

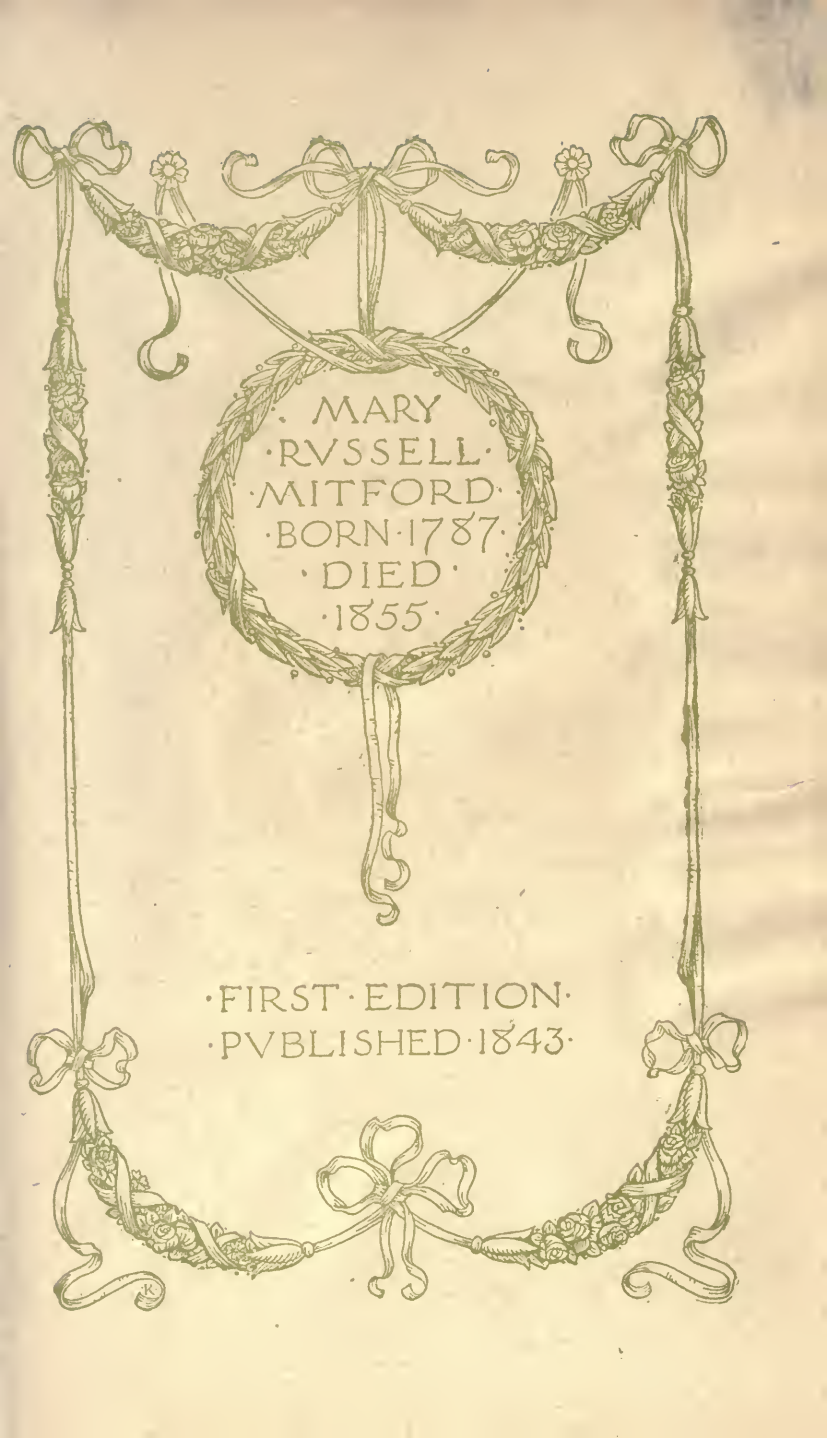




ALFRED LE PETIT del.

d. W. J. M. B. 1932





· MARY
· RUSSELL ·
· MITFORD ·
· BORN · 1787 ·
· DIED ·
· 1855 ·

· FIRST · EDITION ·
· PUBLISHED · 1843 ·



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

*THE
SERIES
OF
ENGLISH
IDYLLS*

*OUR
VILLAGE*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation



*In the very spring
and pride of their
follering prettiness.*



OUR VILLAGE
by
Mary Russell Mitford



With coloured illustrations
by C. E. Brock

London. J. M. Dent & Sons L^{td}
New York. E. P. Dutton & C^o

PR
5022
893
1904

CONTENTS

OUR VILLAGE Page
I

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY—

Frost and Thaw 17

The First Primrose 25

Violeting 32

The Cowslip-ball 38

The Hard Summer 49

Nutting 61

The Wood 69

The Dell 76

The Old House at Aberleigh 85

The Shaw 94

The Fall of the Leaf 104

SELECT SKETCHES—

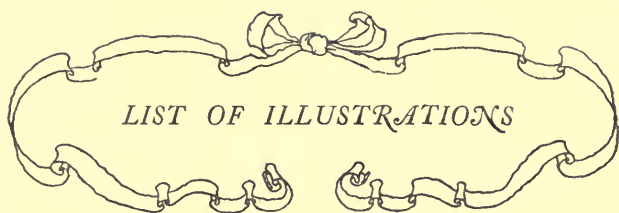
Hannah 113

Modern Antiques 122

A Great Farm-house 132

1221804

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Bramley Maying</i>	141
<i>A Parting Glance at Our Village</i>	150
<i>A Country Cricket-match</i>	167
<i>Wheat-hoeing</i>	182
<i>Whitsun-eve</i>	193
<i>The Haymakers</i>	200
<i>Hay-carrying</i>	214
<i>Lost and Found</i>	229
<i>The Old Gipsy</i>	237
<i>The Young Gipsy</i>	248
<i>Jack Hatch</i>	260
<i>The Mole-catcher</i>	270
<i>The Village Schoolmistress</i>	279
<i>The Rat-catcher</i>	294
<i>Aunt Martha</i>	306



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>In the very spring and pride of their tottering prettiness</i>	<i>frontispiece</i>
<i>Title-page</i>	—
<i>I and my white greyhound</i>	<i>facing page 21</i>
<i>Nothing but for sober melancholy use</i>	<i>„ 36</i>
<i>Striving against the heat</i>	<i>„ 73</i>
<i>A singular division of labour</i>	<i>„ 80</i>
<i>Youth and age</i>	<i>„ 87</i>
<i>Screamed at by the dame</i>	<i>„ 98</i>
<i>Symptoms of a flirtation still</i>	<i>„ 133</i>
<i>Scolding little boys and girls</i>	<i>„ 148</i>
<i>Oh ! they will never do for cricket</i>	<i>„ 181</i>
<i>Not a stroke have they done for these five minutes</i>	<i>„ 196</i>
<i>Mending by Master Keephimself</i>	<i>„ 197</i>
<i>His own visions growing into reality</i>	<i>„ 212</i>
<i>An old crone stooping over a kettle</i>	<i>„ 245</i>
<i>Isaac is a tall, lean, gloomy personage</i>	<i>„ 260</i>

*Most of the three-colour blocks used in this book have been made
by the Graphic Photo-Engraving Co., London*



FOREWORDS

MISS MITFORD, in one of her letters to Miss Barrett (afterwards Mrs Barrett Browning), says: "I have never been without pecuniary care, care that pressed upon my thoughts the last thing at night, to wake in the morning with a dreary sense of pain, a pressure of something that weighed me to the earth."

Such, indeed, was her life, made sordid and in part miserable through the diversions of a father, of whom it is difficult to speak with patience or find in his character one redeeming principle. A gambler who grasped and lost in play the fortunes of a wife and daughter in addition to his own, and when all was exhausted, lived upon and gambled with the earnings of his only child—even in dying leaving her only a heritage of debts to the amount of a thousand pounds, which she most nobly liquidated.

But out of all this sordidness and suffering there was born to her a beautiful, quiet heroism, full of a great cheerfulness; and there was given to her, in compensation, a perfect appreciation and delight in

nature's loveliness, and a great industry which hardly knew fatigue.

Mary Russell Mitford was born at Alresford, Hampshire, on the 16th December 1787. Her father had been educated for the medical profession, and had passed his degree at the Edinburgh University. Her mother, Mary Russell, was the daughter of Richard Russell, one of those richly beneficed clergymen who held two livings, Overton and Ash, both in Hampshire. She was born into comfortable circumstances, her mother having a considerable fortune, as, indeed, had her father; and throughout her early childhood this comfort prevailed, though her father was constantly diminishing the fortunes by his wasteful extravagance and wretched gambling habits. When he had exhausted the whole of their large fortunes—it is said, indeed, that during his life-time he threw away money to the extent of seventy thousand pounds—his daughter added to the family fortunes by winning a prize in a lottery worth twenty thousand pounds. She was attracted to the numbers by the fact that the figures of 2224 made, when added together, the number of her years. This came in time to save them from penury.

Mary was sent to a school kept by a Mrs St Quinton, which had something of a reputation, for several ladies, who afterwards reached literary fame—among them the well-known L. E. L.—had previously been educated there. She left this school, however,

in 1802, and went to live with her parents, and from that time forward supported them both by her earnings. She began to write poetry, and published her first volume in 1810; and, strange to say, these verses, which are very curious to look back upon, attained a second edition, and, we believe, were widely read in America. From poetry, she passed on to writing a drama, and soon it became necessary that she should use all the literary gifts she had in order to maintain her parents and keep the house together.

It was fortunate, indeed, that the necessity of finding money for her father to gamble with led Miss Mitford to turn her thoughts to what we would venture to say she was born for, viz, to the picturing of those charming scenes of country life so exquisitely drawn, so full of a bright cheerfulness, so redolent of fresh air, that have been our delight ever since they appeared. It is amusing to think that this work, which was of true genius, was rejected by Thomas Campbell for the *New Monthly Magazine* because he thought it was beneath the *dignity* of his pages. They were handed over to a little tiny magazine called the *Ladies' Magazine*, which had a circulation at that time of two hundred and fifty copies, but after the first story of "Our Village," it immediately rose to two thousand, and the delightful stories have been perennially printed ever since.

Miss Mitford was for many years an invalid, and one looks with the more disgust upon the character of the father, who could so recklessly live upon and gamble away the earnings of such a fragile creature. He, however, died in 1842, and the poor invalid lived on in peace, helped by a government pension of one hundred pounds a year and a public subscription (which was mainly used to pay her father's debts), until the year 1855, when the shock of a carriage accident accelerated the ravages of rheumatism, and she died on Jan. 10th.

Her genius, though of a very limited order, is so perfect in expression in these wonderful idylls of our English village life, so true in detail, as to remind one of the old Dutch painters in their perfection of light and shade and fulness of colour. They have not the intuitive sense of fine art which Mrs Gaskell's books contain, but they have in them a beauty entirely their own and absolutely unique in our literature. It is curious that Harriet Martineau looked upon her as the originator of that modern style which we call "graphic description," but Mrs Browning was far nearer the truth, it seems to us, when she describes her as the "Prose Crabbe in the sun."

The publishers have endeavoured to bring together all the pictures of actual village life contained in the five volumes of stories. They have chosen those first which revealed the author at her best and

that were more directly studies of nature and the village character. The greater number of these studies are real portraits, so that the volume presents nearly all that the author wrote of "our village."

Several selections of the stories have been illustrated, but the possibility to reproduce colour more accurately has tempted the publishers to make more vivid, scenes that are fast disappearing from our English life.



