STOCK-DOVE,

as we used to call one of our native wild pigeons, which built just such an open and careless nest, as I have before described to you. Montagu tells an anecdote about one of these wood-pigeons and a magpie, which, he says, is an old Suffolk fable: "The magpie once undertook to teach the pigeon to build a better nest; but the pigeon kept crying out, 'Take two, Taffy! take two!'" The magpie kept still proceeding, like a good workman, with only one stick at a time, though the stock-dove still called out, 'Take two, take two!' which cry at last so annoyed the magpie, that he exclaimed, 'I say that one stick at a time is enough; and if you think otherwise, you may finish the work yourself, for I will not.' So mag left the stock-dove to complete the nest after her own slovenly manner.

SPRING.

There is a very ancient rhyme—I cannot tell you how old it is—which says,

“ April showers
Bring May flowers:”

neither can I tell you the names of half the flowers that they do bring; but I remember well, when a boy, I used to set out alone to try how many different kinds of flowers I could gather in a single morning, confining myself to only two or three of the same kind; and I have often returned with a whole handful, many of the names of which I did not know, but amongst them were the clover-flowers, white and red; daisies, of every tinge of crimson; buttercups, yellow as gold; great marsh marigolds, as big as the brass buttons on my grandad's coat; primroses, pale, sweet, and beautiful; lady-smocks, “all silver-white,” as Shakspeare has described them; a beautiful flower that we called the crow's-foot; orchises, that looked like bees, and resembled, in form and colour, other insects; cowslips, still my favourite amongst wild flowers; lilies of the valley, with which our woods were covered; violets, oh, how sweet! anemones, that seemed to grow everywhere; the ivy-leaved speedwell, ever beautiful; arums, which we called lords and ladies, and robins and bobbins, and which, when children, we rarely ever gathered without repeating the following lines, though what they had to do with the arum I have yet to learn:—

“ Robin-a-bobbin, a bilberry ben,
Eat more meat than threescore men;
He eat a bull, and eat a calf;
Then under the hedge
He did himself wedge,
And vowed he had n't enough by half.”

This curious plant, I must tell you, is also well known in the country by the name of “ Robin-in-the-hedge,” for under hedges it is most commonly found. Blue-bells we could lie down and roll in, for the neighbouring plantations were covered with

them. Then there was the yellow and starred celandine, that is so often mistaken for the buttercup, which it only resembles in colour; and the saxifrage, purple and white. These are about all I knew the names of, when a boy; for I must not include the blossoms of the sloe and hawthorn, and the golden buds of the gorse, in my wild posy, although I seldom failed to stick a sprig of each in the centre, where they towered above like the plumes of a tall chieftain. Then I gathered numbers of others whose names I am unacquainted with, even now; and every year I still keep adding to my stock of knowledge, as you will see in my description of Summer and Autumn, where I mention a few more of the flowers which bloom at those seasons of the year; for there were not so many cheap and good works descriptive of flowers, in my boyish days, as there are now, and such as there were, chiefly contained hard Latin names, which I could not clearly understand; so I went blundering onward, like a bee, from one to the other, and gathering knowledge about them as I best could. But I became acquainted with many old men and women who were herbalists, and whom I often talked with while they were out gathering herbs and flowers; and from them I learned many things which, otherwise, I should never have known; for there are many healing virtues in plants and herbs which are highly beneficial to man. And some of those old herbalists used to make me smile while they talked about these things, and how such and such herbs were only good when gathered at certain hours, and under certain planets, which I was very hard in believing in. And I believe now that our ancestors only said that we must wash our faces in may-dew before the sun arose, to give us a fresh colour that would last, that they might induce us to rise early in the mornings, and not lie in bed after the sun had risen. For, in those old-fashioned days, they breakfasted at six, and dined at eleven; and they used to say, that

“ Early to bed, and early to rise,
 Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”

Thomson has in one beautiful line described the boundary which divides, yet seems to blend into the two seasons, and in which he describes a country

“ Half pranked with Spring, with Summer half-imbrowned.”

The truth of this line will strike every boy, who looks upon the change which every week produces towards the end of Spring. He will no longer discover the short green grass which grew side by side with the daisies; but in place of this will observe how the grass itself has grown up into flower and seed, tall and grey, and rustling beneath every breeze that blows, and already ripe for the hay-harvest. He will notice a brown rusty look upon the may-blossoms, which tells that their beauty has departed with the expiring Spring. He will see that the fine light green, which gave such a tender freshness to the foliage of the trees, is deepening into the darker umbrage which Summer hangs over her bowers: he will notice how many flowers have already faded and died away, and how others of a richer bloom and deeper dye, are stepping in to fill up their places; he will observe how many a bird that poured forth its full-throated melody through April and May, is hidden and silent somewhere in the leafy coverts of June; for even the nightingale, that favourite bird of the poets, which singeth all night long, is only heard in Spring, while it chants “in shadiest covert hid,” loving especially those places where the tall spotted cowslips grow. Sweet it is to wander forth in these pleasant evenings, and to watch the moon journeying on, like a lonely traveller, over the unbounded plain of heaven—when we cannot see what flowers we are treading upon, for the shadows that sleep beneath the trees. Then to know that the same song has been listened to, by kings and queens who have passed away long ages ago; perhaps had made glad

THE BUTTERFLY.

“The sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home
She stood in tears amid the alien corn,”

whom we read about in the Bible. To know that great poets have listened to it, and written in its praise—that Milton has said even “Silence was so pleased,” she became more hushed while hearkening unto it, is surely to make us more in love with the song of this beautiful bird, about which I could quote as many exquisite passages of poetry, as would fill a dozen pages of this book. But whilst I am thinking about the poets, I will give you Spenser’s description of a butterfly, that set out for a whole day’s pleasure, and what he did with himself, and where he went to. Spenser you know wrote the beautiful poem which is entitled “The Faery Queen,” and which you ought to read on account of the many exquisite descriptions it contains, of sweet country scenery, and knights in armour who fought many battles, and old enchanters who went about doing mischief, and the fair Una who was followed by a milk-white lamb, and sometimes had a lion for her companion, with many more wonderful and romantic things which I have not space to tell you about. But lest you should dislike his old-fashioned mode of spelling words, and not clearly understand some of his beautiful images, I will turn his description of this butterfly that went out for a long day’s pleasure, into common prose, bidding you, however, to remember that all the beautiful thoughts are Spenser’s, and not mine. Well then, “This butterfly being all ready dressed (as you well know), got up from the flower on which he had been sleeping all night, and giving his mealy wings a shake, just to scatter the dew off them, set out for a day’s pleasure. He went on over the fields at a good pace, and whenever he soared a little higher than common and saw the whole wide country, he said in the lustiness of his heart, ‘I possess all, there is no one to gainsay me, no one to envy me. I can feed bounteously upon every flower that stretches out before me.’ Then he went over the woods, and rivers, and the

meadows green, with his air-cutting wings; he tried the mountains and the rank grassy fens, but none of these seemed to please his dainty fancy, so he hurried off into the gay gardens, where he knew he could riot to excess. When he arrived there, he began to fly about from bed to bed, and from one border to another, surveying every thing with his curious and busy eye, but only tasting tenderly, without disordering any of the flowers, or even defacing their silken leaves with his light and delicate feet. Sometimes he sucked at the sap, sometimes at the dew which still lay on them like rounded pearls, and in it he also bathed his feet; and so having breakfasted deliciously, he settled like a folded peablossom upon the branch of a flower, to rest and sun himself a little while, and to dry his moistened wings, which you know would be rather wet after dabbling about in the morning dew, on which he breakfasted." But I am sure I have quoted enough to make you like Spenser's writings, without extracting more, or naming all the flowers which the poet enumerates that he he lunched and dined upon, and amongst them, in one beautiful line, he mentions

"The roses reigning in the pride of May."

And then having summed up this kingly banquet of rich flowers the poet says in another beautiful verse, which I shall not alter, for it is so much like asking you what can be pleasanter than a delightful ramble into the country, where for the time you may fancy, like the butterfly, that every thing around is your own,

"What more felicity can fill a creature,
 Than to enjoy delight with liberty,
 And to be lord of all the works of Nature?
 To reign in the air, from the earth to highest sky,
 To feed on flowers, and weeds of glorious feature?
 To take whatever thing doth please the eye?
 Who rests not pleas'd with such happiness,
 Will worthy be to taste of wretchedness."

WOODS IN SPRING.

Although we cannot trespass like the butterfly, and take what ever pleases us, still we can enjoy more delight amid our liberty, than any beautiful insect can appreciate, because we are gifted with higher powers of enjoyment, can look up from creation to the Great Creator, and understand more of this wonderful world. But the butterfly reminds me of the woods in Spring, and the



WOOD-CUTTERS

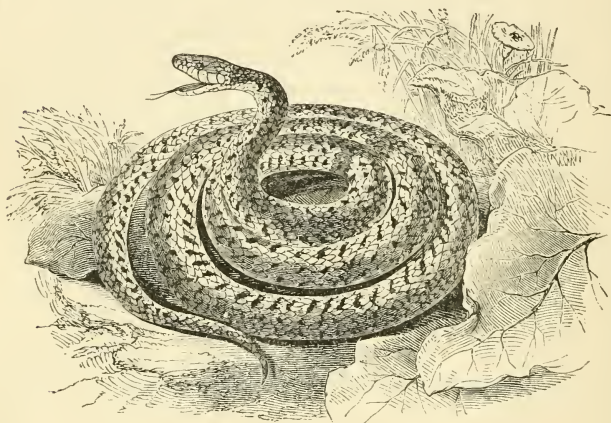
and bark-peelers: men who had a forest-like smell about their garments; who, week after week, rain or fair, went out every morning into the woods, and never returned again until night, but spent all the day among nests, and birds, and flowers,—who saw squirrels run above their heads, and rabbits across their path, without wondering,—who talked about foxes, and polecats, and badgers, and weasels, as if they were but every-day objects; and brought us home nests full of little, white, downy owls, and sharp-beaked hawks, that pecked savagely at our finger-ends, before even they were half-fledged: men who sat down on the trunks of large old

trees, which they had felled, and ate their meals,—who stripped the bark of a tree which contained a nest-full of young ones, quite as unconcerned as if no such little home had been constructed among its branches. Proud was that boy, who was a favourite amongst the bark-peelers, who was privileged to enter the woods at any time to peep into the great stacks of branches and bark which they had piled together, and to hunt for nests amid the thick underwood which they had left untouched, saving around the stems of the trees they had barked. Then there was a strange, wild, and ghastly look about that part of the wood where they had stripped naked all the trees; it looked like a land filled with great white skeletons, made more striking through the surrounding gloom which remained untouched, for it seemed as if an unnatural light fell upon the unearthly forms which had so suddenly sprung up amid the silence and solitude of the forest. Many a pleasant ride had we in the wagons, to and from the woods, to fetch home the bark, as load after load was brought and deposited upon the wharfs by the river-side, ready to be shipped off, and sold to the tanners, who would be unable to make the leather we wear so durable, unless the oak-trees were barked for this purpose. Oh! what a treat it was to ride home on those high and heavily laden wagons, to lie flat down on the load, and feel the topmost boughs of the trees sweeping over our backs, as we passed through the woods, to touch the ends of the high extending branches with our hands, and to know that the wings of wild birds were all that ever before swept over those sprays—to be nearly on a level with the nests which we saw amid the branches, and to touch the end of some bough that projected from a huge, bulging, and knotted trunk, up which we had never been able to climb! These were indeed delights, such as only a thorough-bred country-boy can fully appreciate.

Snakes were also there, which had awakened from their wintry sleep and come out from under dead leaves, and the

hollow roots of trees; and these we saw basking in the sunshine on sandy banks, in the warm and open corners of woods, and on heaths and commons, near water-courses; where they fed upon young birds, eggs, mice, and small lizards, but above all upon the poor little frogs, which appear to be their favourite food. The snake lays eggs which are fastened together by a glutinous matter, often consisting of as many as twenty in number, and these are left to be hatched by the heat of the sun, on a warm bed of leaves, some sunny spot on the bank, or very frequently on a dung-heap, just where the snake chances to deposit them. You should only see one in pursuit of a frog; how the poor little thing tries to leap away, taking shorter and shorter strides every time it jumps, and uttering a shrill pitiable cry, as if it said, "I know it's no use trying, he is sure to have me at last—oh deary me! I see his long jaws open, his bright unmerciful eyes fixed upon me; two or three more leaps and I am done for! and now he has got hold of my hinder leg, and now I feel I am going bit by bit, first on one side, and then on the other,—oh how dark it is getting! I can scarcely see at all, one more movement on the right side of the jaw, and another on the left, and then I'm gone for ever." And sometimes it has so chanced that when the snake has happened to gape, after it has swallowed its prey, the poor little frog has jumped out of its mouth again, all alive and kicking, and made its escape. There are instances on record of two snakes seizing on the same frog at a time, one commencing with its head, and the other with its hinder feet: and oh! didn't they shake one another when their heads chanced to meet, until at last one gave the other a bite on the upper lip, no doubt also making the poor frog squeak a little harder, as if it said to the other snake, "There, take that for your share," while he very leisurely swallowed his victim whole. Oh, what beautiful swimmers they are! carrying the head and neck above the water while they pass through it, and gliding here and there with all the ease and

freedom of an eel. Then the snakes cast their skins too, shoving the head and neck into some small prickly cavity, either between the close and tangling branches of the bramble, the speary points of the sharp thorn-bush, or the biting and armed sprigs of the furze or gorse, which lay hold of those portions of the skin that are already loose about the head and neck, as you might with your fingers lay hold of the top of your stocking, and thus turn it inside out, at the same time you pulled it off; for so does the snake get rid of his old coat, and without either going to be measured, or troubling the tailor, he glides away with the new one already made upon his back. The

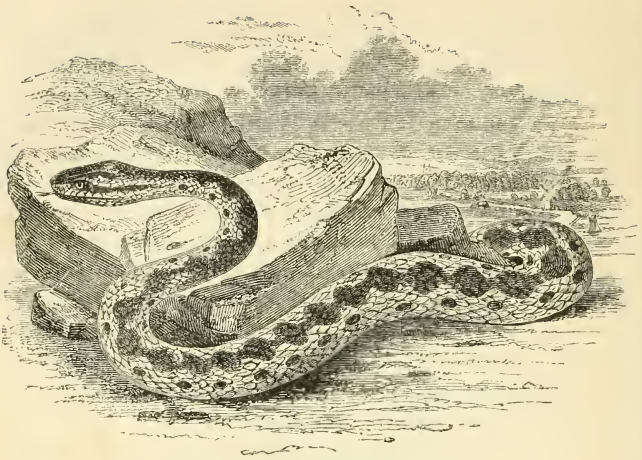


COMMON SNAKE

is perfectly harmless, and may not only be tamed, but will also readily distinguish those who feed it: and Mr. Bell, in his "History of British Reptiles," says, that he had one in his possession which knew him from all other persons, and which would come out of its box, crawl up his coat-sleeve, and there

lie still, enjoying the warmth which his arm afforded it: that it would also come to his hand every morning for a draught of milk, of its own accord; but would hiss and fly at strangers if they attempted to meddle with it. Snakes are sometimes found three and even four feet in length; and are in every way as harmless as an eel, for they possess not the poisonous and venomous fangs, which belong to the viper.

And now I must tell you that the Viper is the only poisonous and venomous reptile known in England, and that it bears in appearance so close a resemblance to the harmless snake, that I am afraid were I to attempt to describe the difference in the two, you would still not be able to distinguish them, however carefully I might do it; for it is not true to say that all vipers are black, for some of them are marked even more beautifully than the common snakes. But dangerous as the bite of the viper may be, I believe that there are very few instances, if any, on record, in which it is known to have produced death. I shall however, by the aid of the work I have already alluded to, endeavour to make you acquainted with the formidable fangs by which the poisonous bite is inflicted. Instead, then, of the outer row of teeth which are found in the harmless snake, the viper also possesses on each side of its upper jaw two or three long, sharp, curved teeth, the largest of which is attached to a small moveable bone, and can easily be erected by a muscular power which the reptile possesses. Unless when angry, this dreadful tooth falls back, and rests upon the jaw, where it is covered by a fold of skin; but when about to bite, it is shot out, and projects downward in a moment, where it stands firm as the point of a spear. And down a groove which runs along the tooth, the poison is shot from a bag, which is connected with its root, and, at the very moment it bites, is struck into the wound: and when this is the case, the safest remedy is to rub the part bitten with oil, and to swallow a small portion of ammonia. When the



VIPER

is about to bite, it draws up its body into a close coil, bends back its neck as if to gather more force, and then darts forth its head in an instant,—so quick indeed, that you can scarcely perceive the action; for the bite is inflicted, and the head again withdrawn, all in one brief moment. I have only to add that boys should be very careful in handling snakes, for it is not easy to distinguish them from vipers: so the best plan is to allow them to escape, for neither the one nor the other will meddle with you, if you let them alone.

Although with all their poverty, I believe that the children of the poor pass their time more happily than those amid walled cities; yet many of them undergo great hardships, and suffer many privations, such as are undreamed of by boys who have only passed their lives in the streets of busy towns; and I will tell you how a little sister and brother were often left for days together, while their parents wandered about the country hawking goods, by the sale of which they obtained a

livelihood. They kept a little tilted cart, and a rough shaggy pony, whose uncombed and uncurried hair turned up and down, and was matted, and knotted, and twisted together in hard lumps; for it had never been rubbed or cleaned down from the first day it was purchased by them. The dirt had gathered about it through dragging its heavy load along cross-country roads, and was left to dry on, or fall off, just as chance directed; or when the pony took it into his head to have a roll now and then upon the road, or to give himself a hearty shaking, by way of variety, just as the humour possessed him. And sometimes the pony, children, and cart were left for days together on the edge of some broad open common, by the side of some wild uninhabited moorland, or the skirts of a wood, or at the end of some green and remote lane; while the pony, with a long rope attached to his leg, and the other end fastened into the ground with a strong stake, picked up what he could within the limits in which he was secured, until the spot around was nearly eaten bare, when the peg was again removed, and he was permitted to graze in another new and limited pasture. And often while their poor parents wandered away with their heavy loads upon their heads, from village to village, they left their children a loaf or two within the cart, a little coffee, oatmeal, and sugar, a tin saucepan, and a tinder-box; and as they always contrived to leave them near some clear water-course, and as there was plenty of dried fuel to be found about the neighbourhood, they managed in the best way they could; and in the Spring time they frequently wandered away from the cart, to gather the wild flowers which grew around, and to watch the little birds which built and sung, and flew in and out of the wild bushes, trees, and hedges. But little Nell was not so hardy as her brother Ned, and as one Spring chanced to set in very wet, and as they were but poorly clad, and poorly fed, and neither of them had shoes to their feet, she caught a dreadful cold, and suffered under a

severe cough, which soon settled down upon her lungs, and she became very ill, and lost all spirit to play. Although Ned doubled the little rug which covered them at night, that his sister might be warmer, while he himself laid upon the straw at the bottom of the cart without any thing over him, still she could not sleep, but lay coughing all night long; and he often got up in the night, lighted the fire with the furze-bushes which he gathered on the common beside the wood, and made her something warm to comfort her; but all was of no avail. It was on a Wednesday night that the rain came down heavily, pouring in through the holes of the old weather-beaten tilt which covered the cart, until it drenched the straw on which the poor girl lay, and soaked through the rug that covered her. She complained of cold and thirst, and he got up as usual to kindle a fire, but the rain had filled the tinder-box, and he could procure no light. Soon after daylight on Thursday morning she died; and all he could do was to sit beside the dead body of his little sister in the cart and weep, for he knew that his parents would not return until Saturday night, and if he put the pony into the shafts, he did not know where to go in search of them: and he was fearful they would not know where to find him when they returned; so he had nothing to do but sit down and cry beside his dead sister in the cart. Night came rainy and dark, and he was still alone, with no one to speak to him now; and although he was very cold, he felt that his sister was colder, and doubled up the rug, to make it thicker, to keep her warm, until his parents returned; for he thought she was still asleep. Poor little fellow! he was too young to know what death was, for no one had ever talked to him about death or heaven; nor had he ever before seen any one dead. Sometimes he thought he would try to awaken her; but then he knew he could not kindle a fire, nor get any thing warm to comfort her, so felt glad that she still slept; though he could not help weeping bitterly when he spoke to

her, and she answered him not. "She will be sure to be hungry and awaken in the morning," he thought; and putting the wet tinder into his bosom to dry, he laid down beside her, and long before daylight he had sobbed himself to sleep, holding her thin cold hands between his own. Alas! he knew not that little Nell would never awake again. When he awoke on the second morning after her death, the sun shone out bright and beautiful, and the little birds were singing their sweet anthems from the neighbouring wood, and the primroses upon the banks opened out broad and beautiful; and having kissed her, and spoken to her, and found that she did not answer him, he got up to gather her a posy of wild flowers, thinking how much they would please her when she awakened; for those which they had collected together, before little Nell was taken ill, lay withered, and drooping, and dead beside her, in the cart. When he returned, and found she was not yet awake, he put them upon her bosom, and placed them between her hands, thinking how pleased she would be when her little eyes opened, and the first thing she saw was such a beautiful posy of sweet-smelling flowers. The tinder-box was now dry, and he lighted a fire, and prepared their breakfast, as he had many a time done; and when all was ready, he shook her, and tried to awaken her; but the wild flowers only rolled from off her bosom, while her arms dropped down stiff and motionless, for he knew not that she had no power to move; so he left the breakfast untasted, and sat down and wept again until the evening came.

That long night passed away like the other in sorrow and in silence; and although no one came near him, neither had he heard the sound of a human voice since she last spoke, yet he was not afraid, for he felt that his sister was still with him, and he knew not that the sleep she slept was the long unbroken quietness of death;—even had he known, he had no cause to fear, for she who lay so tranquilly beside him had ever loved him,

with almost more than a childish love, for he was a year older than his sister, and they had been left alone so often together, that little Nell would have wept more for his absence, than she would have done for her parents, had they remained away for weeks together; for the father and mother were so poor and were so much away, that the children knew not what the comforts of home were, had never celebrated a birthday, or sat down to a holiday-feast in their lives, nor partaken of those endearments and household affections which so many of you enjoy. Roughly nursed, and having had from childhood to battle their way through the hardships of the world, their parents took neither thought nor care about treating them differently to what they themselves had been treated; believing wrongfully that hunger and hardship are the only heritage of the poor; for they possessed not the finer feelings, which teach us that the bitterness of poverty and privation may be sweetened by the tender offices of love. Not that their parents were naturally hard-hearted; but nursed in the cold, hard lap of poverty themselves, and left at an early age to beg, or starve, or earn a livelihood as they best could, they wrongfully considered that they did their duty if they only provided their children with food, which was almost more than their parents had done for them. Further, they had imbibed an evil habit of drinking, a vice which they never endeavoured to uproot, and by so doing, they spent many a shilling which would have added to their children's happiness, and which might have provided them with a good education and a comfortable home. But these were things which they themselves had never known, and never cared to feel the need of; so they went on, just living from hand to mouth, and storing up no provision for the morrow, and there are too many in this world like them. All those two poor children had ever had to make them happy, was the love they bore to each other, sweetened by the pleasure of rambling about, and gathering flowers in the sunshine, and chasing the birds and butterflies about the

wild woods and heaths, wherever they chanced to be stationed, until their parents chose to return.

And now Saturday came; but poor little Ned was so weak, through not having tasted any food for the two preceding days, that he was unable to leave the cart; and when his parents returned in the evening, they found him lying down beside his dead sister, holding one of her cold hands within his own, and weeping bitterly. And when they gazed upon little Nell, they thought how grievously they had neglected her, and wished that she were alive again that they might behave more kindly to her; but all their wishes and tears were now in vain: and from that moment they began to act more tenderly towards the child that was still remaining behind. They had no family grave to bear her to, for their parents had been buried in some close city churchyard, amid numberless other unknown and crowded graves; neither had they any money to pay for her funeral, or they would have buried her in the village churchyard which lay not far distant from the place where she died: so the father dug her a little grave near the pleasant greenwood side: no solemn bell was tolled, no peaceful prayers were breathed over her innocent body, but where the sweet birds sung, and the wildflowers waved, and the long leaves whispered to the passing breeze, there heaved up the green turf that covered the grave of little Nell: and over his sister's grave Ned planted the fairest primroses; and many a summer after did their parents come there, with their little cart, and often in the solemn stillness of the sabbath might the voice of Ned, who was now able to read, be heard, reading passages from the holy Scriptures to his parents, while they sat, silent and attentive, gazing upon the grave of little Nell;—for although they still led the same wandering life, a great change had come over them since her death, and they often talked about her long brown hair which streamed out when she ran here and there in the sunshine, and of those little bright eyes which will never open again until the

SPRING.

ast trumpet sounds, and the dead are awakened from their long sleep. The spot where little Nell was buried, to me, had always a solemn look; for, near it, there flowed an old river, whose banks were frequented by the



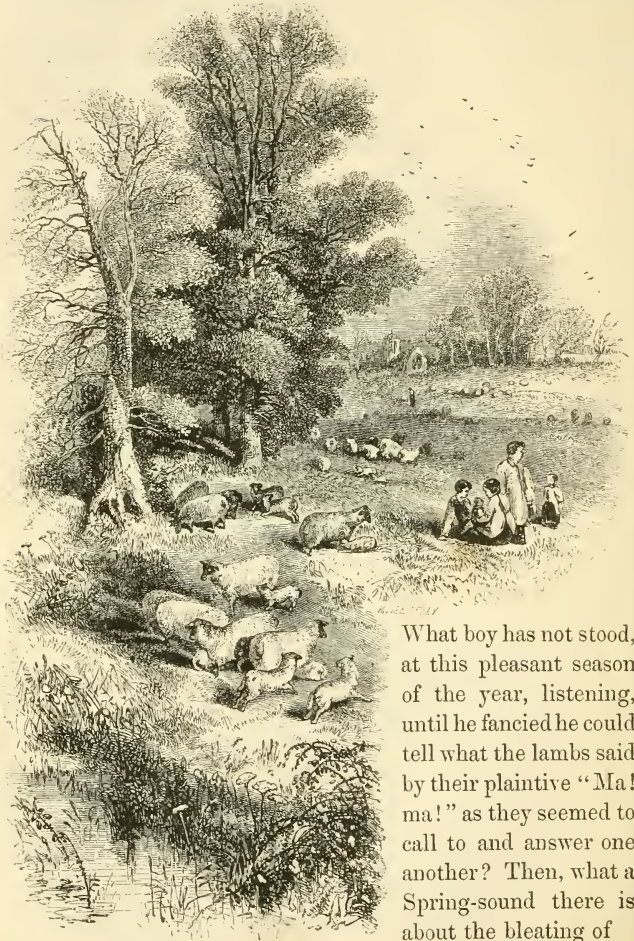
CURLEW;

and on the air, its shrill wild whistle seemed to float like a wailing sound; for so it appeared to me, while I gazed upon that little grave. And there we often wandered, in search of the curlew's nest, which we generally discovered built upon some dry spot on the ground, and formed of grass and leaves, in a very slovenly manner. The eggs were of a pale, olive hue, spotted with brown; and the young can run almost as soon as they are hatched. This bird is rather beautifully marked, the head, neck, and wings being of a pale brown, but in the middle of each feather varied by a black mark, then edging off into a light colour; while the breast is dotted with long black spots

and the tail and upper coverts of the wings are barred with yellowish white and black. Its cry is very peculiar, and there is something very wild about it, when heard mingling with the murmuring of the waves on the sea shore, which it frequently visits in Winter, to feed upon small crabs and marine insects.