OUR VILLAGE

OF all situations for a constant residence, that which appears to me most delightful is a little village far in the country; a small neighbourhood, not of fine mansions finely peopled, but of cottages and cottage-like houses, "messuages or tenements," as a friend of mine calls such ignoble and non-descript dwellings, with inhabitants whose faces are as familiar to us as the flowers in our garden; a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated like ants in an ant-hill, or bees in a hive, or sheep in a fold, or nuns in a convent, or sailors in a ship; where we know every one, are known to every one, interested in every one, and authorised to hope that every one feels an interest in us. How pleasant it is to slide into these true-hearted feelings from the kindly and unconscious influence of habit, and to learn to know and to love the people about us, with all their peculiarities, just as we learn to know and to love the nooks and turns of the shady lanes and sunny commons that we pass every day.

Even in books I like a confined locality, and so do the critics when they talk of the unities. Nothing is so tiresome as to be whirled half over Europe at the chariot wheels of a hero, to go to sleep at Vienna, and awaken at Madrid; it produces a real fatigue, a weariness of spirit. On the other hand, nothing is so delightful as to sit down in a country village in one of Miss Austen's delicious novels, quite sure before we leave it to become intimate with every spot and every person it contains; or to ramble with Mr White¹ over his own parish of Selborne, and form a friendship with the fields and coppices, as well as with the birds, mice, and squirrels, who inhabit them; or to sail with Robinson Crusoe to his island, and live there with him and his goats and his man Friday—how much we dread any new-comers, any fresh importation of savage or sailor! we never sympathise for a moment in our hero's want of company, and are quite grieved when he gets away; or to be shipwrecked with Ferdinand on that other lovelier island—the island of Prospero, and Miranda, and Caliban, and Ariel, and nobody else, none of Dryden's exotic inventions—that is best of all. And a small neighbourhood is as good in sober waking reality as in poetry or prose; a village neighbourhood, such as this Berkshire hamlet in which I write, a long, straggling, winding street at the bottom of a fine eminence, with a road through it, always abounding in carts, horsemen, and carriages, and lately enlivened

¹ White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*; one of the most fascinating books ever written. I wonder that no naturalist has adopted the same plan.

by a stage-coach from B—— to S——, which passed through about ten days ago, and will, I suppose, return some time or other. There are coaches of all varieties nowadays; perhaps this may be intended for a monthly diligence, or a fortnight fly. Will you walk with me through our village, courteous reader? The journey is not long. We will begin at the lower end, and proceed up the hill.

The tidy, square, red cottage on the right hand, with the long well-stocked garden by the side of the road, belongs to a retired publican from a neighbouring town; a substantial person with a comely wife; one who piques himself on independence and idleness, talks politics, reads newspapers, hates the minister, and cries out for reform. He introduced into our peaceful vicinage the rebellious innovation of an illumination on the Queen's acquittal. Remonstrance and persuasion were in vain; he talked of liberty and broken windows—so we all lighted up. Oh! how he shone that night with candles, and laurel, and white bows, and gold paper, and a transparency (originally designed for a pocket-handkerchief) with a flaming portrait of her Majesty, hatted and feathered, in red ochre. He had no rival in the village, that we all acknowledged; the very bonfire was less splendid; the little boys reserved their best crackers to be expended in his honour, and he gave them full sixpence more than any one else. He would like an illumination once a month; for it must not be concealed that, in spite of gardening, of newspaper reading, of jaunting about in his little cart, and frequenting both church and meeting, our worthy neighbour begins to feel the weariness of idleness.

He hangs over his gate, and tries to entice passengers to stop and chat; he volunteers little jobs all round, smokes cherry trees to cure the blight, and traces and blows up all the wasps' nests in the parish. I have seen a great many wasps in our garden to-day, and shall enchant him with the intelligence. He even assists his wife in her sweepings and dustings. Poor man! he is a very respectable person, and would be a very happy one if he would add a little employment to his dignity. It would be the salt of life to him.

Next to his house, though parted from it by another long garden with a yew arbour at the end, is the pretty dwelling of the shoemaker, a pale, sickly-looking, black-haired man, the very model of sober industry. There he sits in his little shop from early morning till late at night. An earthquake would hardly stir him; the illumination did not. He stuck immovably to his last, from the first lighting up, through the long blaze and the slow decay, till his large, solitary candle was the only light in the place. One cannot conceive anything more perfect than the contempt which the man of transparencies and the man of shoes must have felt for each other on that evening. There was at least as much vanity in the sturdy industry as in the strenuous idleness, for our shoemaker is a man of substance—he employs three journeymen, two lame, and one a dwarf, so that his shop looks like an hospital; he has purchased the lease of his commodious dwelling, some even say that he has bought it out and out; and he has only one pretty daughter, a light, delicate, fair-haired girl of fourteen, the champion, protectress, and playfellow of every brat under three years old, whom she jumps, dances, dandles, and feeds all day long.

A very attractive person is that child-loving girl. I have never seen any one in her station who possessed so thoroughly that undefinable charm, the lady-look. See her on a Sunday in her simplicity and her white frock, and she might pass for an earl's daughter. She likes flowers, too, and has a profusion of white stocks under her window, as pure and delicate as herself.

The first house on the opposite side of the way is the blacksmith's; a gloomy dwelling, where the sun never seems to shine; dark and smoky within and without, like a forge. The blacksmith is a high officer in our little state, nothing less than a constable; but, alas! alas! when tumults arise, and the constable is called for, he will commonly be found in the thickest of the fray. Lucky would it be for his wife and her eight children if there were no public-house in the land; an inveterate inclination to enter those bewitching doors is Mr Constable's only fault.

Next to this official dwelling is a spruce brick tenement, red, high, and narrow, boasting, one above another, three sash-windows, the only sash-windows in the village, with a clematis on one side and a rose on the other, tall and narrow like itself. That slender mansion has a fine, genteel look. The little parlour seems made for Hogarth's old maid and her stunted footboy; for tea and card parties—it would just hold one table; for the rustle of faded silks, and the splendour of old china; for the delight of four by honours, and a little snug, quiet scandal between the deals; for affected gentility and real starvation. This should have been its destiny; but fate has been

unpropitious: it belongs to a plump, merry, bustling dame, with four fat, rosy, noisy children, the very essence of vulgarity and plenty.

Then comes the village shop, like other village shops, multifarious as a bazaar; a repository for bread, shoes, tea, cheese, tape, ribands, and bacon; for everything, in short, except the one particular thing which you happen to want at the moment, and will be sure not to find. The people are civil and thriving, and frugal withal; they have let the upper part of their house to two young women (one of them is a pretty, blue-eyed girl) who teach little children their A B C, and make caps and gowns for their mammas — parcel schoolmistress, parcel mantua-maker. I believe they find adorning the body a more profitable vocation than adorning the mind.

Divided from the shop by a narrow yard, and opposite the shoemaker's, is a habitation of whose inmates I shall say nothing. A cottage—no—a miniature house, with many additions, little odds and ends of places, pantries, and what not; all angles, and of a charming in-and-outness; a little bricked court before one half, and a little flower-yard before the other; the walls, old and weather-stained, covered with holyhocks, roses, honeysuckles, and a great apricot-tree; the casement full of geraniums (ah, there is our superb white cat peeping out from among them); the closets (our landlord has the assurance to call them rooms) full of contrivances and corner-cupboards; and the little garden behind full of common flowers, tulips, pinks, larkspurs, peonies, stocks, and carnations, with an arbour of privet, not unlike a sentry-box, where one lives in a

delicious green light, and looks out on the gayest of all gay flower-beds. That house was built on purpose to show in what an exceeding small compass comfort may be packed. Well, I will loiter there no longer.

The next tenement is a place of importance, the Rose Inn; a whitewashed building, retired from the road behind its fine swinging sign, with a little bow-window room coming out on one side, and forming, with our stable on the other, a sort of open square, which is the constant resort of carts, waggons, and return chaises. There are two carts there now, and mine host is serving them with beer in his eternal red waistcoat. He is a thriving man and a portly, as his waistcoat attests, which has been twice let out within this twelvemonth. Our landlord has a stirring wife, a hopeful son, and a daughter, the belle of the village; not so pretty as the fair nymph of the shoe-shop, and far less elegant, but ten times as fine; all curl-papers in the morning, like a porcupine, all curls in the afternoon, like a poodle, with more flounces than curl-papers, and more lovers than curls. Miss Phœbe is fitter for town than country; and to do her justice, she has a consciousness of that fitness, and turns her steps townwards as often as she can. She is gone to B—— to-day with her last and principal lover, a recruiting sergeant—a man as tall as Sergeant Kite, and as impudent. Some day or other he will carry off Miss Phœbe.

In a line with the bow-window room is a low garden-wall, belonging to a house under repair—the white house opposite the collar-maker's shop, with four lime-trees before it, and a waggon-load of

bricks at the door. That house is the plaything of a wealthy, well-meaning, whimsical person who lives about a mile off. He has a passion for brick and mortar, and, being too wise to meddle with his own residence, diverts himself with altering and re-altering, improving and re-improving, doing and undoing here. It is a perfect Penelope's web. Carpenters and bricklayers have been at work for these eighteen months, and yet I sometimes stand and wonder whether anything has really been done. One exploit in last June was, however, by no means equivocal. Our good neighbour fancied that the limes shaded the rooms, and made them dark (there was not a creature in the house but the workmen), so he had all the leaves stripped from every tree. There they stood, poor miserable skeletons, as bare as Christmas under the glowing midsummer sun. Nature revenged herself in her own sweet and gracious manner; fresh leaves sprang out, and at nearly Christmas the foliage was as brilliant as when the outrage was committed.

Next door lives a carpenter, "famed ten miles round, and worthy all his fame" — few cabinet-makers surpass him, with his excellent wife, and their little daughter Lizzy, the plaything and queen of the village, a child three years old according to the register, but six in size and strength and intellect, in power and in self-will. She manages everybody in the place, her schoolmistress included; turns the wheeler's children out of their own little cart, and makes them draw her; seduces cakes and lollypops from the very shop window; makes the lazy carry her, the silent talk to her, the grave romp with her; does anything she pleases; is absolutely irresistible.

Her chief attraction lies in her exceeding power of loving, and her firm reliance on the love and indulgence of others. How impossible it would be to disappoint the dear little girl when she runs to meet you, slides her pretty hand into yours, looks up gladly in your face and says, "Come!" You must go; you cannot help it. Another part of her charm is her singular beauty. Together with a good deal of the character of Napoleon, she has something of his square, sturdy, upright form, with the finest limbs in the world, a complexion purely English, a round, laughing face, sunburnt and rosy, large, merry, blue eyes, curling brown hair, and a wonderful play of countenance. She has the imperial attitudes, too, and loves to stand with her hands behind her, or folded over her bosom; and sometimes, when she has a little touch of shyness, she clasps them together on the top of her head, pressing down her shining curls, and looking so exquisitely pretty! Yes, Lizzy is queen of the village! She has but one rival in her dominions, a certain white greyhound called Mayflower, much her friend, who resembles her in beauty and strength, in playfulness, and almost in sagacity, and reigns over the animal world as she over the human. They are both coming with me, Lizzy and Lizzy's "pretty May." We are now at the end of the street; a cross lane, a rope-walk shaded with limes and oaks, and a cool, clear pond overhung with elms, lead us to the bottom of the hill. There is still one house round the corner, ending in a picturesque wheeler's shop. The dwelling-house is more ambitious. Look at the fine flowered window-blinds, the green door with the brass knocker, and

the somewhat prim but very civil person, who is sending off a labouring man with sirs and curtsies enough for a prince of the blood. Those are the curate's lodgings—apartments, his landlady would call them: he lives with his own family four miles off, but once or twice a week he comes to his neat little parlour to write sermons, to marry, or to bury, as the case may require. Never were better or kinder people than his host and hostess: and there is a reflection of clerical importance about them since their connection with the Church which is quite edifying—a decorum, a gravity, a solemn politeness. Oh, to see the worthy wheeler carry the gown after his lodger on a Sunday, nicely pinned up in his wife's best handkerchief!—or to hear him rebuke a squalling child or a squabbling woman! The curate is nothing to him. He is fit to be perpetual churchwarden.