There is another curious bird which I must make you acquainted with, and that is the Nuthatch. And if you were to hear him pecking with his sharp beak against a bough in the wood, as we often did, you would fancy that somebody was striking one of the trees with a hammer, such a loud and successive tapping does he keep up, as he walks round and round the bough; for he is like a fly, and can just as well stand with his feet up as down; while you expect every moment that he will fall with his back upon the ground and break it: but he knows better than that, and keeping a firm hold with his sharp claws, he pecks away with his heels uppermost, and makes all the wood ring again. Oh, you should see how soon he will work a hole into a hard nut, which he places in some hollow in the bark of the trees, while up and down goes his beak like the head of a hammer; and he will sometimes cut a filbert as clean across the middle, as if it had been split by a sharp instrument. Some say this sound is produced by the woodpecker; but as this bird generally selects a soft wood to peck a hole in, I scarcely think it would make so loud a noise as the other does while hammering at a hard nut. The Woodpecker is, however, a beautiful and curious bird, richly marked with black and white and green and a dim yellow, and it will peck out a hole in a decayed tree as round as if it had been worked out with a pair of compasses, and at the bottom of this hole it lays its eggs, and brings up its young ones: and I have known boys cruel enough to block up the hole with a handful of clay, after having watched the old bird enter; as if, by such a foolish act, they hoped to capture her, which is very difficult, as the hole is too small and too deep to thrust the hand in and get at the eggs. The woodpecker is very partial to ants' eggs, and you may occasionally see them busily employed in

feeding about an ant-hill. They lay four or five beautiful little eggs



What boy has not stood, at this pleasant season of the year, listening, until he fancied he could tell what the lambs said by their plaintive "Ma! ma!" as they seemed to call to and answer one another? Then, what a Spring-sound there is about the bleating of

YOUNG LAMBS IN THE FIELD.

How amusing it is to watch their dams, to hear their answers; as if they said, "Well, well, I'm here; I wo'n't leave you. You shouldn't run off so far to play;" and then she continues to nibble the short, sweet grass, which as yet is scarcely higher than the milk-white daisies, until she is again disturbed by the "Ma! ma!" of her little runaway, who has, perhaps, been running a race with a lot more little white, woolly companions, none of whom are above a month old. Then three or four of them miss their mothers all at once, and, oh! what a bleating they do but make, as they run about here and there, and every where, scarcely knowing what to do; and when they do find their dams, they are so delighted that they seem almost ready to leap out of their skins for very joy. And then you could almost imagine, as the old mothers rub their heads against the lambs, uttering a low, internal sound, that they were chiding them for going so far; for, how can we tell, whilst they recognise each other's voices, but what they can even understand what is said, and, in their way, converse together. Bloomfield, in his beautiful and simple poem, entitled, "The Farmer's Boy" (which I earnestly beg of you all to read), has given a most graphic description of young lambs racing, a few lines of which I here quote:—

"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-brier roses into snow,
 Their little limbs increasing efforts try."

You will not fail to notice the beautiful line which I have marked in italics. Just fancy a sudden gust of wind blowing down in a moment a whole shower of the blossoms of the

wild roses from the hedge, and driving them over the grass like a snow-drift! What a consternation such an unexpected movement must create amongst a dozen or two of little lambs, who have never before witnessed such a sight! What a running and a scampering must it make amongst them! and if sheep do laugh at all, how the old, fond mothers must enjoy such a scene! But, to gaze on such pleasant pictures as these, is only one amongst the many delights of Spring; for, not only is the eye delighted, but every other sense is also gratified. We inhale the fragrance of the hawthorn, which, of all delightful smells, is, perhaps the healthiest and the sweetest; we hear on every side the singing of the birds, making together such a varied concert, so low, and loud, and sweet, that, together with the rustling of the young leaves in the wind, the softened murmur of the glittering waters, and the swaying of countless thousands of field-flowers of all hues to and fro, we seem to be out in a fairy world, a region of enchantment, a grand garden, only walled round by the sky, and in which we may wander onward and onward for evermore! Then what signs of future plenty do the orchards hang out! what visions of cherries, and pears, and plums, and apples, do we see in the silver blossoms! We can half fancy which will be a red-cheeked apple, by the crimson with which the bloom is dyed; and, as the season advances, we can trace the rounded green of the cherries, which we know a few weeks of sunshine will make mellow and ruby red, and we unconsciously lick our lips, and take off our caps, as if we felt a bumping pound dropping heavily into the deep lining! Then come those thick-beaked bullfinches. Oh! they are such thieves! Bless you, they eat pounds and pounds of cherries before they come to perfection, for they prefer them green and without the stones; and a dozen or two of these great thick-headed fellows will strip nearly every fruit-bud off a cherry-tree in a single morning.

BULLFINCHES.

You need only look under one of the trees on which they have been feeding, to satisfy yourself of the havoc they make; for you will find the ground covered over with remains of the buds they have rejected. So dainty are they in their banquet, and so well known for these destructive qualities that in some places they are called, "Pick-a-buds." The engraving I here present you with, is the

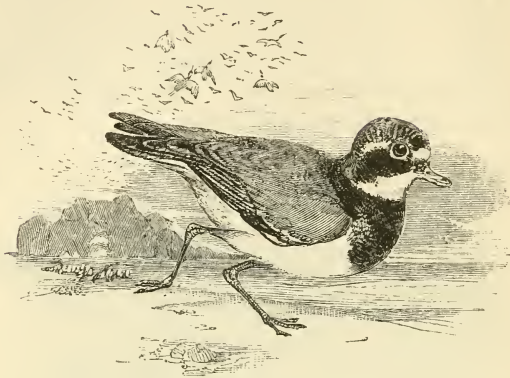


NEST OF THE BULLFINCH.

This bird often selects the fine twigs of the birch-tree, which it weaves together in a loose and irregular manner, giving you more the idea of a rough gap, which some countryman has negligently filled up in the opening of a hedge, instead of the neat-looking woven work of a practised hurdle-maker, though we have seen an instance or two of their nests built very neatly. The eggs are of a bluish white, principally speckled and streaked with purple, generally about four in number, and very little larger than those of the linnet. The bullfinch is a beautifully-marked bird, and when caught, may, with care and attention, be taught a variety of tunes.

There is a beautiful lively bird, which may be met with at

almost any season of the year, in the neighbourhood of the sea-coast, called the



RINGED DOTTEREL:

when squatting down, its plumage is so much in keeping with the colour of the rock, and stone, and sand upon the sea-beach, that it is almost difficult to recognise it from the natural objects by which it is surrounded. Among the loose pebbles which strew the beach, or in the sand-banks of the neighbouring rivers that open out into the sea, do they lay their greenish-coloured eggs and bring forth their young. Their note is a shrill sad whistle, and like the peewit, they are seldom silent, and with every breeze that blows, and every wave that comes welling and lapping upon the shore, is their wailing sound mingled in any locality which they haunt in numbers. Its plumage is very peculiar, underneath its head and throat there is a collar of pure white, and below this a broad band encircles the whole surface of its breast and neck—this is again diversified by the under portion being of clear white, while the ends of the wings and tails are banded with black, brown, and a dullish kind of grey.

You have all heard of May-day and May-games ; and although they are merry old customs which are fast fading away, yet, when I tell you that there are two maypoles still standing near the neighbourhood in which I spent my boyish days, you will like to know something about this ancient English holiday. Our ancestors used to rise early to welcome in this sweet season of the year, and with joyous shouts and merry music bring home may. They decorated the tall maypole with gaudy garlands, made of ribbons and flowers ; they erected a green arbour, and selected some comely village-girl whom they crowned as Queen of May, and they danced and made merry upon the village-green to welcome in the month of flowers. Even in the olden time kings and queens, accompanied by their titled attendants, left their palaces and their castles, and rode forth into the still green country, to gather the sweet may-blossoms : and the poet Herrick in a later day tells us how, in honour of May, the streets were trimmed with trees and made green, until they looked like a park ; that over the porch and door of each house there hung a fresh bough, amid which branches of the may-blossoms were neatly interwoven ; and that ere the sun had well risen, many a boy and girl had returned from the woods laden with may, and brought back with them an eager appetite to enjoy their breakfast of cakes and cream. And Spenser, a much older poet, also informs us how the young folks used to flock out in the early morning to gather may-bushes and sweetbrier, with which they returned home and decorated their houses and the pillars of the church ; and how they crowned the King and Queen of May with flowers, and went and came to and fro the green wood, accompanied with such sweet music that it made his very heart dance to hear it. Nor must I omit to tell you that in summer-time our ancestors strewed the floors with rushes ; and that, while the branches were green and the flowers in season, they rose early in the sweet mornings of Spring and Summer, and brought home from the fields and woods, and hills and val-

leys, many a beautiful branch covered with leaves and blossoms, and many an armful of fragrant flowers, gathered while yet the dew hung fresh and heavy upon them; and with these, they decorated the interior of their buildings, making them so sweet and green that it must have been as pleasant to have sat in those old parlours and ancient halls, as in a beautiful garden summer-house, covered with woodbine and surrounded with moss-roses.

Even only last Spring while rambling among the villages in the county of Surrey, and not more than two or three hours, walk from London itself, I passed several groups of neatly-dressed boys and girls, on the morning of May-day, who were carrying large garlands composed of branches and flowers and ribbons,—reminding me pleasantly that the old May-day customs were not yet dead, and filling my mind with cheerful images of by-gone days; bringing before me the merry England which our ancient poets have enshrined in their immortal songs. And now whilst I recall the scene, it seems like gazing upon some beautiful picture, where a group of neatly-clad little maidens, with their snow-white caps decorated with ribbons, stand with their richly coloured May-garland on the fore-ground of the scene, between a green and open space surrounded on every side with tall gorse-bushes, which look as if countless thousands of golden-coloured butterflies had alighted on them, so profusely are the furze covered with deep yellow and bright blossoms, while in the back ground the dark hills lifted their broad and rounded shoulders to the sky, and in the distance arose a quiet wood as yet but thinly clad in its ancient livery of Spring-green.—It seemed also somehow more in keeping with the sober England of the present day,—a fitting amusement for those innocent children as they threaded their way over the quiet and ancient footpaths, carrying to the inhabitants of lonely and out-of-the-way houses, and still green, pastoral villages, pleasing remembrances of the old observance of May, quietly reminding

them that the month of birds and flowers had returned again, and that the sweet songsters had winged their way, far, far over the stormy sea, to warble once more in the dim shady woods, over which still arch the blue and sunny skies that make so pleasant our English Springs. For poetical as the customs of our old May-games may appear in print, they were accompanied by scenes of rude, drunken, and boisterous revelry, which would but ill accord with our better regulated notions of decorum in the present day; for we should find but little pleasure in gazing upon a noisy group of men and women, throwing themselves into all kinds of grotesque and ridiculous attitudes, as with loud whoop and holla, they hand in hand whirled round the tall may-pole to the music of some old blind fiddler, or the drone of some drowsy bagpipe. Such scenes are only pleasant when youth become the actors, when the laugh and shout rise and ring from the happy hearts of the young; and the grave and matured eye looks with a quiet smile upon their merriment—for such antics but lessen the respect which is due to the wisdom of years, when the actors themselves are men and women.

Our time was a later day than the first of May for setting out a-maying, when we frequently arose long before sunrise, and sallied out into the woods to cut down the green oaken branches, which we carried home and hung over the windows, and placed above the doorways, as our forefathers had done, until we gave to the whole town a green, wild, and woodland look. Our musical instruments were bullocks' and cows' horns, with the tips sawn off, which we blew with puffed cheeks until our lips were sore again through blowing. Wherever the largest branch of oak was hung out, there were the greatest number of boys sure to be assembled, blowing away, until they were almost black in the face, on their hideous and unmusical horns. We covered our hats with leaves of oak; and, in the centre of the broad branches which hung over the doorways, were suspended garlands of flowers. Many a bough was found

afterwards, a little distance from the wood, too large for our united strength to carry away, so left behind, like many a memento of over-reaching ambition, to tell, by its ruin, how weak was the puny arm which attempted to grasp more than it had the power to retain. This rural holiday was called "Oak-apple Day," and held on the twenty-ninth of May, in memory of the escape and restoration of Charles the Second, who, when pursued by a portion of that army which afterwards dethroned and beheaded his father Charles the First, eluded his pursuers by climbing a large oak-tree, and concealing himself amid its branches—all of which you will find recorded in the "History of England;" and you will also see that it is dangerous, even for a king, to encroach upon the liberties and rights of his subjects; and that, through over-stepping the boundaries which the laws of England had confined him within, Charles the First lost both his crown and his head, and Oliver Cromwell, a country gentleman, scarcely known before these stirring times, became at last the Protector of England, and all but entitled the king.