We must now cross the lane into the shady ropewalk. That pretty white cottage opposite, which stands straggling at the end of the village in a garden full of flowers, belongs to our mason, the shortest of men, and his handsome, tall wife: he, a dwarf, with the voice of a giant; one starts when he begins to talk, as if he were shouting through a speaking-trumpet; she, the sister, daughter, and grand-daughter of a long line of gardeners, and no contemptible one herself. It is very magnanimous in me not to hate her; for she beats me in my own way, in chrysanthemums, and dahlias, and the like gauds. Her plants are sure to live; mine have a sad trick of dying, perhaps because I love them “not wisely, but too well,” and kill them with over-kindness. Half-way up the hill is another

detached cottage, the residence of an officer and his beautiful family. That eldest boy, who is hanging over the gate, and looking with such intense childish admiration at my Lizzy, might be a model for a Cupid.

How pleasantly the road winds up the hill, with its broad, green borders and hedgerows so thickly timbered! How finely the evening sun falls on that sandy excavated bank, and touches the farmhouse on the top of the eminence! and how clearly defined and relieved is the figure of the man who is just coming down! It is poor John Evans, the gardener—an excellent gardener till about ten years ago, when he lost his wife, and became insane. He was sent to St. Luke's, and dismissed as cured; but his power was gone and his strength; he could no longer manage a garden, nor submit to the restraint, nor encounter the fatigue of regular employment: so he retreated to the workhouse, the pensioner and factotum of the village, amongst whom he divided his services. His mind often wanders, intent on some fantastic and impracticable plan, and lost to present objects: but he is perfectly harmless, and full of a child-like simplicity, a smiling contentedness, a most touching gratitude. Every one is kind to John Evans, for there is that about him which must be loved; and his unprotectedness, his utter defencelessness, have an irresistible claim on every better feeling. I know nobody who inspires so deep and tender a pity; he improves all around him. He is useful, too, to the extent of his little power; will do anything, but loves gardening best, and still piques himself on his old arts of pruning fruit-trees and raising cucumbers.

He is the happiest of men just now, for he has the management of a melon bed—a melon bed!—fie! What a grand, pompous name was that for three melon plants under a hand-light! John Evans is sure that they will succeed. We shall see; as the chancellor said, “I doubt.”

We are now on the very brow of the eminence, close to the Hill-house and its beautiful garden. On the outer edge of the paling, hanging over the bank that skirts the road, is an old thorn—such a thorn! The long sprays covered with snowy blossoms, so graceful, so elegant, so lightsome, and yet so rich! There only wants a pool under the thorn to give a still lovelier reflection, quivering and trembling, like a tuft of feathers, whiter and greener than the life, and more prettily mixed with the bright blue sky. There should, indeed, be a pool; but on the dark grass-plot, under the high bank, which is crowned by that magnificent plume, there is something that does almost as well—Lizzy and Mayflower in the midst of a game at romps, “making a sunshine in the shady place”; Lizzy rolling, laughing, clapping her hands, and glowing like a rose; Mayflower playing about her like summer lightning, dazzling the eyes with her sudden turns, her leaps, her bounds, her attacks, and her escapes. She darts round the lovely little girl, with the same momentary touch that the swallow skims over the water, and has exactly the same power of flight, the same matchless ease, and strength, and grace. What a pretty picture they would make; what a pretty foreground they do make to the real landscape! The road winding down the hill with a slight bend, like that in the High

Street at Oxford; a waggon slowly ascending, and a horseman passing it at a full trot (ah! Lizzy, Mayflower will certainly desert you to have a gambol with that blood-horse!)—half-way down, just at the turn, the red cottage of the lieutenant, covered with vines, the very image of comfort and content; farther down, on the opposite side, the small, white dwelling of the little mason: then the limes and the rope-walk; then the village street, peeping through the trees, whose clustering tops hide all but the chimneys, and various roofs of the houses, and here and there some angle of a wall: farther on, the elegant town of B——, with its fine old church-towers and spires; the whole view shut in by a range of chalky hills; and over every part of the picture, trees so profusely scattered, that it appears like a woodland scene, with glades and villages intermixed. The trees are of all kinds and all hues, chiefly the finely shaped elm, of so bright and deep a green, the tips of whose high outer branches drop down with such a crisp and garland-like richness, and the oak, whose stately form is just now so splendidly adorned by the sunny colouring of the young leaves. Turning again up the hill, we find ourselves on that peculiar charm of English scenery, a green common divided by the road; the right side fringed by hedge-rows and trees, with cottages and farm-houses irregularly placed, and terminated by a double avenue of noble oaks; the left prettier still, dappled by bright pools of water, and islands of cottages and cottage-gardens, and sinking gradually down to corn-fields and meadows, and an old farm-house, with pointed roofs and clustered chimneys, looking out from its

blooming orchard, and backed by woody hills. The common is itself the prettiest spot of the prospect: half covered with low furze, whose golden blossoms reflect so intensely the last beams of the setting sun, and alive with cows and sheep, and two sets of cricketers; one of young men, surrounded by spectators, some standing, some sitting, some stretched on the grass, all taking a delighted interest in the game; the other, a merry group of little boys, at a humble distance, for whom even cricket is scarcely lively enough, shouting, leaping, and enjoying themselves to their hearts' content. But cricketers and country boys are too important persons in our village to be talked of merely as figures in the landscape. They deserve an individual introduction—an essay to themselves—and they shall have it. No fear of forgetting the good-humoured faces that meet us in our walks every day.

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY



FROST AND THAW

JANUARY 23RD.—At noon to-day I and my white greyhound, Mayflower, set out for a walk into a very beautiful world—a sort of silent fairy-land—a creation of that matchless magician, the hoar-frost. There had been just snow enough to cover the earth and all its covers with one sheet of pure and uniform white, and just time enough since the snow had fallen to allow the hedges to be freed of their fleecy load, and clothed with a delicate coating of rime. The atmosphere was deliciously calm; soft, even mild, in spite of the thermometer; no perceptible air, but a stillness that might almost be felt, the sky, rather grey than blue, throwing out in bold relief the snow-covered roofs of our village, and the rimy trees that rise above them, and the sun shining dimly as through a veil, giving a pale, fair light, like the moon, only brighter. There was a silence, too, that might become the moon, as we stood at our little gate looking up the quiet street; a Sabbath-like pause of work and play, rare on a work-day; nothing was audible but the pleasant hum of frost, that low, monotonous sound, which is perhaps the nearest approach that life and nature can make to absolute silence. The very waggons as they come

down the hill along the beaten track of crisp, yellowish frost-dust, glide along like shadows; even May's bounding footsteps, at her height of glee and of speed, fall like snow upon snow.

But we shall have noise enough presently: May has stopped at Lizzy's door; and Lizzy, as she sat on the window-sill with her bright, rosy face laughing through the casement, has seen her and disappeared. She is coming. No! The key is turning in the door, and sounds of evil omen issue through the key-hole—sturdy “Let me outs,” and “I will goes,” mixed with shrill cries on May and on me from Lizzy, piercing through a low continuous harangue, of which the prominent parts are apologies, chilblains, sliding, broken bones, lollypops, rods, and gingerbread, from Lizzy's careful mother. “Don't scratch the door, May! Don't roar so, my Lizzy! We'll call for you as we come back.”—“I'll go now! Let me out! I will go!” are the last words of Miss Lizzy. Mem.—Not to spoil that child—if I can help it. But I do think her mother might have let the poor little soul walk with us to-day. Nothing worse for children than coddling. Nothing better for chilblains than exercise. Besides, I don't believe she has any—and as to breaking her bones in sliding, I don't suppose there's a slide on the common. These murmuring cogitations have brought us up the hill, and half-way across the light and airy common, with its bright expanse of snow and its clusters of cottages, whose turf fires send such wreaths of smoke sailing up the air, and diffuse such aromatic fragrance around. And now comes the delightful sound of childish voices, ringing with glee

and merriment almost from beneath our feet. Ah, Lizzy, your mother was right! They are shouting from that deep, irregular pool, all glass now, where, on two long, smooth, liny slides, half-a-dozen ragged urchins are slipping along in tottering triumph. Half-a-dozen steps bring us to the bank right above them. May can hardly resist the temptation of joining her friends, for most of the varlets are of her acquaintance, especially the rogue who leads the slide—he with the brimless hat, whose bronzed complexion and white flaxen hair, reversing the usual lights and shadows of the human countenance, give so strange and foreign look to his flat and comic features. This hobgoblin, Jack Rapley by name, is May's great crony; and she stands on the brink of the steep irregular descent, her black eyes fixed full upon him, as if she intended him the favour of jumping on his head. She does: she is down, and upon him: but Jack Rapley is not easily to be knocked off his feet. He saw her coming, and in the moment of her leap sprung dexterously off the slide on the rough ice, steadying himself by the shoulder of the next in file, which unlucky follower, thus unexpectedly checked in his career, fell plump backwards, knocking down the rest of the line like a nest of card-houses. There is no harm done; but there they lie, roaring, kicking, sprawling, in every attitude of comic distress, whilst Jack Rapley and Mayflower, sole authors of this calamity, stand apart from the throng, fondling, and coquetting, and complimenting each other, and very visibly laughing, May in her black eyes, Jack in his wide, close-shut mouth,

and his whole monkey-face, at their comrades' mischances. I think, Miss May, you may as well come up again, and leave Master Rapley to fight your battles. He'll get out of the scrape. He is a rustic wit—a sort of Robin Goodfellow—the sauciest, idlest, cleverest, best-natured boy in the parish; always foremost in mischief, and always ready to do a good turn. The sages of our village predict sad things of Jack Rapley, so that I am sometimes a little ashamed to confess, before wise people, that I have a lurking predilection for him (in common with other naughty ones), and that I like to hear him talk to May almost as well as she does. “Come, May!” and up she springs, as light as a bird. The road is gay now; carts and post-chaises, and girls in red cloaks, and, afar off, looking almost like a toy, the coach. It meets us fast and soon. How much happier the walkers look than the riders—especially the frost-bitten gentleman, and the shivering lady with the invisible face, sole passengers of that commodious machine! Hooded, veiled, and bonneted, as she is, one sees from her attitude how miserable she would look uncovered.

Another pond, and another noise of children. More sliding? Oh, no! This is a sort of higher pretension. Our good neighbour, the lieutenant, skating, and his own pretty little boys, and two or three other four-year-old elves, standing on the brink in an ecstasy of joy and wonder! O what happy spectators! And what a happy performer! They admiring, he admired, with an ardour and sincerity never excited by all the quadrilles and the spread-eagles of the Seine and the Serpentine. He really skates well, though, and I am glad I



*I and my white greyhound
set out for a walk.*

came this way; for, with all the father's feelings sitting gaily at his heart, it must still gratify the pride of skill to have one spectator at that solitary pond who has seen skating before.