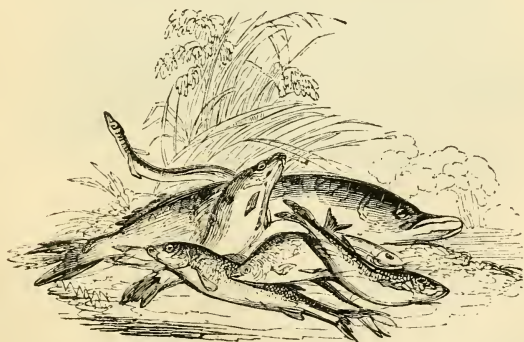
Another of the favourite places which we were fond of visiting in Spring, was a little cottage that stood in the centre of that old wood: you never saw such a wild romantic place in your life as this was; and I can tell you that it would have puzzled you to have found it, unless you had been acquainted with the windings and turnings which went in and out of the underwood, or had chanced to come upon the only wide path that led to it, and opened out into a number of fields, all the gates of which were locked, and where nobody went, saving when we used to wander over them, or the old man had to come across with his little cart, which he very rarely did. All round this little homestead was a land of trees; for the wood was at least four miles long, by three broad, and this wild forest-farm stood nearly in the centre of it. It seemed so strange to see a corn-field standing there, and a little green pasture, where the

grey pony and the white cow quietly grazed together; while before the door of the house stretched the beautiful garden, with its row of bee-hives; and behind it, lay the old orchard; the blossoms of the fruit trees, in Spring, looking as if they formed a portion of the wood. And all around this little enclosure, rose a high, closely-woven fence, formed of withered furze-bushes; their thick stems and prickly thorns, so matted and massed together, that even the very rabbits were compelled to burrow under-ground to get at the garden within; so impenetrable was that closely-formed barrier of furze-bushes. Then it seemed so unlike any other place in the day-time, with the bright sunlight shining there, while all around the wood looked so green and gloomy, and seemed ever to sleep amid the quiet of its undisturbed shadows. It appeared like coming upon one of those peaceful settlements, which we read of in the old American forests; so solemn, and quiet, and tranquil, and out of the world did it lay, that you would scarcely have been surprised if half-a-dozen dusky Indians had leaped over the fence out of the deep underwood, and stood before you with their war-hatchets in their hands. Then the little beds of flowers had such a strange appearance there; they looked so clean, and out-of-place, so unlike the primroses, and violets, and lilies-of-the-valley, which grew outside the barrier, and which we had to grope for in dark dingles and mossy dells, beneath trailing brambles and shady hazels, and prickly thorns, and young ferns, that were just opening their fan-like leaves and huge-armed gorse bushes, whose summits were yellow as gold; for there, was no trace there of the trees which had been cleared away; and we often fancied that it had in former days been one of those open enclosures in which the Ancient Britons dwelt, when they erected their huts in the deep solitudes of the old forests. Beautiful did that old thatched roof look, covered with every variety of creeping plant; while the smoke from the thickly ivy-covered chimney went curling upward to the

calm blue sky, that seemed to hang over, and bend there more beautifully than anywhere beside; as if it loved to look down upon such a sweet and peaceful spot. And we often asked the old man what sounds he heard at night; for to us all around looked like an enchanted land. And he told us how he used to hear in the deep midnight the fox bark, and the raven croak, and the owl hoot from its hollow home, in the decayed old oak; and how on stormy nights the tall trees rocked and roared; and that he had lived there for half a century, yet never once felt afraid. He had his dog, and his cat, and his favourite raven; a goat or two that bleated after him wherever he went; and when we saw him marching forth, with his long gun over his shoulder, we thought of Robinson Crusoe, in the desert island; for, although he was not surrounded by the sea, there ever stretched about him a great ocean of trees. All the walls of his little outhouses were built of furze-bushes, and thatched with the long reed-like grass that grew among the under wood, and which nobody, saving himself, had ever cut down. And, oh! what numbers of birds built in them, and there brought forth their young; he could not go to and fro without seeing the old ones seated upon their nests; he could have put out his hand and touched them, yet they seldom flew off, but seemed to know that with him they were safe. Then he had two great guns over the mantel-piece, and a brace of pistols in his bed-room, and a huge savage dog, whose kennel was a hogshead; and this dog went ranging round the house at night, with a long chain round his neck, and would, if any one had approached the place after dark, have flown at him, and torn him down in a moment; but, although so savage at night, yet in the day-time he would come out and wag his tail, and lick our hands, seeming to say, as well as he could, "I am quite delighted to see you!" Many a pleasant ramble had we to visit that little farm-house in the wood, where we were always welcome guests; for that old

man delighted in the society of well-behaved boys, and taught us many things, which we should never have known, about the habits of birds, and stoats, and weasels, and all those curious things which you will know more of when you have read through these volumes.

Many a journey had we in the early mornings of Spring, ere the sun had yet gilded the green summits of Somerby Wood, and while the dew lay, grey and unshaken, upon the untrodden grass, to gather worms in the moist meadows beside the Trent, with which to bait our hooks when we angled in the river. Oh, what numbers of calm deep places did we know at the corners of jetties, and in bendings between the banks, places into which the strong currents never flowed, where the wild, boiling, and ever-rippling eddies came not,—spots which lay like silver mirrors, into which the tufted reeds and tall willows were ever looking at their clear, unruffled shadows below. Happy and peaceful were the hours which we passed there, anxiously watching the float as it stood motionless in the calm water, until we saw it slightly move, just as some fish was timidly nibbling at the bait, ere we knew what addition there was in store to our



GROUP OF FISHES.

What a pleasant suspense it was; for we could not tell whether it would be a prickly perch, or a roach, or a bream; nor how large it might be, nor what it would weigh, until, becoming more emboldened, it seized firmly hold of the hook, drew the float clean under the water; and, then, if our line was strong enough, one good, sharp jerk was sure to make us secure of our prey, and in another minute it was laid upon the bright, green grass, a rich increase to our stock. True, it often grieved me to see the beautiful little white creatures, with their silver scales, gasping and tossing about upon the greensward, instead of gliding rapidly through their own bright element; but long custom had reconciled us to such sights, and many, amongst the kindest hearted of men, have been anglers. Sometimes we left our angling-rods to fish for themselves, while we went to gather flowers, or sought a



SHELTER FROM THE RAIN,

like the angler we have copied from an engraving by Bewick; and which almost makes you feel as if you were getting wet through while looking at it, so heavily does the low sky rain. Then, higher up the river, we had the osier-holt to

THE OLD BRIDGE.

visit, and the osier-peelers to watch while they stripped the tall, white, tapering willow-wands; for osier-peeling was a merry time, and drew together the poor inhabitants from many a surrounding village, to this early in-gathering of Spring. Then there was a solemn and ancient spot higher up the river, where an old bridge was said to have stood ages ago, even so far back as the time of the ancient Britons, and over it Julius Cæsar and his Roman soldiers were said to have passed, though no traces of it were visible, saving a few huge stones, which were only half-bared when the water was very low. And near this spot I loved to sit and angle, for it called up the deeds of other days which had glided away for ever; and such thoughts as then passed through my mind I shall endeavour to make you acquainted with, in a little poem which I wrote on the spot, many long years ago, and entitled—

THE OLD BRIDGE.

Oft, when a boy, I wandered forth alone,
By a broad river far from any town;
And on a bank with willows overgrown,
In that still solitude would lie me down;
The tide left a long landmark brown and clear,
And, save a lonely heron, no living thing was near.

'T was a wild spot! for there, old legends say,
In ancient days a rude stone bridge had stood,
And that two thousand years had passed away
Since first its arches spanned the rapid flood;
And there, they say, the Roman troops passed o'er,
And drove the ancient Britons from the opposing shore.

And huge gigantic blocks, all quaintly wrought,
When the tide ebbs, are seen to lie around;
And battle-weapons rude, with which they fought,
In the deep river-bed are often found;
Bucklers, and bows, and blades, and dead men's bones,
Lie heaped, as in a grave, beneath those mighty stones.

SPRING.

And I have lain upon that ancient bank,
While deeds of other days rose on my eye :
The curlew streamed above the willows dank,
Roused by the Roman cohorts that swept by,
And gilded galleys through the white waves tore,
Their purple sails outspread, the Imperial Cæsar bore.

Then that old bridge heaved up before my sight,
The architecture rude which it displayed ;
Such weapons as were used in savage fight,
And wild wolves' heads, such as in forests strayed ;
While, o'er each arch, fixed with a stony frown,
Grim-bearded Druids' heads ever looked sternly down.

And o'er it, hurrying legions burst away,
Their warlike music rising on the breeze,
Till all was lost, saving the gusty sway
Of some broad banner swelling 'mid the trees,
Or sun-bright Roman eagle, half-revealed,
Passing a British town, then, by the wood concealed.

Where the wild forest stretched along the hill,
Above the bank scooped into sandy caves,
Stood the old Druids, and with voices shrill,
Sent their loud curses o'er the murmuring waves,
And as their long, white beards streamed in the blast,
On the dark oaken groves their eyes were ever cast.

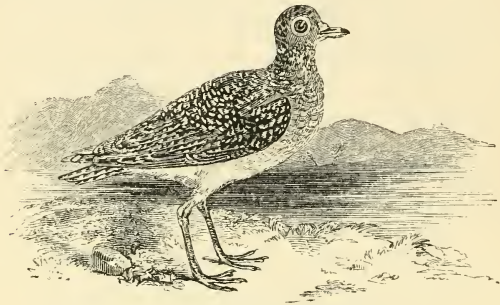
In the green vale, naked and undismayed,
Ready for fight, the stalwart Britons stood,
With bow, and club, and flinty spear arrayed,
Their scythe-wheeled chariots stretched along a wood :
Before them a rude granite altar rose
Its grey and stony front facing the arméd foes.

And on that fight, looked anxious eyes of love,
Peeping in fear the forest trees between ;
Wild, though they were, as untamed woodland dove,
Still there was grace and beauty in their mien ;
And as the battle closed, they shrieked and sighed,
Or sent their heathen prayers across that river wide.

It might be all a dream ; but oh ! to me
 Such fancies brought a melancholy joy ;
 And still that river flows on murmuringly,
 Clear as it did when I sat there a boy :
 And those grey stones and willows are the same
 As when a dreaming boy an angler I became.

An early acquaintance with English History stored my boyish mind with endless ideas that gave me pleasure, and made me feel as if I was never alone. I could at any moment call up the great actors, who have rendered themselves so famous in the annals of our country. Caractacus, and Boadicea, had each, in my "mind's eye," an individual form. I beheld the one, stern, unbending, and undaunted, as when he stood before the Roman Emperor, a captive, and in chains. I heard the sweet voice of the other come floating upon the breeze, soft and low, yet earnest and eloquent, as when she stood up in her war-chariot, her weeping daughters, with their faces buried in their hands, seated at her feet, while she, tall and queen-like, with her long yellow hair unbound, proclaimed her wrongs to the assembled Britons, and although a woman, showed them it was nobler to die than become the slaves of their insolent invaders. I could call up the very image of the Great Alfred before me, with his grave, thoughtful, intellectual countenance, as he stood when first defeated by the misbelieving Danes, when he wandered forth homeless, crownless, and sceptreless, and was driven by hunger and danger to seek food and shelter in the swineherd's hut. I was familiar with the very armour which the Norman Conqueror wore : I had in fancy heard the tramp of his heavy cavalry as they came thundering along the opposite bank : had seen the air darkened with arrows, and beheld the blaze of many a Saxon village reddening the deepening sunset ; and so I stood, peeping through the barred gates which time had closed upon the past, and looking upon the grey ruins which lay scattered and overturned in those

dim twilight walks, until armed forms again sprang up instinct with life, battlemented castles, and deep dungeons that went yawning down beneath the waters of the moat—all the rude barbarism of the past, the pomp and cruelty of chivalry, rose before me, and I felt thankful that early reading had made my memory so rich a storehouse for the past. And in these sequestered haunts I often met with the



GOLDEN PLOVER,

a beautiful, large-eyed bird, which built its nest on the ground in those wild sedgy marshes, where no doubt the same species had built long before that ancient period I have written about. Oh! what a noise would a colony of those plovers make when they were once startled! You would have thought that some great school had broken loose if you had but have heard them, such a whelping and wailing did they kick up! Then it was a great treat to see the young ones, such little downy things, running after the old plovers to search for worms; and oh, my eye! when they laid hold of one, wasn't it soon gobbled up! and though they couldn't fly, didn't they lead us a chase! for they could run like lamplighters. And they were such fellows to skulk too, and when once they had concealed themselves, there they would lie as mute as mice. Rare fun had we in chasing the golden plover

THE OLD SLUICE GATES.

A famous spot was that for Swallows too, about which I have told you so much in my "Autumn Book." They used to come there before I ever saw them anywhere else, and go in and out of the sluice gates, which opened into the river, as if they loved the gloomy shadow of the arch; and I remember once swimming under and seeing several of their nests there, which there was no getting at, as you may readily imagine; for where could we plant our feet, with a deep, rapid current below, and a dark shadowy arch above? dark, at least, unless when the sunshine shone through it. And it required a boy to have some courage to swim under there, for it contained such large eels; and great long-jawed pikes were ever swimming in and out: and if a little swallow happened to tumble out of its nest, it was swallowed up in an instant. I well remember that it was reckoned a daring deed to swim under that arch, and come out of the sluice gates which faced the river, for the dark water seemed ever to boil, and to look black and angry as if it would like to drown you for venturing into it; and it would but have only been poor consolation to have had one's death-chant sung by the



SWALLOWS.