Now we have reached the trees—the beautiful trees! never so beautiful as to-day. Imagine the effect of a straight and regular double avenue of oaks, nearly a mile long, arching over-head, and closing into perspective like the roof and columns of a cathedral, every tree and branch encrusted with the bright and delicate congelation of hoar-frost, white and pure as snow, delicate and defined as carved ivory. How beautiful it is, how uniform, how various, how filling, how satiating to the eye and to the mind—above all, how melancholy! There is a thrilling awfulness, an intense feeling of simple power in that naked and colourless beauty which falls on the earth, like the thoughts of death—death pure, and glorious, and smiling—but still death. Sculpture has always the same effect on my imagination, and painting never. Colour is life.—We are now at the end of this magnificent avenue, and at the top of a steep eminence commanding a wide view over four counties—a landscape of snow. A deep lane leads abruptly down the hill; a mere narrow cart-track, sinking between high banks clothed with fern and furze and low broom, crowned with luxuriant hedges, and famous for their summer smell of thyme. How lovely these banks are now—the tall weeds and the gorse fixed and stiffened in the hoar-frost, which fringes round the bright, prickly holly, the pendent foliage of the bramble, and the deep orange leaves of the pollard oaks! Oh, this is rime in its

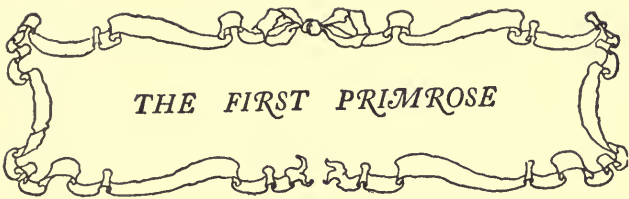
loveliest form! And there is still a berry here and there on the holly, "blushing in its natural coral," through the delicate tracery, still a stray hip or haw for the birds, who abound here always. The poor birds, how tame they are, how sadly tame! There is the beautiful and rare crested wren, "that shadow of a bird," as White of Selborne calls it, perched in the middle of the hedge, nestling, as it were, amongst the cold, bare boughs, seeking, poor, pretty thing, for the warmth it will not find. And there, farther on, just under the bank, by the slender runlet, which still trickles between its transparent fantastic margin of thin ice, as if it were a thing of life—there, with a swift, scudding motion, flits, in short, low flights, the gorgeous kingfisher, its magnificent plumage of scarlet and blue flashing in the sun, like the glories of some tropical bird. He is come for water to this little spring by the hillside—water which even his long bill and slender head can hardly reach, so nearly do the fantastic forms of those garland-like icy margins meet over the tiny stream beneath. It is rarely that one sees the shy beauty so close or so long; and it is pleasant to see him in the grace and beauty of his natural liberty, the only way to look at a bird. We used, before we lived in a street, to fix a little board outside the parlour window, and cover it with bread crumbs in the hard weather. It was quite delightful to see the pretty things come and feed, to conquer their shyness, and do away with their mistrust. First came the more social tribes, "the robin red-breast and the Wren," cautiously, suspiciously, picking up a crumb on the wing, with the little, keen, bright eye fixed on the window; then

they would stop for two pecks; then stay till they were satisfied. The shy birds, tamed by their example, came next; and at last, one saucy fellow of a blackbird—a sad glutton, he would clear the board in two minutes—used to tap his yellow bill against the window for more. How we loved the fearless confidence of that fine, frank-hearted creature! And surely he loved us. I wonder the practice is not more general. “May! May! naughty May!” She has frightened away the kingfisher; and now in her coaxing penitence she is covering me with snow. “Come, pretty May! it is time to go home.”

THAW

JANUARY 28TH.—We have had rain, and snow, and frost, and rain again; four days of absolute confinement. Now it is a thaw and a flood; but our light, gravelly soil, and country boots, and country hardihood, will carry us through. What a dripping, comfortless day it is! just like the last days of November: no sun, no sky, grey or blue; one low, overhanging, dark, dismal cloud, like London smoke: Mayflower is out coursing too, and Lizzy is gone to school. Never mind. Up the hill again! Walk we must. Oh, what a watery world to look back upon! Thames, Kennet, London—all overflowed; our famous town, inland once, turned into a sort of Venice; C. park converted into an island; and the long range of meadows from B. to W. one huge, unnatural lake, with trees growing out of it. Oh, what a watery world!—I will look at it no longer. I will walk on. The road is alive again. Noise is

re-born. Waggon creak, horses splash, carts rattle, and pattens paddle through the dirt with more than their usual clink. The common has its old, fine tints of green and brown, and its old variety of inhabitants, horses, cows, sheep, pigs, and donkeys. The ponds are unfrozen, and cackling geese and gabbling ducks have replaced the lieutenant and Jack Rapley. The avenue is chill and dark, the hedges are dripping, the lanes knee-deep, and all nature is in a state of "dissolution and thaw."



THE FIRST PRIMROSE

MARCH 6TH.—Fine March weather : boisterous, blustering, much wind and squalls of rain ; and yet the sky, where the clouds are swept away, deliciously blue, with snatches of sunshine, bright, and clear, and healthful, and the roads in spite of the slight, glittering showers, crisply dry. Altogether, the day is tempting, very tempting. It will not do for the dear common, that windmill of a walk ; but the close, sheltered lanes at the bottom of the hill, which keep out just enough of the stormy air, and let in all the sun, will be delightful. Past our old house, and round by the winding lanes, and the workhouse, and across the lea, and so into the turnpike road again—that is our route for to-day. Forth we set, Mayflower and I, rejoicing in the sunshine, and still more in the wind, which gives such an intense feeling of existence, and, co-operating with brisk motion, sets our blood and our spirits in a glow. For mere physical pleasure there is nothing, perhaps, equal to the enjoyment of being drawn in a light carriage against such a wind as this, by a blood-horse at his height of speed. Walking comes next to it ; but walking is not quite so luxurious or so spiritual ; not quite so much what one fancies

of flying or being carried above the clouds in a balloon.

Nevertheless, a walk is a good thing; especially under this southern hedgerow, where nature is just beginning to live again; the periwinkles, with their starry blue flowers, and their shining, myrtle-like leaves, garlanding the bushes; woodbines and elder-trees pushing out their small, swelling buds; and grasses and mosses springing forth in every variety of brown and green. Here we are at the corner where four lanes meet, or rather where a passable road of stones and gravel crosses an impassable one of beautiful but treacherous turf, and where the small, white farm-house, scarcely larger than a cottage, and the well-stocked rick-yard behind, tell of comfort and order, but leave all unguessed the great riches of the master. How he became so rich is almost a puzzle; for, though the farm be his own, it is not large; and though prudent and frugal on ordinary occasions, Farmer Barnard is no miser. His horses, dogs, and pigs are the best kept in the parish—May herself, although her beauty be injured by her fatness, half envies the plight of his bitch Fly; his wife's gowns and shawls cost as much again as any shawls or gowns in the village; his dinner parties (to be sure they are not frequent) display twice the ordinary quantity of good things—two couples of ducks, two dishes of green peas, two turkey poults, two gammons of bacon, two plum-puddings; moreover, he keeps a single-horse chaise, and has built and endowed a Methodist chapel. Yet is he the richest man in these parts. Everything prospers with him. Money drifts about him like snow. He looks like a rich man.

There is a sturdy squareness of face and figure ; a good-humoured obstinacy ; a civil importance. He never boasts of his wealth, or gives himself undue airs ; but nobody can meet him at market or vestry without finding out immediately that he is the richest man there. They have no child to all this money ; but there is an adopted nephew, a fine, spirited lad, who may, perhaps, some day or other, play the part of a fountain to the reservoir.

Now turn up the wide road till we come to the open common, with its park-like trees, its beautiful stream, wandering and twisting along, and its rural bridge. Here we turn again, past that other white farm-house, half hidden by the magnificent elms which stand before it. Ah ! riches dwell not there, but there is found the next best thing—an industrious and light-hearted poverty. Twenty years ago Rachel Hilton was the prettiest and merriest lass in the country. Her father, an old gamekeeper, had retired to a village ale-house, where his good beer, his social humour, and his black-eyed daughter, brought much custom. She had lovers by the score ; but Joseph White, the dashing and lively son of an opulent farmer, carried off the fair Rachel. They married and settled here, and here they live still, as merrily as ever, with fourteen children of all ages and sizes, from nineteen years to nineteen months, working harder than any people in the parish, and enjoying themselves more. I would match them for labour and laughter against any family in England. She is a blithe, jolly dame, whose beauty has amplified into comeliness ; he is tall, and thin, and bony, with sinews like whip-cord, a strong, lively voice, a sharp,

weather-beaten face, and eyes and lips that smile and brighten, when he speaks, into a most contagious hilarity. They are very poor, and I often wish them richer ; but I don't know—perhaps it might put them out.

Quite close to farmer White's is a little ruinous cottage, whitewashed once, and now in a sad state of betweenity, where dangling stockings and shirts, swelled by the wind, drying in a neglected garden, give signal of a washerwoman. There dwells at present in single blessedness, Betty Adams, the wife of our sometimes gardener. I never saw any one who so much reminded me in person of that lady whom everybody knows, Mistress Meg Merrilies—as tall, as grizzled, as stately, as dark, as gipsy-looking, bonneted and gowned like her prototype, and almost as oracular. Here the resemblance ceases. Mrs Adams is a perfectly honest, industrious, pains-taking person who earns a good deal of money by washing and charing, and spends it in other luxuries than tidiness—in green tea, and gin, and snuff. Her husband lives in a great family, ten miles off. He is a capital gardener—or rather he would be so, if he were not too ambitious. He undertakes all things, and finishes none. But a smooth tongue, a knowing look, and a great capacity of labour, carry him through. Let him but like his ale and his master, and he will do work enough for four. Give him his own way, and his full quantum, and nothing comes amiss to him.

Ah, May is bounding forward ! Her silly heart leaps at the sight of the old place—and so in good truth does mine. What a pretty place it was—or

rather, how pretty I thought it! I suppose I should have thought any place so where I had spent eighteen happy years. But it was really pretty. A large, heavy, white house, in the simplest style, surrounded by fine oaks and elms, and tall, massy plantations shaded down into a beautiful lawn by wild overgrown shrubs, bowery acacias, ragged sweet-briers, promontories of dogwood, and Portugal laurel, and bays overhung by laburnum and bird-cherry; a long piece of water letting light into the picture, and looking just like a natural stream, the banks as rude and wild as the shrubbery, interspersed with broom, and furze, and bramble, and pollard oaks covered with ivy and honeysuckle; the whole enclosed by an old mossy park paling, and terminating in a series of rich meadows, richly planted. This is an exact description of the home which, three years ago, it nearly broke my heart to leave. What a tearing up by the root it was; I have pitied cabbage-plants and celery, and all transplantable things, ever since; though, in common with them, and with other vegetables, the first agony of the transportation being over, I have taken such firm and tenacious hold of my new soil, that I would not for the world be pulled up again, even to be restored to the old beloved ground—not even if its beauty were undiminished, which is by no means the case; for in those three years it has thrice changed masters, and every successive possessor has brought the curse of improvement upon the place; so that between filling up the water to cure dampness, cutting down trees to let in prospects, planting to keep them out, shutting up windows to darken the inside of the house (by

which means one end looks precisely as an eight of spades would do that should have the misfortune to lose one of his corner pips), and building colonnades to lighten the out, added to a general clearance of pollards, and brambles, and ivy, and honeysuckles, and park palings, and irregular shrubs, the poor place is so transmogrified, that if it had its old looking-glass, the water, back again, it would not know its own face. And yet I love to haunt round about it: so does May. Her particular attraction is a certain broken bank full of rabbit burrows, into which she insinuates her long, pliant head and neck, and tears her pretty feet by vain scratchings; mine is a warm, sunny hedgerow, in the same remote field, famous for early flowers. Never was a spot more variously flowery; primroses yellow, lilac white, violets of either hue, cowslips, oxslips, arums, orchises, wild hyacinths, ground ivy, pansies, strawberries, heart's-ease, formed a small part of the Flora of that wild hedgerow. How profusely they covered the sunny open slope under the weeping birch, "the lady of the woods"—and how often have I started to see the early innocent brown snake, who loved the spot as well as I did, winding along the young blossoms, or rustling among the fallen leaves! There are primrose leaves already, and short, green buds, but no flowers; not even in that furze cradle so full of roots, where they used to blow as in a basket. No, my May, no rabbits! no primroses! We may as well get over the gate into the woody winding lane, which will bring us home again.