But I will leave all such melancholy subjects, and tell you about an odd kind of character, who lived in a little village where one of my aunts resided, and who was known by the name of "Never-sweat-a-hair." He never allowed any thing to put him out of the way ; and it used to be his boast, that he never once was in a hurry during the whole course of his life. Nothing ever seemed to annoy him. Things which other people would have regretted, and talked about for days after, appeared to have no effect upon him ; and when his prime fat pig died, just as he was on the eve of killing it, instead of murmuring, he said, it was a good job it was n't one of the cows : and when he once fell down and broke his arm, and was stopped by a friend to sympathize over his misfortune, he only replied, that it would have been a much worse job if he had broken his neck. The cottage, he once lived in, chanced to take fire, and was burnt to the ground ; all the neighbours, together with his wife, were busy in endeavouring to save what they could ; until, at length, there was an outcry that Never-sweat-a-hair was missing. Search was made for him, and he was found seated upon a stone-heap, at some distance, busily employed with his claspknife, and eating his way through a large lump of cold bacon and bread. All he had saved, or attempted to rescue from the fire, being a basketful of provisions. And when remonstrated with, his only answer was, that good victuals once lost could never be recovered again : as for houses, and tables, and chairs, they were intended to be destroyed, for bricklayers, and cabinet-makers, and joiners must live. After the fire, he was kindly taken in by a neighbour, who cheerfully resigned his bed, and sat up the remainder of the night. Next evening, about nine o'clock, Never-sweat-a-hair was missing. No one could tell where he had gone to. It was strange he did not come in, as his wife was waiting for him to accompany her to the new lodgings she had taken in the village. Ten o'clock came, and the neighbour remarked, " he is in no hurry, as

usual." And after waiting half an hour longer, the wife set out to go by herself. The friend who had been kind enough to give Never-sweat-a-hair shelter on the night that he was burnt out, sat up until after eleven before he retired; and when he got up stairs he was never more surprised than to find Never-sweat-a-hair in bed, and comfortably asleep. After arousing him, and telling him how long his wife had been waiting, he arose reluctantly, and having indulged in three or four gapes and half a dozen stretches, as if occupying his bed was of no more consequence than having sat down in one of his chairs, he said, "Well then I must be moving if that's it. I hope you're not in a hurry. I never am. I must sleep somewhere; and so long as there's no hurry, it does n't matter to me where it is." It used to be his boast, that he had escaped more accidents through never having been in a hurry, than twenty people ever had through running away and endeavouring to avoid them. "I remember a bull," said he, "that tossed half a dozen people who scampered off; but I was in no hurry for my turn, so took my station behind a gas-post; and when he came full butt at me, he struck the gas-post instead of me, knocking himself down with the force of the blow. He was in no hurry to get up again, and I thought it very wise of him, as I walked away." One day, the front of an old house chanced to fall in while he was passing, and there was a man before him who ran to get out of the way, and was knocked down by a beam falling; while Never-sweat-a-hair stood beside the ruins uninjured, and said, "If he had n't been in a hurry he would have escaped as well as I did." He chanced once to be crossing the river in the ferry-boat, which was very old, when a restive young horse, being also a passenger, happened to strike its hoof through the bottom of the boat, which, through decay, began to fill instantly. The ferryman leaped overboard, and had a very narrow escape of his life. Never-sweat-a-hair stood up to his knees in water, and saw it gradually increase, inch by inch, as it

was driven by the current on the shore, which when it touched it filled and went down. He turned half round, and saw the ferryman pulling himself out of the river, at some distance higher up, by the willows, and said, "If he had but waited like me he would have saved himself that ducking." He used to say, that Danger always ran straight forward, and that those who were before it only gave it encouragement to follow. That people who walk in the middle of the road on a windy day, to avoid a falling chimney-pot, choose the very spot where it is likeliest to fall, if it is a narrow street. "I keep close to the wall, and am never in a hurry, and it is sure enough to keep clear off my head. There never was a great discovery," he said, "made through any one being in a hurry, in the world. They were all easy, patient men," he contended, "and he would bet a bunch of turnips to a leg of mutton, providing both parties, if they lost, should club the articles together, and have a dinner after, that, if it could be proved, these great men never sweat a hair in their lives." He used to argue that what was a misfortune to one was a blessing to another; and that once he was on board of a steamboat which chanced to run aground, and while others were deploring the delay, he was thankful for it, for it just allowed him time to go home, without being hurried, to fetch something he had left behind. He always carried an umbrella with him in fair weather, for he said he could not bear to be hurried in case it rained. If he went into a house, and people made an excuse for not offering him a cup of tea, because the kettle had not yet boiled, of course, he was never in a hurry, and could always wait. Excuses were of no avail where he came. He knew by heart every verse of the "Proverbs," where it says, "there is a time for every thing." He called railways the road to ruin; as he declared nothing could succeed that ever went so rapid; and he believed that the disease in potatoes arose from guano; for how can we expect any thing good he said, that is grown so quick. He used to keep a tor-

toise, for he considered it one of the wisest animals in creation. "It did every thing so leisurely" he said, "and was a month in making up its mind before it moved at all." He looked upon the snail also as displaying great wisdom, and said that if every body who paid a visit to their relations had the same forethought, and carried their house with them, they would generally meet with a much warmer reception. He was never known to buy but one plant in his life, and that was an American Aloe, because he had heard it was a hundred years before it flowered ; and said that although he should 'nt live to see it, he knew it would be very handsome when it blowed, and there was no hurry. He was a great admirer of big trees, and said, they took their time over what they did. And on his mantelpiece he had a large collection of hard hollow stones : and he delighted in talking about the hundreds of years it had taken the water, as it fell drop by drop, to wear away and form one of those cavities. He valued his watch all the more because it always went too slow, for he said he felt doubly impressed how rapid was the flight of Time ; and how useless it was to attempt to overtake him. Man, he argued, was originally intended to go slowly ; and, as a proof of it, instanced how long a child was learning to walk by itself, compared with other objects, many of whom could run when they were only a few days old.

He called a backward season a fine slow Spring, and said that things would be all the better for it. When he heard that a raven lived a hundred years, he bought one immediately ; and he said that was a fact worth proving ; he was in no hurry, but he should see. He loved to watch a heavily-laden stage wagon creeping slowly along with its four horses, and always rode in them in preference to stage coaches, because, he said they were slow and sure. To show the many advantages which a man gained through not being in a hurry, he used to tell an anecdote of a farmer who, while sipping his pea-soup, took a five-pound note out of his pocket-book to get it changed, so that he might

not lose a moment, the instant he had swallowed his dinner, in starting off for home. The note fell into the soup, and as he snatched it up to shake off what had adhered to it under the table, the dog which was lying at his feet, thinking that its master was going to give it a taste of his dinner, as usual, made a snatch at the note, which, having been steeped in the soup, could in no wise be disagreeable, and swallowed it in an instant. In vain did the farmer lift up the dog by the tail, as if to make him disgorge it: it was gone, and there was an end of it. Now, argued Never-sweat-a-hair, such a loss could never have happened to a man unless he had been in a hurry. I should never have thought about changing till I'd finished my dinner. In the second place, had such a misfortune befallen me, I should have wiped the note clean first. Thirdly, I should have got up and sat by the fire until it had dried. And, fourthly, I should never have made a practice of feeding the dog until I had finished my own dinner. And so he would go on, endeavouring to prove that the farmer only lost his note through being in a hurry. He once went ten miles to see a castle which had outstood a twelvemonth's siege; and often said he should like to have known that governor, for he was sure he was a man who did nothing in a hurry. He often said that he should like to live in one of the pyramids of Egypt, for that would be a house where a man would not have much trouble with repairs. He selected his wife, he said, because she employed five minutes in scraping a thin cheese-crust the first time he saw her; and he felt confident that she would never be one to do any thing in a hurry. The sunshiny side of the way, he said, was only made for men like himself, who enjoyed it; and that only people with contented hearts were to be found there. On the shady side, he said, every body seems in a bustle; but I like to be among people who never sweat a hair. He was, of course, a great admirer of cattle shows; for he used to argue, that no creature could ever get fat unless it

was of a happy disposition. They cannot be in a hurry if they would, he used to say. And he thought that it was a good slow progress in testing the strength of leather, to see how much a hide would stand distending, without giving way, while the animal was alive; and he was delighted with the pig that made three attempts to open its eyes, and could not; and had he sat as judge, he declared that he should have awarded to its owner a prize. He often told the well-known story of the boy, who, when asked by the sportsman if he had seen a hare run that way, answered, "A hare, sir?" "Yes, yes," exclaimed the impatient sportsman, "a hare." "Had it long ears, sir?" inquired the boy. "Yes, yes, long ears," was the hurried answer. "And a short tail, sir?" the boy further asked. "And a short tail," answered the man, losing both his temper and the hare through the delay. "And when it ran did it go lobberty lob, lobberty lob?" proceeded the boy, with the coolest indifference. "Yes, yes; that's it," replied the man, more snappishly than ever. "Which way did it run?" "I do n't know," answered the lad, without ever changing his countenance, "for I have not seen it." Now, said he, that was a sensible lad: he examined every part of the question carefully, and took time to consider, for he was in no hurry; and, depend upon it, if he were to live until he was ninety he would never sweat a hair. He had a volume full of scraps, containing anecdotes of persons who had narrow escapes through being too late. And he often talked about the man, who, when told by his doctor that smoking was a slow poison, said, that was why he still continued it, for he had already been a smoker above fifty years. What a contrast was there between Never-sweat-a-hair and Flying Jemmy, as we used to call a tall thin man, who was "all legs and wings," and whom, to look at, you would have thought a strong gust of wind would blow round the corner! What jokes used to pass between these two whenever they met! "Well, Tortoise," the Shadow used to exclaim, "haven't you walked yourself to

sleep yet?" "You'll be so thin soon," answered Never-sweat, "that it'll take two men to see you; and you were in such a hurry yesterday that your shadow had fairly to run to keep up to you. You go so quick," continued the easy one, "that even your thoughts cannot keep up with you; and you outstrip them so far, that you are often compelled to return home two or three times to inquire again what business you were going about." "And you are so long making up your mind about a thing," answered Flying Jemmy, "that by the time you have made it up, it is too late. As when you were about purchasing Paul Proctor's cow, and were so long hesitating, that before you had completed the bargain the poor thing died." "Hey, hey," Never-sweat would reply, "and through not being in a hurry I saved my ten pounds." The Flyer never looked before him in dirty weather, and went through all kinds of puddles. Never-sweat seldom took a step without first examining the ground he trod upon. His garden was unlike any other person's; for when their things were going out of season, his were coming in: and this he considered another great advantage acquired through not being in a hurry. He never was on a jury but once, and then he brought his nightcap; for although the rest were unanimous in returning a verdict of "guilty" ere the trial was half ended, as the thief had been captured within a few yards of the spot where the robbery was committed, and the stolen property found upon his person, yet Never-sweat was not to be hurried: he would hear all that could be said on the subject, nor could he be persuaded to give his decision at all until after a long sleep; and when he awoke he apologized for sleeping, and said he hoped he had not hurried them. They used to tell a tale about a poor man who once fell into a deep pond, where he stuck up to the middle in mud, and up to the chin in water; and seeing Never-sweat-a-hair crawling by, the poor fellow called to him for assistance. Never-sweat sat down upon the bank,

SEE-SAW.

and very leisurely began to unlace his boots; and when the poor man begged of him to make haste, as he felt himself sinking deeper, Never-sweat answered, "Would you have me break a new boot-lace? Stop a bit, till I've undone the knot: do n't be in a hurry." The man extricated himself as well as he could, and when he got out shoved Never-sweat in, exclaiming, "Although they say you never sweat a hair in your life, I wo'n't leave 'em to say you never wet a hair." This ducking did Never-sweat a deal of good; and it was noticed that he quickened his pace from that day, and began to think there were occasions sometimes when a person ought to be in a hurry. When any body asked Never-sweat to do a thing he did not like, he used to say it was "as bad as leaving off work, to go and saw deals;" meaning it was worse than what he was then doing, for sawing deals is no joke I can tell you; though all my knowledge about sawing is see-saw, a game we often played near a saw pit which was dug on the common, and for which game we had only to borrow a plank, and place it across the rounded stem of one of the trees, plenty of which lay about, and commence the amusement called



SEE-SAW.

Rare fun was it to keep riding up-and-down on that large, long plank, on which two of us were seated, one at each end; and very often, when our wooden horse was not properly balanced, down it would slip, at the heaviest end, leaving the boy opposite perched up a good height in the air, until a more equal adjustment of "pudding," as we called it, was made; and when the plank was once more properly parted, away we went, as regularly as the upper beam which you see on board a steamer, in the engine-room. And beside being excellent amusement, it was also capital exercise, and very healthy too—not that we were ever much troubled with ill-health, saving when we caught a cold now and then, through sitting in some draught while in a violent perspiration, which is about one of the worst things any boy can ever do to injure a good constitution.

Oh, what old-fashioned sports I used to see in the country at Whitsuntide, at the wakes, and village feasts. Sometimes a long pole was erected, at the top of which was placed a new hat, and he who could climb up, and fetch it down, obtained the prize. Then the pole was so smooth, and made so slippery with soft soap and grease, that it was impossible to keep hold of it with the hands, or climb many yards without sliding down again; and sometimes two and three were clambering up at a time, and when he who was uppermost chanced to slip, down he came, and down came those who were beneath him; and rare fun it was to see them all lay, laughing and scrambling upon the ground. Then some took up their pockets full of sand, and dry dirt, and saw-dust, so as to make the pole rough, and rub off the grease, that they might retain a firmer hold; and often, after a dozen had tried without succeeding, up would go some little fellow, after all the slippery substance had been rubbed off, fresh as a lark, and come sliding down triumphantly with the prize on his head. Then there were races with men who trundled wheelbarrows before them blindfolded, and jumped in sacks which were fastened tightly about their necks, and who,

when they tumbled down, were unable to get up again. It was so laughable to see half-a-dozen sacks with a man's head, and nothing more, peeping out of each; and when one happened to stumble against the other, down they both came, and could neither get up nor out until they were released; and sometimes they were left there a good while to kick, and holla, and storm, while the bystanders only looked on and laughed, and refused to release them until they grew more civil. Then the men who were blindfolded, with the wheelbarrows, run foul of each other, and tumbled into hedges and ditches, and went every way but the one which led to the winning-place; for some called out, "more to the right," others, "more to the left," one, "this side," and another, "that side," until souse one of them would come into a stagnant ditch, or head over heels in a horse-pond, much to the annoyance of themselves, and greatly to the amusement of the lookers-on. Then there was a pig to be caught, with his tail greased, on the wide, open common; and one was generally selected that was as thin as a half-penny herring, and could run like a greyhound, while his long tail was smooth and slippery as glass; and the moment he was laid hold of, his greasy tail slipped out of the hand, and away he went with a grunt and a squeal, and was half way over the common before the man who had tumbled down was enabled to get up again; for sometimes the pig would head the chase for a full hour without being caught, very often escaping all his pursuers, and reaching home again; and when this was the case they had only their labour for their reward. But the most laughable part of all these Whitsuntide games, was, when they ate hot hasty pudding for a wager—the victor being he who first emptied his dish. Oh, you should have seen them when they commenced, for it was turned out of the pan into the basons boiling hot! How one blowed, and another grinned, and a third kept taking a little bit from round the edges, while a fourth swallowed so hot a mouthful that it fetched the tears into his eyes, when instead of

being pitied for the pain he endured, he was laughed at for his folly : and, perhaps, some little fellow who had got into a corner, and to all appearance kept only licking his spoon, had quietly worked his way to the bottom ere the others were aware, by skimming off the top carefully, and scarcely ever losing a moment without swallowing a portion ; and so, while the other competitors were blowing, and stirring, and scarcely making any progress, he was quietly finishing his mess, and to the astonishment of all turned up his empty basin, and won the prize. Then came the donkey-race—oh, such racing ! one would n't start at all, in spite of all the pushing and shoving behind ; another would set off quite a contrary way to that he was wished to go : a third, would very leisurely down with his head and up with his heels, and lay his rider sprawling upon the earth a yard or two off ; while a fourth, perhaps, finding that there was no other means of getting rid of his jockey, would treat him to a roll upon the road ; and it would sometimes so happen that the one which did little more than the whole length at a full trot would come in and win the race, which was generally for a new saddle and bridle. Rude as these sports were, they were such as our forefathers had loved to look upon ; and as the betting rarely went beyond a quart or two of ale, or a glass of grog, such wagers could do but little injury to any one. If they were vices, they belonged to the most innocent class, and were much more harmless than those gentlemanly ones of carding, dicing, and betting enormous sums at fashionable race-courses, which I hope none of you will ever be guilty of doing.

It is not every boy who knows what a downright common village school is, such a one as I have before me at this moment, standing as it does at the end of a large straggling hamlet, and in the neighbourhood of five or six smaller villages, the remotest of which do not lay more than three or four miles from the centre one in which the school is stationed. And from all these surrounding hamlets, and solitary farm-

houses, and straggling cottages, do the boys come ; some from over the hills, and some through the woods, and others across the far-off green and pleasant fields, bringing their dinners with them in little baskets, and dropping into the school, one after another, at all kinds of odd and irregular hours ; for how is it possible to resist the many pleasing temptations they meet with by the way ? In they come in smock-frocks, and heavy-nailed ankle-boots, with hats and caps crushed into all manner of forms through climbing up trees, and poking into hedges ; while their chubby cheeks are either red as an apple-blossom, or, through exposure to the sun, almost the colour of a ripe hazel-nut. Clever lads are they all at finding out a bird's nest, hunting a water-rat, or a water-hen, chasing a stoat or a weasel, running young hares or rabbits almost off their legs ; but as to learning any thing beside, you never saw such dunces as many of them are. It took them days and days of practice to make straight strokes, and pothooks, and round O's, for their round O's had often three corners, sometimes more ; their straight strokes were not unlike a dog's hinder leg ; and as for their hooks they went up and down, a little to the right and a little to the left, and were so entangled and twisted, and ran one into the other, that, for the life of you, you could not tell where they begun nor where they ended. In their sums, they made two and two five, they carried one to four, and made seven of it easily ; took six from nine and left any thing behind you please from thirteen to thirty ; carried one to eight and made fifteen of it like "winking ;" made three-and-sixpence out of sixty pence ; and in casting up twelve pounds of butter, at a shilling and a halfpenny a pound, they were pretty sure to come near double the same number of shillings, either under or over. X and Z they made vowels of, and turned E and O into consonants ; they found a plural in a single pen, but a score was with them singular. They pronounced antique, "antikew ;" and fatigue, "fatigew ;" and no, "Noah : " spelt command, "kumhand ;"

and in their knowledge of geography made Grand Cairo in Cornwall; and believed America to be situated somewhere in Argyleshire; Ireland and the East Indies they said joined each other; and Africa was with them a market-town, where they sold large ostriches' eggs. They tore up their books to make paper boats of, and swam them as they went home in the streams they passed. They held their pens as a housemaid does a poker; and when they had blotted their copybooks all over, so as to leave no space to write, they finished by blacking each other's faces with the remainder of the ink. They broke up their slates to play at "pitch and toss" with; and after the schoolmaster had whacked them, till his arm fairly ached again, they sat down upon the forms as if nothing at all had happened and said they "didn't care." If, to punish them, he withheld their dinners until they went home, by keeping back the basket in which their provisions were stored, and they could by any chance get outside the door, they rioted to excess upon a raw turnip, and banqueted like an emperor on beetroot, and fairly licked their lips over a green cabbage. If they could but get hold of the cane, with which they had been beaten, they cut it up into small pieces to smoke; they got astride the forms when their master's back was turned, made them rear up, and played at horses; they made the most awful noises, then pretended to look innocently round as if they wondered who had done it. They stowed away young birds in their hats, and, instead of attending to their lessons, imitated the chirping of the birds; and if an opportunity presented itself, without being discovered, they put on the clock that they might leave all the earlier, and told all kinds of stories about their parents wanting them to go errands, that they might get out of school the sooner. They never cared to mount a donkey unless he was a well-known kicker; would not tell their name for a dike, unless there was a chance of some half-dozen of them getting up to their middle in leaping it, and were always practising at

those fences which were the most renowned for grazing shins. There was scarcely a tree, however difficult it might be, but what they could clamber up; no garden-hedge so thick but what they contrived to get through it; nor no pinfold in the neighbourhood but what they could get the stray shaggy pony out of, if they once set about it. They could run like greyhounds, throw a stone to within an inch or two of the object they aimed at, and when they had done wrong hide themselves in such holes and corners as you would only think a rat would ever dream of getting into.

Sometimes they managed to arrive at school just in time to see the better behaved scholars leaving, and now and then they never got there at all. Occasionally, too, they had to wait outside an hour or more before they could get in, as the master had gone to measure some land for a farmer, or to see how many feet of timber there were in a tree which had just been felled. For his ideas of education extended no further than in the belief that to read a chapter in the testament without making above a dozen mistakes; to write a good, staring, round hand, which all who run might read; and to cast up and divide an account, to within a shilling or two of the true amount, was to turn out a pretty decent sort of a scholar. And it was his boast that many a boy could, by careful spelling, make out the farmer's name, which was painted on the front of the wagon, who, but for him, would never have known "a B from a bull's foot." When he could not get them to learn as he wished, he invariably thrashed them: if this did not succeed, he starved them: when this would not answer, he kept them so late that it was often dark by the time they reached home. As to teaching them, he never thought of that, there were the books, and copies and slates, and there was he, ready to thrash, starve, and keep them, if they would not say their lessons, and write their copies. He had his little garden to attend to, and farmers This-that-and-the-other to chat with whenever they rode past;

and if, when he came in again, he found the boys fighting hand over head, why he also fought too, and, as he said, "contrived to let them see who was master." To induce them to become good boys, he promised that they should weed his garden, or gather a few barrow-loads of manure on the roads, for his little paddock; and it was wonderful how quiet they would remain for five minutes or so, whenever he offered them such pleasant promises. Sometimes he went out with them to play at Hounds and Hare, he himself taking the part of the hare; and after him they went, over hedge and ditch, for he was all legs and wings, and they pulled at his coat-laps, got him down and pretended to worry him, forgiving him all the thrashings he had given them, and never caring or bestowing a thought about those they were likely enough to receive the very next day. He argued, that beating them well caused them to grow, and that keeping back their dinners would prepare them for being good farmers, and enable them better to endure the many hours which they would have to labour in the fields without food. He made them dibble and set his potatoes, as he said, to instruct them in agriculture; cut grass by the road-side for his pony, so that they might have an idea of doing something "when they went out to place;" and gather acorns for his hogs in autumn, to instruct them a little in getting in harvest. He sent them on errands five or six miles off, to the market-town, and although they sometimes lost the money, or brought soap for sugar, tin-tacks for tea, and candles instead of coffee, he only beat them, and sent them back again the next day; for he argued, that a long walk and a good whacking were two of the finest things in the world to improve the memory.

He had only been elected schoolmaster, by the neighbouring farmers, because he excelled all the other candidates in his answers about how many loads of manure there would be in a dunghill of such a size, and how many square yards in a field of given dimensions. He read a paragraph from the newspa-

per which laid upon the table, did a sum in subtraction, which one of the farmers set him, wrote his name in small hand, and then in large, and was elected by a majority of three. Such was the schoolmaster, and such were his pupils; nor was there one amongst them all who had a greater objection to a long hard word than himself. Still he was at the bottom a good-hearted man, he knew that the race he had to deal with would be sent out to sow and plough, and tend cattle, and not one out of ten would ever, perhaps, take up any thing but a song, to get off, after they left school, or write on a barn-door, with chalk, how much their wages came to in a month, at ten pounds a year. Nor is my picture at all overdrawn, for sorry I am to say, that many such schoolmasters and scholars, are yet to be found in those out-of-the-way and obscure villages, which are scattered up and down England, even in the present day. Nor is there, perhaps, much exaggeration in the description, which some of you may have heard, of a village schoolmistress and her scholars, who when they could not very clearly remember even their letters, some such dialogue as the following took place:—Schoolmistress: “What letter’s that, Billy?” Billy: “Don’t know.” “What’s that farmer Jobson feeds his horses with, Billy?” “Straw,” answers Billy at a venture, “No, hay,” replies his enlightened instructress. “Remember it’s hay, Billy,” “Now what letter’s that, Billy?” inquires she, proceeding again. “Don’t know,” answers the chubby-faced pupil, counting the marbles in his pocket, and looking upon the ground. “What’s that which flies about in the garden with a sting in its tail, Billy?” “A wasp,” answers Billy, his thoughts wandering to the sunny bank, and the hole at which he has watched them go in and out so often. “No, Billy; a bee, Billy,” replies the dame, exulting again in her superior knowledge. “Remember a bee, Billy; and B E spells bee; and a bee makes honey, Billy; and h-u-n-double-e spells honey, Billy. Now, Billy, what’s the next letter? I know you know that.” “Crooked S,”

answers Billy at a venture. "No it is n't," answers she; "try again." "Then it's round O" replies he, quite positive this time. "No it's not: what do I do with my eyes, Billy?" "Squint," says the young vagabond, telling the truth at last, and grinning from ear to ear. "Squint, do I? you young dog!" she answers, fetching him a bat on the head with the book, and scattering all the loose leaves upon the floor. "It's C, you ignorant little jackass you, C-E; and I'll make you see before I've done with you, that I will, for saying I squint." And up she jumps and chases Billy, with the book-cover in her hand, round the room, and over the forms, and in and out between the scholars, until at last she probably tumbles all her length upon the floor; while her hopeful pupil runs, screaming and laughing, out of the door, followed by the whole string of scholars; and such is the end of Billy's lesson for that day. And all such pupils would do to improve themselves after they left school would be, to cut out some queer hieroglyphics, which they called the initials of their names, either upon a gate-post, or the church-spout; while their reading would be confined to spelling out the names on the shop-signs; and by a great effort they would perhaps be enabled to count twenty backwards without making a mistake. What think you to such a school as this, my boys?