Here we are making the best of our way between the old elms that arch so solemnly overhead,

dark and sheltered even now. They say that a spirit haunts this deep pool—a white lady without a head. I cannot say that I have seen her, often as I have paced this lane at deep midnight, to hear the nightingales, and look at the glowworms—but there, better and rarer than a thousand ghosts, dearer even than nightingales or glowworms, there is a primrose, the first of the year; a tuft of primroses, springing in yonder sheltered nook, from the mossy roots of an old willow, and living again in the clear, bright pool. Oh, how beautiful they are — three fully blown, and two bursting buds! How glad I am I came this way! They are not to be reached. Even Jack Rapley's love of the difficult and unattainable would fail him here: May herself could not stand on that steep bank. So much the better. Who could wish to disturb them? There they live in their innocent and fragrant beauty, sheltered from the storms, and rejoicing in the sunshine, and looking as if they could feel their happiness. Who would disturb them? Oh, how glad I am I came this way home!



MARCH 27TH.—It is a dull, grey morning, with a dewy feeling in the air; fresh, but not windy; cool, but not cold; the very day for a person newly arrived from the heat, the glare, the noise, and the fever of London, to plunge into the remotest labyrinths of the country, and regain the repose of mind, the calmness of heart, which has been lost in that great Babel. I must go violeting—it is a necessity—and I must go alone; the sound of a voice, even my Lizzy's, the touch of Mayflower's head, even the bounding of her elastic foot, would disturb the serenity of feeling which I am trying to recover. I shall go quite alone, with my little basket, twisted like a beehive, which I love so well, because *she* gave it to me, and kept sacred to violets and to those whom I love; and I shall get out of the highroad the moment I can. I would not meet any one just now, even of those whom I best like to meet.

Ha!—Is not that group—a gentleman on a blood-horse, a lady keeping pace with him so gracefully and easily—see how prettily her veil waves in the wind created by her own rapid motion!—and that gay, gallant boy, on the gallant white Arabian, curveting at their side, but ready to spring before

them every instant—is not that chivalrous-looking party Mr and Mrs M., and dear B.? No! the servant is in a different livery. It is some of the ducal family, and one of their young Etonians. I may go on. I shall meet no one now; for I have fairly left the road, and am crossing the lea by one of those wandering paths, amidst the gorse, and the heath, and the low broom, which the sheep and lambs have made—a path turfy, elastic, thymy and sweet, even at this season.

We have the good fortune to live in an unenclosed parish, and may thank the wise obstinacy of two or three sturdy farmers, and the lucky unpopularity of a ranting madcap lord of the manor, for preserving the delicious green patches, the islets of wilderness amidst cultivation, which form, perhaps, the peculiar beauty of English scenery. The common that I am passing now—the lea, as it is called—is one of the loveliest of these favoured spots. It is a little sheltered scene, retiring, as it were, from the village; sunk amidst higher lands—hills would be almost too grand a word: edged on one side by one gay high-road, and intersected by another; and surrounded by a most picturesque confusion of meadows, cottages, farms, and orchards; with a great pond in one corner, usually bright and clear, giving a delightful cheerfulness and daylight to the picture. The swallows haunt that pond; so do the children. There is a merry group round it now; I have seldom seen it without one. Children love water; clear, bright, sparkling water; it excites and feeds their curiosity; it is motion and life.

The path that I am treading leads to a less lively

spot, to that large, heavy building on one side of the common, whose solid wings, jutting out far beyond the main body, occupy three sides of a square, and give a cold, shadowy look to the court. On one side is a gloomy garden, with an old man digging in it, laid out in straight dark beds of vegetables, potatoes, cabbages, onions, beans; all earthy and mouldy as a newly-dug grave. Not a flower or flowering shrub! Not a rose-tree or currant-bush! Nothing but for sober, melancholy use. Oh, different from the long irregular slips of the cottage-gardens, with their gay bunches of polyanthus and crocuses, their wall-flowers sending sweet odours through the narrow casement, and their gooseberry trees bursting into a brilliancy of leaf, whose vivid greenness has the effect of a blossom on the eye! Oh, how different! On the other side of this gloomy abode is a meadow of that deep, intense emerald hue, which denotes the presence of stagnant water, surrounded by willows at regular distances, and like the garden, separated from the common by a wide, moat-like ditch. That is the parish workhouse. All about it is solid, substantial, useful; but so dreary! so cold! so dark! There are children in the court, and yet all is silent. I always hurry past the place as if it were a prison. Restraint, sickness, age, extreme poverty, misery, which I have no power to remove or alleviate—these are the ideas, the feelings, which the sight of those walls excites; yet, perhaps, if not certainly, they contain less of that extreme desolation than the morbid fancy is apt to paint. There will be found order, cleanliness, food, clothing, warmth, refuge for the homeless, medicine and attendance for the sick,

rest and sufficiency for old age, and sympathy—the true and active sympathy which the poor show to the poor—for the unhappy. There may be worse places than a parish workhouse—and yet I hurry past it. The feeling, the prejudice, will not be controlled.

The end of the dreary garden edges off into a close-sheltered lane, wandering and winding, like a rivulet, in gentle “sinuosities” (to use a word once applied by Mr Wilberforce to the Thames at Henley), amidst green meadows, all alive with cattle, sheep, and beautiful lambs, in the very spring and pride of their tottering prettiness; or fields of arable land, more lively still with troops of stooping bean-setters, women and children, in all varieties of costume and colour; and ploughs and harrows, with their whistling boys and steady carters, going through, with a slow and plodding industry, the main business of this busy season. What work bean-setting is! What a reverse of the position assigned to man to distinguish him from the beasts of the field! Only think of stooping for six, eight, ten hours a day, drilling holes in the earth with a little stick, and then dropping in the beans one by one. They are paid according to the quantity they plant: and some of the poor women used to be accused of clumping them—that is to say, of dropping more than one bean into a hole. It seems to me, considering the temptation, that not to clump is to be at the very pinnacle of human virtue.

Another turn in the lane, and we come to the old house standing amongst the high elms—the old farm-house, which always, I don't know why, carries back my imagination to Shakespeare's days. It is a

long, low, irregular building, with one room, at an angle from the house, covered with ivy, fine white-veined ivy; the first floor of the main building projecting and supported by oaken beams, and one of the windows below, with its old casement and long narrow panes, forming the half of a shallow hexagon. A porch, with seats in it, surmounted by a pinnacle, pointed roofs, and clustered chimneys, complete the picture! Alas! it is little else but a picture! The very walls are crumbling to decay under a careless landlord and ruined tenant.

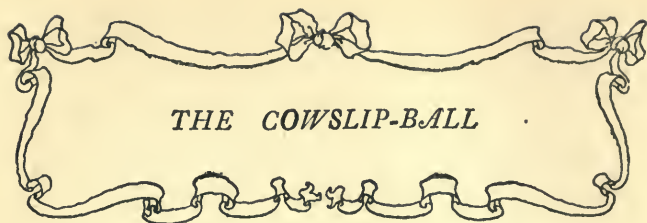
Now a few yards farther, and I reach the bank. Ah! I smell them already—their exquisite perfume steams and lingers in this moist, heavy air. Through this little gate, and along the green south bank of this green wheat-field, and they burst upon me, the lovely violets, in tenfold loveliness. The ground is covered with them, white and purple, enamelling the short, dewy grass, looking but the more vividly coloured under the dull, leaden sky. There they lie by hundreds, by thousands. In former years I have been used to watch them from the tiny green bud, till one or two stole into bloom. They never came on me before in such a sudden and luxuriant glory of simple beauty—and I do really owe one pure and genuine pleasure to feverish London! How beautifully they are placed, too, on this sloping bank, with the palm branches waving over them, full of early bees, and mixing their honeyed scent with the more delicate violet odour! How transparent and smooth and lusty are the branches, full of sap and life! And there, just by the old mossy root, is a superb tuft



GEORGE
1874

*Nothing but for sober,
melancholy use.*

of primroses, with a yellow butterfly hovering over them, like a flower floating on the air. What happiness to sit on this tufty knoll, and fill my basket with the blossoms! What a renewal of heart and mind! To inhabit such a scene of peace and sweetness is again to be fearless, gay, and gentle as a child. Then it is that thought becomes poetry, and feeling religion. Then it is that we are happy and good. Oh, that my whole life could pass so, floating on blissful and innocent sensation, enjoying in peace and gratitude the common blessings of Nature, thankful above all for the simple habits, the healthful temperament, which render them so dear! Alas! who may dare expect a life of such happiness? But I can at least snatch and prolong the fleeting pleasure, can fill my basket with pure flowers, and my heart with pure thoughts; can gladden my little home with their sweetness; can divide my treasures with one, a dear one, who cannot seek them; can see them when I shut my eyes; and dream of them when I fall asleep.



THE COWSLIP-BALL

MAY 16TH.—There are moments in life when, without any visible or immediate cause, the spirits sink and fail, as it were, under the mere pressure of existence; moments of unaccountable depression, when one is weary of one's very thoughts, haunted by images that will not depart—images many and various, but all painful; friends lost, or changed, or dead; hopes disappointed even in their accomplishment; fruitless regrets, powerless wishes, doubt and fear, and self-distrust and self-disapprobation. They who have known these feelings (and who is there so happy as not to have known some of them?) will understand why Alfieri became powerless and Froissart dull; and why even needlework, the most effectual sedative, that grand soother and composer of woman's distress, fails to comfort me to-day. I will go out into the air this cool pleasant afternoon, and try what that will do. I fancy that exercise, or exertion of any kind, is the true specific for nervousness. "Fling but a stone, the giant dies." I will go to the meadows, the beautiful meadows! and I will have my materials of happiness, Lizzy and May, and a basket for flowers, and we will make a cowslip-ball. "Did you ever see a cowslip-ball, my

Lizzy?" "No." "Come away, then; make haste! run, Lizzy!"

And on we go, fast, fast! down the road, across the lea, past the workhouse, along by the great pond, till we slide into the deep, narrow lane, whose hedges seem to meet over the water, and win our way to the little farm-house at the end. "Through the farm-yard, Lizzy; over the gate; never mind the cows; they are quiet enough."—"I don't mind 'em," said Miss Lizzy, boldly and truly, and with a proud, affronted air, displeased at being thought to mind anything, and showing by her attitude and manner some design of proving her courage by an attack on the largest of the herd, in the shape of a pull by the tail. "I don't mind 'em."—"I know you don't, Lizzy; but let them alone, and don't chase the turkey-cock. Come to me, my dear!" and, for a wonder, Lizzy came.

In the meantime, my other pet, Mayflower, had also gotten into a scrape. She had driven about a huge, unwieldy sow, till the animal's grunting had disturbed the repose of a still more enormous Newfoundland dog, the guardian of the yard. Out he sallied, growling, from the depth of his kennel, erecting his tail, and shaking his long chain. May's attention was instantly diverted from the sow to this new playmate, friend or foe, she cared not which; and he of the kennel, seeing his charge unhurt, and out of danger, was at leisure to observe the charms of his fair enemy, as she frolicked around him, always beyond the reach of his chain, yet always, with the natural instinctive coquetry of her sex, alluring him to the pursuit which she knew to be vain. I never

saw a prettier flirtation. At last the noble animal, wearied out, retired to the inmost recesses of his habitation, and would not even approach her when she stood right before the entrance. "You are properly served, May. Come along, Lizzy. Across this wheat-field, and now over the gate. Stop! let me lift you down. No jumping, no breaking of necks, Lizzy!" And here we are in the meadows, and out of the world. Robinson Crusoe in his lonely island had scarcely a more complete or a more beautiful solitude.

These meadows consist of a double row of small enclosures of rich grass-land, a mile or two in length, sloping down from high arable grounds on either side, to a little nameless brook that winds between them with a course which, in its infinite variety, clearness, and rapidity, seems to emulate the bold rivers of the north, of whom, far more than of our lazy southern streams, our rivulet presents a miniature likeness. Never was water more exquisitely tricky—now darting over the bright pebbles, sparkling and flashing in the light with a bubbling music, as sweet and wild as the song of the woodlark; now stretching quietly along, giving back the rich tufts of the golden marsh-marigolds which grow on its margin; now sweeping round a fine reach of green grass, rising steeply into a high mount, a mimic promontory, whilst the other side sinks softly away, like some tiny bay, and the water flows between, so clear, so wide, so shallow, that Lizzy, longing for adventure, is sure she could cross unwetted; now dashing through two sand-banks, a torrent deep and narrow, which May clears at a bound; now sleeping, half hidden, beneath the

alders, hawthorns, and wild roses, with which the banks are so profusely and variously fringed, whilst flags,¹ lilies, and other aquatic plants, almost cover the surface of the stream. In good truth, it is a beautiful brook, and one that Walton himself might have sitted by and loved, for trout are there; we see them as they dart up the stream, and hear and start at the sudden plunge when they spring to the surface for the summer flies. Izaak Walton would have loved our brook and our quiet meadows; they breathe the very spirit of his own peacefulness, a soothing quietude that sinks into the soul. There is no path through them, not one; we might wander a whole spring day and not see a trace of human habitation. They belong to a number of small proprietors, who allow each other access through their respective grounds from pure kindness and neighbourly feeling; a privilege never abused; and the fields on the other side of the water are reached by a rough plank, or a tree thrown across, or some such

¹ Walking along these meadows one bright sunny afternoon, a year or two back, and rather later in the season, I had an opportunity of noticing a curious circumstance in natural history. Standing close to the edge of the stream, I remarked a singular appearance on a large tuft of flags. It looked like bunches of flowers, the leaves of which seemed dark, yet transparent, intermingled with brilliant tubes of bright blue or shining green. On examining this phenomenon more closely, it turned out to be several clusters of dragon-flies, just emerged from their deformed chrysalis state, and still torpid and motionless from the wetness of their filmy wings. Half-an-hour later we returned to the spot and they were gone. We had seen them at the very moment when beauty was complete and animation dormant. I have since found nearly a similar account of this curious process in Mr. Bingley's entertaining work, called *Animal Biography*.

homely bridge. We ourselves possess one of the most beautiful; so that the strange pleasure of property, that instinct which makes Lizzy delight in her broken doll, and May in the bare bone which she has pilfered from the kennel of her recreant admirer of Newfoundland, is added to the other charms of this enchanting scenery: a strange pleasure it is, when one so poor as I can feel it! Perhaps it is felt most by the poor, with the rich it may be less intense—too much diffused and spread out, becoming thin by expansion, like leaf-gold; the little of the poor may be not only more precious, but more pleasant to them; certain that bit of grassy and blossomy earth, with its green knolls and tufted bushes, its old pollards wreathed with ivy, and its bright and babbling waters, is very dear to me. But I must always have loved these meadows, so fresh, and cool, and delicious to the eye and to the tread, full of cowslips, and of all vernal flowers: Shakespeare's song of spring bursts irrepressibly from our lips as we step on them—

“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——”

“Cuckoo! cuckoo!” cried Lizzy, breaking in with her clear, childish voice; and immediately, as if at her call, the real bird, from a neighbouring tree (for these meadows are dotted with timber like a park), began to echo my lovely little girl, “Cuckoo! cuckoo!” I have a prejudice very unpastoral and unpoetical (but I cannot help it, I have many such)

against this "harbinger of spring." His note is so monotonous, so melancholy; and then the boys mimic him; one hears "Cuckoo! cuckoo!" in dirty streets, amongst smoky houses, and the bird is hated for faults not his own. But prejudices of taste, likings, and dislikings, are not always vanquishable by reason; so, to escape the serenade from the tree, which promised to be of considerable duration (when once that eternal song begins, on it goes ticking like a clock)—to escape that noise, I determined to excite another, and challenged Lizzy to a cowslip-gathering; a trial of skill and speed, to see which should soonest fill her basket. My stratagem succeeded completely. What scrambling, what shouting, what glee from Lizzy! twenty cuckoos might have sung unheard whilst she was pulling her own flowers, and stealing mine, and laughing, screaming, and talking through all.

At last the baskets were filled, and Lizzy declared victor; and down we sat, on the brink of the stream, under a spreading hawthorn, just disclosing its own pearly buds, and surrounded with the rich and enamelled flowers of the wild hyacinth, blue and white, to make our cowslip-ball. Every one knows the process: to nip off the tuft of flowerets just below the top of the stalk, and hang each cluster nicely balanced across a riband, till you have a long string like a garland; then to press them closely together, and tie them tightly up. We went on very prosperously, *considering*—as people say of a young lady's drawing, or a Frenchman's English, or a woman's tragedy, or of the poor little dwarf who works without fingers, or the ingenious sailor who writes with his toes, or generally of any performance which is

accomplished by means seemingly inadequate to its production. To be sure we met with a few accidents. First, Lizzy spoiled nearly all her cowslips by snapping them off too short; so there was a fresh gathering; in the next place, May overset my full basket, and sent the blossoms floating, like so many fairy favours, down the brook: then, when we were going on pretty steadily, just as we had made a superb wreath, and were thinking of tying it together, Lizzy, who held the riband, caught a glimpse of a gorgeous butterfly, all brown and red and purple, and skipping off to pursue the new object, let go her hold; so all our treasures were abroad again. At last, however, by dint of taking a branch of alder as a substitute for Lizzy, and hanging the basket in a pollard-ash, out of sight of May, the cowslip-ball was finished. What a concentration of fragrance and beauty it was! golden and sweet to satiety! rich to sight, and touch, and smell! Lizzy was enchanted, and ran off with her prize, hiding amongst the trees in the very coyness of ecstasy, as if any human eye, even mine, would be a restraint on her innocent raptures.

In the meanwhile I sat listening, not to my enemy the cuckoo, but to a whole concert of nightingales, scarcely interrupted by any meaner bird, answering and vying with each other in those short, delicious strains which are to the ear as roses to the eye; those snatches of lovely sound which come across us as airs from heaven. Pleasant thoughts, delightful associations, awoke as I listened; and almost unconsciously I repeated to myself the beautiful story of the Lutist and the Nightingale, from Ford's *Lover's*

Melancholy. Here it is. Is there in English poetry anything finer ?

“ Passing from Italy to Greece, the tales
Which poets of an elder time have feign'd
To glorify their Tempe, bred in me
Desire of visiting Paradise.
To Thessaly I came, and living private,
Without acquaintance of more sweet companions
Than the old inmates to my love, my thoughts,
I day by day frequented silent groves
And solitary walks. One morning early
This accident encounter'd me : I heard
The sweetest and most ravishing contention
That art and nature ever were at strife in.
A sound of music touch'd mine ears, or rather,
Indeed, entranced my soul ; as I stole nearer,
Invited by the melody, I saw
This youth, this fair-faced youth, upon his lute
With strains of strange variety and harmony
Proclaiming, as it seem'd, so bold a challenge
To the clear choristers of the woods, the birds,
That as they flock'd about him, all stood silent,
Wondering at what they heard. I wonder'd too.
A nightingale,
Nature's best skill'd musician, undertakes
The challenge ; and for every several strain
The well-shaped youth could touch, she sang him down.
He could not run divisions with more art
Upon his quaking instrument than she,
The Nightingale, did with her various notes
Reply to.
Some time thus spent, the young man grew at last
Into a pretty anger, that a bird,
Whom art had never taught cleffs, moods, or notes,
Should vie with him for mastery, whose study
Had busied many hours to perfect practice.
To end the controversy, in a rapture
Upon his instrument he plays so swiftly,
So many voluntaries, and so quick,
That there was curiosity and cunning,
Concord in discord, lines of different method

Meeting in one full centre of delight.
 The bird (ordain'd to be
 Music's first martyr) strove to imitate
 These several sounds; which, when her warbling throat
 Fail'd in, for grief down dropt she on his lute,
 And brake her heart. It was the quaintest sadness
 To see the conqueror upon her hearse
 To weep a funeral elegy of tears.
 He looked upon the trophies of his art,
 Then sigh'd, then wiped his eyes; then sigh'd and cry'd,
 'Alas! poor creature, I will soon revenge
 This cruelty upon the author of it.
 Henceforth this lute, guilty of innocent blood,
 Shall never more betray a harmless peace
 To an untimely end'; and in that sorrow,
 As he was pashing it against a tree,
 I suddenly stept in."

When I had finished the recitation of this exquisite passage, the sky, which had been all the afternoon dull and heavy, began to look more and more threatening; darker clouds, like wreaths of black smoke, flew across the dead leaden tint; a cooler, damper air blew over the meadows, and a few large, heavy drops splashed in the water. "We shall have a storm. Lizzy! May! where are ye? Quick, quick, my Lizzy! run, run! faster, faster!"

And off we ran; Lizzy not at all displeas'd at the thoughts of a wetting, to which, indeed, she is almost as familiar as a duck; May, on the other hand, peering up at the weather, and shaking her pretty ears with manifest dismay. Of all animals, next to a cat, a greyhound dreads rain. She might have escaped it; her light feet would have borne her home long before the shower; but May is too faithful for that, too true a comrade, understands

too well the laws of good-fellowship; so she waited for us. She did, to be sure, gallop on before, and then stop and look back, and beckon, as it were, with some scorn in her black eyes at the slowness of our progress. We in the meanwhile got on as fast as we could, encouraging and reproaching each other. "Faster, my Lizzy! Oh, what a bad runner!"—"Faster, faster! Oh, what a bad runner!" echoed my sauce-box. "You are so fat, Lizzy, you make no way!"—"Ah! who else is fat?" retorted the darling. Certainly her mother is right; I do spoil that child.

By this time we were thoroughly soaked, all three. It was a pelting shower, that drove through our thin summer clothing, and poor May's short glossy coat, in a moment. And then, when we were wet to the skin, the sun came out, actually the sun, as if to laugh at our plight; and then, more provoking still, when the sun was shining, and the shower over, came a maid and a boy to look after us, loaded with cloaks and umbrellas enough to fence us against a whole day's rain. Never mind! on we go, faster and faster; Lizzy obliged to be most ignobly carried, having had the misfortune to lose a shoe in the mud, which we left the boy to look after.

Here we are at home—dripping; but glowing and laughing, and bearing our calamity most manfully. May, a dog of excellent sense, went instantly to bed in the stable, and is at this moment over head and ears in straw; Lizzy is gone to bed too, coaxed into that wise measure by a promise of tea and toast, and of not going home till to-morrow, and the story of Little Red Riding Hood; and I am enjoying the luxury

of dry clothing by a good fire. Really, getting wet through now and then is no bad thing, finery apart; for one should not like spoiling a new pelisse, or a handsome plume; but when there is nothing in question but a white gown and a straw bonnet, as was the case to-day, it is rather pleasant than not. The little chill refreshes, and our enjoyment of the subsequent warmth and dryness is positive and absolute. Besides, the stimulus and exertion do good to the mind as well as body. How melancholy I was all the morning! how cheerful I am now! Nothing like a shower-bath—a real shower-bath, such as Lizzy and May and I have undergone, to cure low spirits. Try it, my dear readers, if ever ye be nervous—I will answer for its success.



THE HARD SUMMER

AUGUST 15TH.—Cold, cloudy, windy, wet. Here we are, in the midst of the dog-days, clustering merrily round the warm hearth like so many crickets, instead of chirruping in the green fields like that other merry insect, the grasshopper; shivering under the influence of the *Jupiter Pluvius* of England, the watery St Swithin; peering at that scarce personage, the sun, when he happens to make his appearance, as intently as astronomers look after a comet, or the common people stare at a balloon; exclaiming against the cold weather, just as we used to exclaim against the warm. “What a change from last year!” is the first sentence you hear, go where you may. Everybody remarks it, and everybody complains of it; and yet in my mind it has its advantages, or at least its compensations, as everything in nature has, if we would only take the trouble to seek for them.