I will now endeavour to describe to you the life which a country-boy leads, whose parents are very poor. He is scarcely out of his mother's arms above a few years, before he has to nurse some great fat baby of a brother or sister, half as big as himself, while his father and mother go out to work in the fields; and this great chubby-cheeked "babby" he carries with him into the lanes, and fields, and on the commons, and he sets it down anywhere, while he hunts in the hedges for nests; and sometimes the little thing will, when it grows big enough to crawl, as if anxious to gather all the flowers at once, throw itself down, spread out its little legs and arms to their fullest extent, and crow again with delight, while its innocent

face is buried amongst the flowers, delighted to think that they are all his own, if it chooses to gather them. When he grows up, he goes to gather fuel in the woods or lanes; tents the cows for somebody, and has perhaps a shilling a week for it. If he does this, his whole day is spent in the pleasant green lanes,—for all he has to do is to see that they do not get into the fields, or run away, or trespass anywhere, and get into the pinfold. How he amuses himself I can hardly tell you. Sometimes he runs after the birds, tries to make traps to catch them, chases bees and butterflies, plaits rushes together and makes himself a dunce's cap, jumps a bit, runs a bit, whistles a bit, has a nap if he likes, opens the gate for some horseman who may happen to pass, and fairly crows again if the traveller should by chance throw him a halfpenny; and depend upon it, his thoughts are fully occupied for all the remainder of that day, by thinking of what he shall buy with it; but the first and last thought is the little confectioner's shop, and there it goes. The very first thing he purchases, when he is rich enough, is a knife, and he spends hours in sharpening it on a stone; then he cuts gate-posts, and sticks, and branches of may-blossoms off with it; and it is never out of his hand for the first week or two, only when he is asleep. If he can only get out "to place," he is happy; for he has often heard what lumps of fat bacon, and great hunches of brown bread, and huge porringers of new milk, and mugs of home-brewed beer, boys get who live in the large farmhouses; and he longs for the time when he shall get his victuals for his labour, and his parents will only have to find him his clothes. That time at length comes, and oh! isn't he busy then! he has the pigs and the poultry to feed, and he goes out into the fields in the early part of Spring with a great fork over his shoulder, and knocks the manure about, to get a good appetite for his dinner. And he has to run all the errands,—to the mill about the corn, and to the blacksmith with something he can hardly carry to mend; but above all,



WATERING THE CATTLE

is what delights him most, because he can ride both there and back to the clear bright “beck;” for such is the name given to a sheet of water that runs across a road in the country, though I cannot tell you why it is so called. Oh, you should but see him sitting astride of one of the broad-backed horses, and driving the cattle before him! he is some proud I can tell you; and when he has had a little more practice, he is intrusted with the horse all the way to the mill, to bring home a sack of flour on its back. Then if the land is heavy, he drives the horses for the ploughman, carries a long whip over his shoulder, and cries “gee-hoo-gee” like a man. He now wears heavy ankle-boots, and a blue or white smock-frock, a round cart-hat, and lifts up his smock-frock to put his knife into his waistcoat-pocket just like the head-man, John; and thinks that the day will perhaps come when he shall have a watch of his own, like him; then wo’n’t he pull it out about every five minutes or so to see what o’clock it is? He can now weed, and

plant potatoes, and bush-harrow, that is, drive the horse up and down the field, that drags an old gate behind it filled with thorns, to raise and lighten the grass, and level and break up the mould. But, oh! I cannot tell you one-half of the things he does; though I must not forget one great event in his life, and that is when he is first trusted with a gun, and allowed to shoot at the sparrows and rooks in the corn-field. If he cannot hit them, he can the gate somewhere; and perhaps after a many tries he happens to send one single small shot into his hat: ah! you should but see him show his companions the hole;—but then the old gun is pretty sure to send its shot somewhere, for when it comes out of the worn-out old barrel, it spreads about nearly the space of half-a-dozen yards. When he gets money enough, he gives five shillings for a “real” beaver hat, to wear on a Sunday; and to show you that it really is beaver, he brushes the nap up the wrong way, so that every body may see what a lot of beaver there is on it. The next thing he purchases is a shaggy plush waistcoat, either a red or yellow one, covered with black spots: if yellow, he believes it to be made of a leopard’s skin. He now carries a stick, and takes a delight in standing and talking to men, especially if any body of consequence happens to be passing; and if he sees any youngsters in the fields trespassing who are a year or so his juniors, he calls out, “Will you boys get off there?” and if they happen to run away directly, he thinks himself somebody at once. He makes friends with the old shepherd-dog, and bribes it with lumps of bacon and pieces of bread to follow him; and if it only steps a yard or two aside, and any body is by, he calls out, “Come here, sirrah,” to let them see that he has something to do with it,—for he wishes people to think that he is a man all but “a little bit.” Is n’t he proud if any great farmer passes him and says, “How are you, Jack?” or “Do you think we shall have any wet?” Oh, does n’t he look up, and, if he chances to say, “I think, Mr. Jobbins, we shall

have a little rain," he wishes heartily that it may rain, so as to give the farmer a high opinion of his "weather-wisdom."

And now I think I have given you an insight into all his little vanities, for when he begins to talk to Betty I have done with him; and if he buys her a ribbon when he goes to market, why, depend upon it he means "sweet-hearting;" and then let any lad call him a boy after that if he dare, for he would turn round and say, "Where do you find your men?" Remember, I have given him no schooling; and there are many like him who, saving a few hours on the sabbath, never had time to go to school, nor ever knew any thing about the world, beyond the neighbouring market-town, which they visit once or twice a year, perhaps, and the village in which they were born. Gray, in his beautiful "Elegy," which I hope all of you have read, has summed up such a life in a few lines, where he says,

"Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
 Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
 How jocund did they drive their team afield;
 How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

"Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure!
 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor."

The world may never even hear of their names; yet they have done their day's work, their duty to their fellow-men: and without such as these, who were once poor country-boys, our fields would remain uncultivated, and our harvest unreaped. So here I end with an old English sentiment, often the motto on a village alehouse sign, and say, "God speed the Plough."

There was a curious character who used to wander about amongst the villages, and whom I could never look upon, when a boy, without a mingled feeling of wonder and awe, and that was

the country Rat-catcher. He was a thin man, with a face the colour of a walnut, with sharp, dark little eyes that were deeply set in his head, and a long chin that seemed to project out as far as his nose, while his forehead went sloping back, and his cheeks were nearly covered with short brown hair; and I never looked at him without being struck by the resemblance he bore to an old rat. He looked like a rat, he smelt like a rat, and when he was in a hurry he went jumping on like an old rat that had got two stiff legs. From head to heel he was all over rats: he wore a great, long, cotton-velvet coat, full of strange pockets from top to bottom, every one of which buttoned over; and this coat was fairly alive with rats. Put his hand wherever he would, inside or out, into any one of those mysterious pockets, and out came a great long-tailed, black-eyed rat. He wore a belt over his shoulder, that went under the opposite arm, and nearly reached down to his knee, and this was covered all over with figures of gilded rats. His glazed hat was also surrounded with them; his purse and tobacco-pouch were made of the dried skins of rats; there was one carved on the lid of his snuff-box, and even his tobacco-stopper was a rat's foot mounted with silver. He pulled them out of his pockets, and allowed them to run about him, up his arms, and on his shoulders, and round his neck, and in and out of his great velvet coat they went squeaking; and out of his pockets they sometimes sat, peeping like swallows from the holes in their nests. He had names for them all—such funny names: "Short-tail," and "Round-ears," and "Black-nose," and "Bob-with-his-eye-out," and "Nock-the-nailer," and "Tommy Licktrencher," and "Dicky-in-the-dumps," and "Jacky-my-love;" and they all seemed to know their names: and when he called them, Short-tail, who had lost two or three inches of his hinder appendage, would poke out his head; and the one whose ears he had cut would make his appearance; then out would come the next, whose nose looked as if it had been blacked with ink; he was

followed by old Bob, who had only got one eye, and who always looked as if he were asleep; then came Nock-the-nailer, so called because he was always knocking about in the pocket, and never at rest; he was put away and succeeded by Tommy Licktrencher, who was ever hungry; then came Dicky-in-the-dumps, a sulky dog, whose tail he was compelled to pull to make him move at all; then Jacky-my-love, the greatest favourite in the lot, who was ever trying to get at the old man's long chin, as he said to kiss him, though we often thought to ourselves that he had a most villanous look, and contemplated giving him a good bite. And sometimes the old rat-catcher would get into the large tap-room of the village public-house, and by clambering up the horseblock, and looking in at the window, we could see him turn out his whole family of rats at once, and hold them to the very noses of his rough wire-haired terriers, who never attempted to touch them, although they would have nipped up and worried any strange rat that they had chanced to come near, in the twinkling of an eye. Then he had ferrets, too, such long-bodied, white-haired, strange-looking animals, with eyes as red as rubies; and although they would have laid hold of your finger, and drawn blood in a moment, yet they allowed him to handle them, and play with them; for he had tamed them to such a degree that with him they seemed playful as kittens: and with his ferrets and terriers he went about from farmhouse to farmhouse, earning his livelihood by the destruction of rats. And no sooner did he put one of these ferrets into a corn-rick, or a hole in the barn, than out the rats would come, rushing one after the other, and there stood the terriers ready to worry them in an instant; and in this manner two or three score were destroyed in the space of an hour or two. Mr. Jesse, in his "Gleanings," a work full of interesting anecdotes relating to the habits of animals, speaking of the destructive nature of the rat, says, that when a proposition was made for removing a horse slaughter-house to a greater distance

from Paris, the great objection made to such a removal was a fear of the ravages they would make in the neighbourhood, when they had no longer the carcasses of the slaughtered horses to feed upon; as many as thirty horses, or more, were sometimes slaughtered in a day, and nothing but their bare bones found next morning, all picked clean by the rats. In one of these slaughter-houses, which was enclosed by solid walls, the carcasses of two or three horses were placed, and in the night the workmen blocked up all the holes through which the rats went in and out as they pleased; when this was done, the workmen went inside, with lighted torches and heavy sticks, and in one night killed 2,650 rats: in four such hunts the numbers destroyed were above 9,000. They made themselves burrows in the surrounding neighbourhood like rabbits, and to such an extent were these excavations carried, that the earth sometimes fell in, and revealed the immense subterraneous works which they had made. They also multiplied so rapidly that there was not room for them to lodge in the slaughter-houses, and paths could be distinctly traced in the fields over which they came to feed in the night, and returned in the morning.

There is scarcely a village in England without a little shop in it, where you see over the doorway, in strange-looking letters, "Licensed Dealer in Tea, Coffee, Tobacco and Snuff, Pepper and Vinegar," where they keep every thing well-seasoned, and very little that is fresh. You cannot mistake it, for there are generally a lot of little children looking in, licking their lips, and seeming to envy the very sunshine which is melting the lollipops in the glass jars; wishing that they were small as flies to hop about and eat up the dirty handful of sugar that is thrown in one corner of the window; and fairly longing to have a suck of the two or three wizened oranges, which have lain undisturbed for weeks on their little bed of comfortable dust in the corner. There is generally a hair broom, a mop, and a besom at the

door, and an empty tea-chest which the carrier brought, and which, when full, contained a dozen sixpenny fire-shovels, a dozen pieces of hearthstone, ditto of Bath bricks, and the same number of lumps of pipeclay, with divers and sundry packages of red ochre. They never lay in a stock of more than a pound of tea at a time, which the carrier brings to them in his coat-pocket; and were any little girl to come for a whole ounce, they would send her back again to see if it was not a mistake, so accustomed are they to serve out only half and quarter of ounces. They make halfpennyworths of sugar, and seldom give a child a pennyworth of treacle in a teacup, without a caution not to put his finger in and lick it as he goes home; for if he does, it will be short weight when he gets there. They are never without gingerbread cakes, plum buns, and biscuits; but as they are all mixed together in one drawer, it frequently takes some time to find such as are wanted, and when found, scarcely any thing less than a good heavy hammer will break them; nor is there the remotest chance of eating them at all, until they have had a good soaking in a basin of water. The top row of the window is generally dedicated to a few whipping and pegging tops in a net; half-a-dozen shuttlecocks stuck in one another; a couple of halfpenny battledores to match; a spotted harlequin suspended by the neck, who kicks up his legs and arms beautifully when the string behind is pulled; a wax-doll, whose nose and lips the sun has melted away; a wooden dog that used to squeak when it was moved, before it fell down and got broken; two or three soldiers on horseback lying higgledy-piggledy together, some of the men without heads, and some of the horses without legs; and two or three halfpenny kites, with a beautiful cross in the middle, marked with red ochre; with one or two other articles, such as a sixpenny fiddle without strings, the bow of which has long since been lost—and these make up what the village shopkeeper calls his toy department. The second row is dedicated to a very small show of crockeryware: a

few little packages which are either groats, oatmeal, or lucifer matches, you cannot tell which, unless you go close and read the labels; beside these, stand two or three bottles of patent medicines, those intended for the use of the villagers being the smallest, those for the cows and horses a little larger. Next stand a couple of pens, a box full of wafers, and a little bottle which once contained ink. These are matched by half-a-dozen pipes, very tastefully crossed and tied together; then a bill, about something which was stolen, lost, or strayed, you cannot tell how long ago, for the date has slipped down. This is accompanied by another bill, announcing "Day and Martin's Blacking,"—not that they ever had any, for they found it come cheaper to make their own; but as the pane happened to be out, and it just fitted, it came in very handy, and the glazier lived above five miles off. This completes row the second, with the exception of a written paper, announcing "A Cotage too Lett Inkwire within." The bottom row it is almost impossible to describe, for it is made up of soap, and soda, and stone-blue; a pair or two of boots, ditto of shoes, a hat, and a little suit of corduroys; parcels which are supposed to contain every thing, though they have very much the appearance of bricks tied up in brown paper; a piece of bacon mounted on a lump of cheese; a half-quartern loaf, overhung by half-a-pound of candles, on both of which the effects of the hot sunshine are visible; two or three eggs which have been kept long enough, and made warm enough to contain little chickens; three onions, one of which is wizened, while the other two have begun to sprout; a mousetrap, a frying-pan, and a gridiron, with a tin saucepan, turned bottom upwards, and surmounted by a half-bladder of dirty-looking lard. These, with a notice that passengers and parcels are booked there for the Red Rover coach, make up about all you can see without a very minute examination. If you venture inside and ask for any thing, no matter what it is, they have it; but bless me! wherever can it be? it must be somewhere in one of these

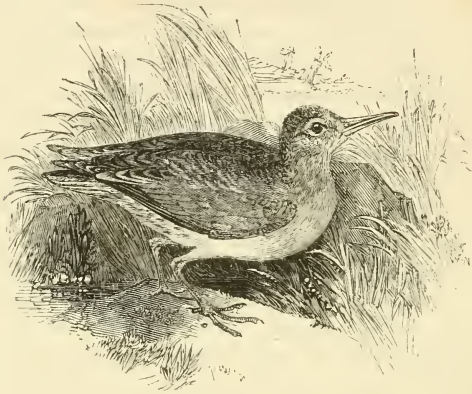
drawers. John! John! John comes out of the little back parlour, he also is certain that it must be somewhere—he scratches his head, and tries to remember—has a recollection of Mrs. So-and-so having a penn’orth about six months back—knows he did it up, and put it away carefully—must be this—no, those are tin-tacks—must be that—deary me! they’re thimbles!—did n’t know they had any—and had given an order for two dozen to come by the carrier on Saturday—Could n’t you look in again in about an hour, or call next day? they should be sure to find them then. Perhaps it is a lead-pencil you want. They have black lead, but they reckon that wo’n’t do. They have pens also, but, unfortunately, at that time are out of ink;—the last ink they had a great jar tumbled off the shelf, fell on it, and broke the ink-bottle; and it was very unfortunate, for it happened all to run into the drawer where they kept the moist sugar. Is there nothing else you want? a penknife, or a pail, or a penny box of paints? You shake your head, and say no—and bid good-by to the Village Shopkeeper.

Amid the life, and stir, and animation which the return of Spring has brought with it, we must not forget the Easter Holidays, as they are the first that come since old Christmas sat warming his hands beside the hearth. There are other faces, on the rivers and roads now, looking different to those which only go to and fro on their errands of business—numbers who sally out with no other motives than to see how the country looks after the return of Spring. You know them by the holiday smile which they wear upon their faces, by their ever “babbling about green fields,” and opening flowers, and the sweet and sunshiny spots which they are on their way to visit. On the steamboats you hear their merry laugh; their conversation sounds above the shrill whistle and deep groaning of the railway-engine; it drowns the noisy clamour of the guard’s horn behind the coach; and they give back shout for shout to the noisy welcome of the village children, who are out to play

in the busy streets through which they pass. What pleasure has it afforded me, in my happy rambles into the country, when issuing from some village inn, where I have located myself for a few days, I have been attracted by the noise of merry children to peep into some green and shady corner, and have there come unawares upon a group of little fellow-travellers, while they were busied in gathering flowers, and who have, at my unexpected appearance, scampered off in all directions, leaving their floral treasures scattered about upon the ground, until I had crossed the rustic stile, and was far away beyond the high hawthorn hedge, behind which they were sheltered when I first approached! And sometimes, while wandering beside a clear stream, that went winding in and out like a silver thread, between meadows which were almost knee-deep in flowers, have I startled a little company of village children, as they were swimming their boat, or, further down, seen a group of larger boys venturing timidly into the cold water, and, by the shiver they gave, telling how much they wished for the summer sun to make the stream warmer. Others, by the wayside banks, were hunting for the beautiful empty snail-shells, which were streaked and varied with endless lines of gorgeous colours, looking not unlike some strange flower that had forced itself through the covering of dead leaves. Then, another pleasant sight was the first brood of young birds, which could scarcely fly half the length of a field without resting, and seemed almost afraid of venturing anywhere away from the high-sheltering hedges and the tall green trees; little things, that would fairly shrink again if only a dragon-fly went sailing by, and even looked upon the butterfly, which they would not, ere long, hesitate to make a meal of, with an eye of wonder. And often, in those very trees where the young birds sheltered, the old withered leaves, which had stood all the batter and storm of the past Winter, still hung, dead, and dry, and brown, amid the garland of fresh green with which the coming Summer

had adorned herself—looking like old age and youth congregated together; the one about to drop into the grave, and the other revelling in the full enjoyment of the morning of life.

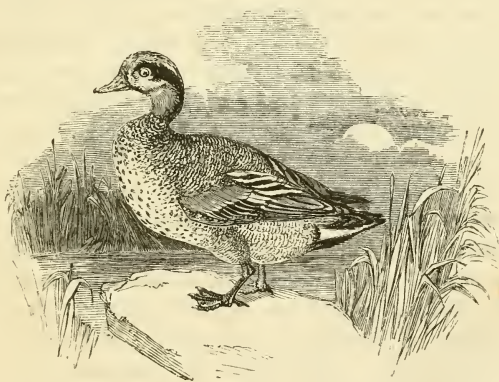
There is another curious bird which I have not yet told you about, and which, they say, took its name from Canute the Dane; for, when cooked, it formed one of his favourite dishes. It is called the



KNOT.

You all remember Canute the Dane: it was he who rebuked his flattering courtiers, when, in their fulsome adulation, they told him that every thing was possible for him to accomplish, by ordering his chair to be placed near the sea-shore while the tide was rising, and commanding the waves to retire, as he still retained his seat until they begun to wash about his feet; when, turning round upon his flatterers, he said, “Confess ye now how frivolous and vain is the might of an earthly king compared to that Great Power, who rules the elements, and can say unto the ocean, ‘Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.’” Although this bird belongs to the class of sand-

pipers, it still retains its Danish name; and you will readily see the resemblance there is between the words Canute and knot, the former of which was anciently spelt knute. It is fond of frequenting marshes, and may often be seen in the neighbourhood of the sea; and sometimes, during a high tide, the rocks, in the northern parts of our island, are covered with them, and there they sit until the tide recedes, when they fly down and commence their search for food upon the beach. The knot is seldom above nine inches long, and weighs but little more than four ounces. The head, neck, back, and wings, are of a grey, ash colour; a dusky streak runs from the bill to the eye; and the wings are edged with white, varied with curved and dusky lines. It is very common, in the fens of Lincolnshire, though we have no proof that it builds in our island. Another bird, which may be found in the same locality, is the



TEAL,

the smallest of all the duck tribe, for it seldom weighs above twelve ounces, and rarely exceeds fourteen inches in length. It is, as you will see by the engraving, a beautifully marked

bird, for the bill is black, the neck and head bay, while on each side a rich green patch stretches backwards, bordered with a line of white, while the hinder part of the neck, back, and body, are finely varied with wavy lines of black and white. The other portions of its plumage being beautifully diversified with buff, brown, black, and glossy green, while the white breast is exquisitely dotted with round spots of black. Its nest, which is made of rushes, and lined with down, is generally built by the side of some pond. The eggs are about the size of those of a pigeon, and are of a dullish white colour, spotted with brown. The manner of capturing it is much the same as that which I have described in Winter, in taking the wild ducks; where a decoy is made covered with nets, and supported by hoops, all of which you will see by referring to the passage I have alluded to.

But were I to fill a whole volume, it would not contain half the interesting information I could give you about birds only: from the great eagle, that sweeps the sky with its broad wings, down to the little golden wren, which I have described, would intervene a long list of birds whose names I have not even mentioned, although I have made you acquainted with the habits of so many. And not a year elapses without naturalists making some new discovery, and adding fresh facts to the thousands which are already known respecting the habits of birds. As to insects, when I tell you that one gentleman found, within a very limited neighbourhood, and in a space of time not exceeding two months, near three thousand various species, and out of these many which he had never before seen in any collection, you will readily imagine what a wide field there is yet to explore before we are fully acquainted with this wonderful branch of natural history. The unpractised eye but sees them winging their way, or dancing in clouds in the air; the naturalist would capture them, and so arrange them in different species, that a common observer would in a moment be struck with their dissimilarity of appearance, and see at a

glance what a variety of distinct forms they present when thus classed in form and order. So it is with birds, and flowers, and even fishes, about which we know so little. There is, in every separate class, something varied and striking, and which, when rightly understood, shows how perfect is the order of creation in even the minutest forms.

What makes a country ramble so interesting is, that almost every time you go out you are sure to discover something new. If your walk extends beside a sequestered brook, there perhaps you see the water-rat swimming about, and stopping every now and then to nibble at a green leaf that keeps moving up and down, as rocked by every little ripple that passes; or some strange butterfly goes sailing away, of a different colour to any one you have ever before seen; or a flower arrests your eye, and you endeavour to learn its name. Perchance some strange-looking bird is perched upon a spray; for you are as likely to meet with one of these winged wanderers as the wisest naturalist that ever set out in quest of such strangers; and occasionally a rare bird or two visits some particular neighbourhood that is not met with anywhere else in England. In fact, it is almost impossible to wander any distance without making some fresh discovery.

All boys love Spring better than any other season of the the year; for, somehow, Summer seems to sink into it so imperceptibly, that however narrowly we look we can scarcely distinguish the change; for it seems but a continuation of Spring, only covered with more green, and marked with another race of flowers. Autumn also glides in upon Summer with a noiseless motion; though, to an observant eye, all these changes appear clear and visible. But Spring rises up from the nakedness of Winter, and arrests every eye by her coming; she appears even at our doors in crowded cities, and the cry of "Sweet primroses" tells us that her flowery feet are already upon the earth. For, even without journeying into the fields,

the twitter of the swallows upon the eaves proclaim her coming; and, above all, we see her bright cheerful face in the lengthening of the days—the sunbeams that come peeping in at the window, so early in the morning, in place of the gloom and darkness which, but a few weeks ago, hung around; and we recall the many sweet country spots which that bright sunshine is warming, and the thousands of beautiful flowers it is nourishing and bringing forth,

“In the early, early morning, when the Summer sun doth shine,
Before the red cock crows from the farm upon the hill,
When we are all asleep, and all the world is still.”

TENNYSON.

It is also pleasant to notice the trees, as they become every week more thickly covered with leaves—to trace the broader opening of the buds, day by day, until at last high over our heads hangs the dark embowered roof, covering many an undiscovered bird's-nest, and sheltering numbers of callow young, which, but for this green curtaining, would fill the maws of hungry hawks and other birds of prey. Then the great brown bees, that belong to no hive, go booming past; and ever up amid the sunlight, in the branches, we catch glimpses of beautiful insects; while butterflies, of almost every hue, go fanning their mealy wings among the under-wood, as if they had not yet made up their minds where to alight, amid such a sweet variety of flowers and twinkling of leaves. And ever there come, as if only to peep at you, the redcap, and the blackcap, and the yellow-hammer, and the white-throat, the grey-linnet, and the green-linnet, and a host of other birds, swinging for a moment at the end of some spray, where they warble a few brief notes, then dive off amongst the green branches to places only known to themselves. And you almost wonder, when you consider how far they fly away, at times, that they are ever able to find their nests again, in a great, green, old, pathless wood, where every tree seems to look

alike, and where you would soon be lost were you to venture as they do through thicket, and dingle, and deep-sunken dell, which no foot, saving that of the woodman and gamekeeper, ever traverse.

The morning skies of Spring are very beautiful, so blue and marbled, and broken into cloudy masses or groups, that are dyed with the richest colours when the sun rises. I have often fancied, as I have noticed those clustering clouds, gathering around the eastern sky, that they were humble vassals, waiting for the approach of the sun, who, when he arises from his couch, casts off his raiment of many colours, and scatters it amongst the clouds; for the sun never appears twice in the same dress—never seems to wear the same garments again; the dawn has ever a new pattern ready woven for him in her golden loom. Boys who lie late in bed cannot imagine the beautiful colours which hang about the morning skies of Spring and Summer about sunrise—cannot even dream of the splendour in which the east is robed before the round sun comes heaving up above the distant hills. No painter could ever imitate in colours, no poet describe in the most beautiful language, such magnificent skies as I have many a time witnessed at these seasons of the year—

“ Right against the eastern gate,
 Where the great sun begins his state,
 Robed in flames and amber light,
 The clouds in thousand liveries dight;
 While the ploughman, near at hand,
 Whistles o’er the furrowed land,
 And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
 And the mower whets his scythe,
 And every shepherd tells his tale
 Under the hawthorn in the dale.”

MILTON’S “L’ALLEGRO.”

And here we must take our farewell of Spring, and journey further onward towards the pleasant land of Summer; for many

SPRING.

a flower has already faded, and many a young bird, by this time, flown; and others there are whose song ceased when the white may-blossoms were drifted away. The little lambs have grown taller and stronger, and their weak, pitiful bleating has taken a deeper tone. There is also a darker shadow about the trees, and on the hazels you can now see where the bunchy clusters will be hung. The green corn has put on its eary plume, the feathery grass has already begun to whiten, the violets of the early Spring are dead, and, saving in moist and shady places, the pale primroses are all withered and gone. In place of those young and delicate tints, which bore such a soft and tender appearance, we now begin to see the broader and bolder opening of Summer in all her beauty; and the Season, whose cheeks were before wan with the hues of snowdrops and lilies-of-the-valley, are now becoming flushed and tinged with the deep dye of the opening roses.



12

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