Last year, in spite of the love which we are now pleased to profess towards that ardent luminary, not one of the sun’s numerous admirers had courage to look him in the face: there was no bearing the world till he had said “good-night” to it. Then we might stir: then we began to wake and to live. All day long we languished under his influence in a strange

dreaminess, too hot to work, too hot to read, too hot to write, too hot even to talk; sitting hour after hour in a green arbour, embowered in leafiness, letting thought and fancy float as they would. Those day-dreams were pretty things in their way; there is no denying that. But then, if one half of the world were to dream through a whole summer, like the sleeping Beauty in the Wood, what would become of the other?

The only office requiring the slightest exertion which I performed in that warm weather was watering my flowers. Common sympathy called for that labour. The poor things withered, and faded, and pined away; they almost, so to say, panted for draught. Moreover, if I had not watered them myself, I suspect that no one else would; for water last year was nearly as precious hereabout as wine. Our land-springs were dried up; our wells were exhausted; our deep ponds were dwindling into mud; and geese, and ducks, and pigs, and laundresses, used to look with a jealous and suspicious eye on the few and scanty half-buckets of that impure element, which my trusty lackey was fain to filch for my poor geraniums and campanulas and tuberoses. We were forced to smuggle them in through my faithful adherent's territories, the stable, to avoid lectures within doors; and at last even that resource failed; my garden, my blooming garden, the joy of my eyes, was forced to go waterless like its neighbours, and became shrivelled, scorched, and sunburnt, like them. It really went to my heart to look at it.

On the other side of the house matters were still worse. What a dusty world it was, when about

sunset we became cool enough to creep into it! Flowers in the court looking fit for a *hortus siccus*; mummies of plants, dried as in an oven; hollyhocks, once pink, turned into Quakers; cloves smelling of dust. Oh, dusty world! May herself looked of that complexion; so did Lizzy; so did all the houses, windows, chickens, children, trees, and pigs in the village; so above all did the shoes. No foot could make three plunges into that abyss of pulverised gravel, which had the impudence to call itself a hard road, without being clothed with a coat a quarter of an inch thick. Woe to white gowns! woe to black! Drab was your only wear.

Then, when we were out of the street, what a toil it was to mount the hill, climbing with weary steps and slow upon the brown turf by the wayside, slippery, hot, and hard as a rock! And then if we happened to meet a carriage coming along the middle of the road—the bottomless middle—what a sandy whirlwind it was! What choking! what suffocation! No state could be more pitiable, except, indeed, that of the travellers who carry this misery about with them. I shall never forget the plight in which we met the coach one evening in last August, full an hour after its time, steeds and driver, carriage and passengers, all in dust. The outsiders, and the horses, and the coachman, seemed reduced to a torpid quietness, the resignation of despair. They had left off trying to better their condition, and taken refuge in a wise and patient hopelessness, bent to endure in silence the extremity of ill. The six insides, on the contrary, were still fighting against their fate, vainly struggling to ameliorate their hapless destiny. They

were visibly grumbling at the weather, scolding at the dust, and heating themselves like a furnace, by striving against the heat. How well I remember the fat gentleman without his coat, who was wiping his forehead, heaving up his wig, and certainly uttering that English ejaculation, which, to our national reproach, is the phrase of our language best known on the Continent. And that poor boy, red-hot, all in a flame, whose mamma, having divested her own person of all superfluous apparel, was trying to relieve his sufferings by the removal of his neckerchief—an operation which he resisted with all his might. How perfectly I remember him, as well as the pale girl who sat opposite, fanning herself with her bonnet into an absolute fever! They vanished after a while into their own dust; but I have them all before my eyes at this moment, a companion picture to Hogarth's *Afternoon*, a standing lesson to the grumblers at cold summers.

For my part, I really like this wet season. It keeps us within, to be sure, rather more than is quite agreeable; but then we are at least awake and alive there, and the world out of doors is so much the pleasanter when we can get abroad. Everything does well, except those fastidious bipeds, men and women; corn ripens, grass grows, fruit is plentiful; there is no lack of birds to eat it, and there has not been such a wasp-season these dozen years. My garden wants no watering, and is more beautiful than ever, beating my old rival in that primitive art, the pretty wife of the little mason, out and out. Measured with mine, her flowers are naught. Look at those hollyhocks, like pyramids of roses; those garlands of the

convolvulus major of all colours, hanging around that tall pole, like the wreathy hop-bine; those magnificent dusky cloves, breathing of the Spice Islands; those flaunting double dahlias; those splendid scarlet geraniums, and those fierce and warlike flowers, the tiger-lilies. Oh, how beautiful they are! Besides, the weather clears sometimes—it has cleared this evening; and here are we, after a merry walk up the hill, almost as quick as in the winter, bounding lightly along the bright green turf of the pleasant common, enticed by the gay shouts of a dozen clear young voices, to linger awhile, and see the boys play at cricket.

I plead guilty to a strong partiality towards that unpopular class of beings, country boys; I have a large acquaintance amongst them, and I can almost say, that I know good of many and harm of none. In general, they are an open, spirited, good-humoured race, with a proneness to embrace the pleasures and eschew the evils of their condition, a capacity for happiness, quite unmatched in man, or woman, or girl. They are patient, too, and bear their fate as scape-goats (for all sins whatsoever are laid, as matters of course, to their door), whether at home or abroad, with amazing resignation; and, considering the many lies of which they are the objects, they tell wonderfully few in return. The worst that can be said of them is, that they seldom, when grown to man's estate, keep the promise of their boyhood; but that is a fault to come—a fault that may not come, and ought not to be anticipated. It is astonishing how sensible they are to notice from their betters, or those whom they

think such. I do not speak of money, or gifts, or praise, or the more coarse and common briberies—they are more delicate courtiers; a word, a nod, a smile, or the mere calling of them by their names, is enough to ensure their hearts and their services. Half-a-dozen of them, poor urchins, have run away now to bring us chairs from their several homes. “Thank you, Joe Kirby!—you are always first—yes, that is just the place—I shall see everything there. Have you been in yet, Joe?”—“No, ma’am! I go in next.”—“Ah, I am glad of that—and now’s the time. Really, that was a pretty ball of Jem Eusden’s!—I was sure it would go to the wicket. Run, Joe. They are waiting for you.” There was small need to bid Joe Kirby make haste; I think he is, next to a race-horse, or a greyhound, or a deer, the fastest creature that runs—the most completely alert and active. Joe is mine especial friend, and leader of the “tender juveniles,” as Joel Brent is of the adults. In both instances this post of honour was gained by merits even more remarkably so in Joe’s case than in Joel’s; for Joe is a less boy than many of his companions (some of whom are fifteeners and sixteeners, quite as tall and nearly as old as Tom Coper), and a poorer than all, as may be conjectured from the lamentable state of that patched, round frock, and the ragged condition of those unpatched shoes, which would encumber, if anything could, the light feet that wear them. But why should I lament the poverty that never troubles him? Joe is the merriest and happiest creature that ever lived

twelve years in this wicked world. Care cannot come near him. He hath a perpetual smile on his round, ruddy face, and a laugh in his hazel eye that drives the witch away. He works at yonder farm on the top of the hill, where he is in such repute for intelligence and good-humour, that he has the honour of performing all the errands of the house, of helping the maid, the mistress, and the master, in addition to his own stated office of carter's boy. There he works hard from five till seven, and then he comes here to work still harder, under the name of play—batting, bowling, and fielding, as if for life, filling the place of four boys; being, at a pinch, a whole eleven. The late Mr Knyvett, the king's organist, who used in his own person to sing twenty parts at once of the Hallelujah Chorus, so that you would have thought he had a nest of nightingales in his throat, was but a type of Joe Kirby. There is a sort of ubiquity about him; he thinks nothing of being in two places at once, and for pitching a ball, William Grey himself is nothing to him. It goes straight to the mark like a bullet. He is king of the cricketers from eight to sixteen, both inclusive, and an excellent ruler he makes. Nevertheless, in the best-ordered states there will be grumblers, and we have an opposition here in the shape of Jem Eusden.

Jem Eusden is a stunted lad of thirteen, or thereabout, lean, small, and short, yet strong and active. His face is of an extraordinary ugliness, colourless, withered, haggard, with a look of extreme age, much increased by hair so light that it might rather pass for white than flaxen. He is constantly arrayed in the blue

cap and old-fashioned coat, the costume of an endowed school to which he belongs; where he sits still all day, and rushes into the field at night, fresh, untired, and ripe for action, to scold, and brawl, and storm, and bluster. He hates Joe Kirby, whose immovable good-humour, broad smiles, and knowing nods, must certainly be very provoking to so fierce and turbulent a spirit; and he has himself (being, except by rare accident, no great player) the preposterous ambition of wishing to be manager of the sports. In short, he is a demagogue in embryo, with every quality necessary to a splendid success in that vocation—a strong voice, a fluent utterance, an incessant iteration, and a frontless impudence. He is a great “scholar” too, to use the country phrase; his “piece,” as our village schoolmaster terms a fine sheet of flourishing writing, something between a valentine and a sampler, enclosed within a border of little coloured prints—his last, I remember, was encircled by an engraved history of Moses, beginning at the finding in the bulrushes, with Pharaoh’s daughter dressed in a rose-coloured gown and blue feathers—his piece is not only the admiration of the school, but of the parish, and is sent triumphantly round from house to house at Christmas, to extort halfpence and sixpences from all encouragers of learning—*Montem* in miniature. The Mosaic history was so successful, that the produce enabled Jem to purchase a bat and ball, which, besides adding to his natural arrogance (for the little pedant actually began to mutter against being eclipsed by a dunce, and went so far as to challenge Joe Kirby to a trial in Practice, or the Rule of Three), gave him, when compared with the general

poverty, a most unnatural preponderance in the cricket state. He had the ways and means in his hands—(for, alas! the hard winter had made sad havoc among the bats, and the best ball was a bad one)—he had the ways and means, could withhold the supplies, and his party was beginning to wax strong, when Joe received a present of two bats and a ball for the youngsters in general and himself in particular — and Jem's adherents left him on the spot—they ratted, to a man, that very evening. Notwithstanding this desertion, their forsaken leader has in nothing relaxed from his pretensions or his ill-humour. He still quarrels and brawls as if he had a faction to back him, and thinks nothing of contending with both sides, the ins and the outs, secure of out-talking the whole field. He has been squabbling these ten minutes, and is just marching off now with his own bat (he has never deigned to use one of Joe's) in his hand. What an ill-conditioned hobgoblin it is! And yet there is something bold and sturdy about him, too. I should miss Jem Eusden.

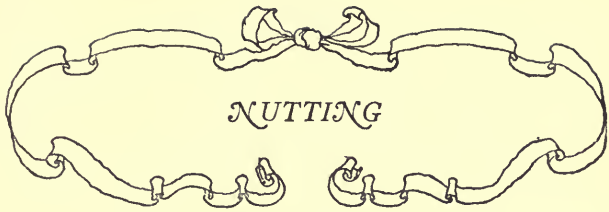
Ah, there is another deserter from the party! my friend the little hussar—I do not know his name, and call him after his cap and jacket. He is a very remarkable person, about the age of eight years, the youngest piece of gravity and dignity I ever encountered; short, and square, and upright, and slow, with a fine, bronzed, flat visage, resembling those convertible signs, the Broad-Face and the Saracen's-Head (which, happening to be next-door neighbours in the town of B., I never knew apart), resembling, indeed, any face that is open-eyed and immovable, the very sign of a boy! he stalks about

with his hands in his breeches pockets, like a piece of machinery; sits leisurely down when he ought to field, and never gets farther in batting than to stop the ball. His is the only voice never heard in the *mêlée*; I doubt, indeed, if he have one, which may be partly the reason of a circumstance that I record to his honour, his fidelity to Jem Eusden, to whom he has adhered through every change of fortune, with a tenacity proceeding, perhaps, from an instinctive consciousness that the loquacious leader talks enough for two. He is the only thing resembling a follower that our demagogue possesses, and is cherished by him accordingly. Jem quarrels for him, scolds for him, pushes for him; and but for Joe Kirby's invincible good-humour, and a just discrimination of the innocent from the guilty, the activity of Jem's friendship would get the poor hussar ten drubbings a day.

But it is growing late. The sun has set a long time. Only see what a gorgeous colouring has spread itself over those parting masses of clouds in the west—what a train of rosy light! We shall have a fine sunshiny day to-morrow—a blessing not to be undervalued, in spite of my vituperation of heat. Shall we go home now? And shall we take the longest but prettiest road, that by the green lanes! This way, to the left, round the corner of the common, past Mr Welles's cottage, and our path lies straight before us. How snug and comfortable that cottage looks! Its little yard all alive with the cow and the mare, and the colt almost as large as the mare, and the young foal, and the great yard-dog, all so fat! Fenced in with hay-rick, and

wheat-rick, and bean-stack, and backed by the long garden, the spacious drying-ground, the fine orchard, and that large field quartered into four different crops. How comfortable this cottage looks, and how well the owners earn their comforts! They are the most prosperous pair in the parish—she a laundress, with twenty times more work than she can do, unrivalled in flounces and shirt-frills, and such delicacies of the craft; he, partly a farmer, partly a farmer's man, tilling his own ground, and then tilling other people's—affording a proof, even in this declining age, when the circumstances of so many worthy members of the community seem to have “an alacrity in sinking,” that it is possible to amend them by sheer industry. He, who was born in the workhouse, and bred up as a parish boy, has now, by mere manual labour, risen to the rank of a landowner, pays rates and taxes, grumbles at the times, and is called Master Welles—the title next to Mister—that by which Shakespeare was called—what would man have more? His wife, besides being the best laundress in the county, is a comely woman still. There she stands at the spring, dipping up water for to-morrow—the clear, deep, silent spring, which sleeps so peacefully under its high, flowery bank, red with the tall spiral stalks of the foxglove and their rich, pendent bells, blue with the beautiful forget-me-not, that gem-like blossom, which looks like a living jewel of turquoise and topaz. It is almost too late to see its beauty; and here is the pleasant shady lane, where the high elms will shut out the little twilight that remains. Ah, but we shall have the fairies' lamps to guide us, the

stars of the earth, the glowworms! Here they are, three almost together. Do you not see them? One seems tremulous, vibrating, as if on the extremity of a leaf of grass; the others are deeper in the hedge, in some green cell, on which their light falls with an emerald lustre. I hope my friends the cricketers will not come this way home. I would not have the pretty creatures removed for more than I care to say, and in this matter I would hardly trust Joe Kirby—boys so love to stick them in their hats. But this lane is quite deserted. It is only a road from field to field. No one comes here at this hour. They are quite safe; and I shall walk here to-morrow and visit them again. And now, good-night! beautiful insects, lamp of the fairies, good-night!



SEPTEMBER 26TH.—One of those delicious autumnal days, when the air, the sky, and the earth seemed lulled into a universal calm, softer and milder even than May. We sallied forth for a walk, in a mood congenial to the weather and the season, avoiding, by mutual consent, the bright and sunny common, and the gay highroad, and stealing through shady, unfrequented lanes, where we were not likely to meet any one—not even the pretty family procession which in other years we used to contemplate with so much interest—the father, mother, and children, returning from the wheat-field, the little ones laden with bristling close-tied bunches of wheat-ears, their own gleanings, or a bottle and a basket which had contained their frugal dinner, whilst the mother would carry her babe, hushing and lulling it, and the father and an elder child trudged after with the cradle, all seeming weary and all happy. We shall not see such a procession as this to-day; for the harvest is nearly over, the fields are deserted, the silence may almost be felt. Except the wintry notes of the red-breast, nature herself is mute. But how beautiful, how gentle, how harmonious, how rich! the rain has preserved to the herbage all the freshness and verdure

of spring, and the world of leaves has lost nothing of its midsummer brightness, and the harebell is on the banks, and the woodbine in the hedges, and the low furze, which the lambs cropped in the spring, has burst again into its golden blossoms.

All is beautiful that the eye can see; perhaps the more beautiful for being shut in with a forest-like closeness. We have no prospect in this labyrinth of lanes, cross-roads, mere cart-ways, leading to the innumerable little farms into which this part of the parish is divided. Uphill or down, these quiet woody lanes scarcely give us a peep at the world, except when, leaning over a gate, we look into one of the small enclosures, hemmed in with hedgerows, so closely set with growing timber that the meady opening looks almost like a glade in a wood; or when some cottage, planted at a corner of one of the little greens formed by the meeting of these crossways, almost startles us by the unexpected sight of the dwellings of men in such a solitude. But that we have more of hill and dale, and that our cross-roads are excellent in their kind, this side of our parish would resemble the description given of La Vendée in Madame Laroche-Jacquelin's most interesting book.¹ I am sure if wood can entitle a country to be called Le Bocage, none can have a better right to the name.

¹ An almost equally interesting account of that very peculiar and interesting scenery may be found in *The Maid of La Vendée*, an English novel, remarkable for its simplicity and truth of painting, written by Mrs Le Noir, the daughter of Christopher Smart, an inheritor of much of his talent. Her works deserve to be better known.

Even this pretty snug farm-house on the hillside, with its front covered with the rich vine, which goes wreathing up to the very top of the clustered chimney, and its sloping orchard full of fruit—even this pretty, quiet nest can hardly peep out of its leaves. Ah! they are gathering in the orchard harvest. Look at that young rogue in the old mossy apple-tree—that great tree, bending with the weight of its golden-rennets—see how he pelts his little sister beneath with apples as red and as round as her own cheeks, while she, with her out-stretched frock, is trying to catch them, and laughing and offering to pelt again as often as one bobs against her; and look at that still younger imp, who, as grave as a judge, is creeping on hands and knees under the tree, picking up the apples as they fall so deedily,¹ and depositing them so honestly in the great basket on the grass, already fixed so firmly and opened so widely, and filled almost to overflowing by the brown rough fruitage of the golden-rennet's next neighbour, the russeting; and see that smallest urchin of all, seated apart in infantine state on the turfy bank, with that toothsome piece of deformity, a crumpling, in each hand, now biting from one sweet, hard, juicy morsel, and now from another. Is not that a pretty English picture? And then, farther up the orchard, that bold, hardy lad, the eldest born, who has scaled

¹ "Deedily."—I am not quite sure that this word is good English; but it is genuine Hampshire, and is used by the most correct of female writers, Miss Austen. It means (and it is no small merit that it has no exact synonyme) anything done with a profound and plodding attention, an action which engrosses all the powers of mind and body.

(heaven knows how) the tall, straight upper branch of that great pear-tree, and is sitting there as securely and as fearlessly, in as much real safety and apparent danger, as a sailor on the topmast. Now he shakes the tree with a mighty swing that brings down a pelting shower of stony bergamots, which the father gathers rapidly up, whilst the mother can hardly assist for her motherly fear—a fear which only spurs the spirited boy to bolder ventures. Is not that a pretty picture? And they are such a handsome family too, the Brookers. I do not know that there is any gipsy blood, but there is the true gipsy complexion, richly brown, with cheeks and lips so red, black hair curling close to their heads in short, crisp rings, white shining teeth—and such eyes!—That sort of beauty entirely eclipses your mere roses and lilies. Even Lizzy, the prettiest of fair children, would look poor and watery by the side of Willy Brooker, the sober little personage who is picking up the apples with his small chubby hands, and filling the basket so orderly, next to his father the most useful man in the field. “Willy!” He hears without seeing; for we are quite hidden by the high bank, and a spreading hawthorn bush that overtops it, though between the lower branches and the grass we have found a convenient peephole. “Willy!” The voice sounds to him like some fairy dream, and the black eyes are raised from the ground with sudden wonder, the long silky eyelashes thrown back till they rest on the delicate brow, and a deeper blush is burning on those dark cheeks and a smile is dimpling about those scarlet lips. But the voice is silent now, and the little quiet boy, after a moment’s pause, is

gone coolly to work again. He is, indeed, a most lovely child. I think some day or other he must marry Lizzy; I shall propose the match to their respective mammas. At present the parties are rather too young for a wedding—the intended bridegroom being, as I should judge, six, or thereabout, and the fair bride barely five—but at least we might have a betrothment after the royal fashion—there could be no harm in that. Miss Lizzy, I have no doubt, would be as demure and coquettish as if ten winters more had gone over her head, and poor Willy would open his innocent black eyes, and wonder what was going forward. They would be the very Oberon and Titania of the village—the fairy king and queen.

Ah! here is the hedge along which the periwinkle wreathes and twines so profusely, with its evergreen leaves shining like the myrtle, and its starry blue flowers. It is seldom found wild in this part of England; but, when we do meet with it, it is so abundant and so welcome, — the very robin-redbreast of flowers, a winter friend. Unless in those unfrequent frosts which destroy all vegetation, it blossoms from September to June, surviving the last lingering crane's-bill, forerunning the earliest primrose, hardier even than the mountain daisy—peeping out from beneath the snow, looking at itself in the ice, smiling through the tempests of life, and yet welcoming and enjoying the sunbeams. Oh, to be like that flower!

The little spring that has been bubbling under the hedge all along the hillside, begins, now that we have mounted the eminence and are imperceptibly descending, to deviate into a capricious variety of

clear, deep pools and channels, so narrow and so choked with weeds, that a child might overstep them. The hedge has also changed its character. It is no longer the close, compact, vegetable wall of hawthorn, and maple, and brier-roses, intertwined with bramble and woodbine, and crowned with large elms or thickly set saplings. No! the pretty meadow which rises high above us, backed and almost surrounded by a tall coppice, needs no defence on our side but its own steep bank, garnished with tufts of broom, with pollard oaks wreathed with ivy, and here and there with long patches of hazel overhanging the water. "Ah, there are still nuts on that bough!" and in an instant my dear companion, active and eager and delighted as a boy, has hooked down with his walking-stick one of the lissome hazel stalks, and cleared it of its tawny clusters, and in another moment he has mounted the bank, and is in the midst of the nuttery, now transferring the spoil from the lower branches into that vast variety of pockets which gentlemen carry about them, now bending the tall tops into the lane, holding them down by main force, so that I might reach them and enjoy the pleasure of collecting some of the plunder myself. A very great pleasure he knew it would be. I doffed my shawl, tucked up my flounces, turned my straw bonnet into a basket, and began gathering and scrambling—for, manage it how you may, nutting is scrambling work—those boughs, however tightly you may grasp them by the young, fragrant twigs and the bright, green leaves, will recoil and burst away; but there is a pleasure even in that: so on we go, scrambling and gathering with all our might and all our glee. Oh, what an

enjoyment! All my life long I have had a passion for that sort of seeking which implies finding (the secret, I believe, of the love of field-sports, which is in man's mind a natural impulse)—therefore I love violeting—therefore, when we had a fine garden, I used to love to gather strawberries, and cut asparagus, and above all, to collect the filberts from the shrubberies: but this hedgerow nutting beats that sport all to nothing. That is a make-believe thing compared with this; there was no surprise, no suspense, no unexpectedness—it was as inferior to this wild nutting as the turning out of a bag-fox is to unearthing the fellow, in the eyes of a staunch fox-hunter.

Oh, what enjoyment this nut-gathering is! They are in such abundance, that it seems as if there were not a boy in the parish, nor a young man, nor a young woman—for a basket of nuts is the universal tribute of country gallantry; our pretty damsel Harriet has had at least half-a-dozen this season; but no one has found out these. And they are so full, too, we lose half of them from over-ripeness; they drop from the socket at the slightest motion. If we lose, there is one who finds. May is as fond of nuts as a squirrel, and cracks the shell and extracts the kernel with equal dexterity. Her white glossy head is upturned now to watch them as they fall. See how her neck is thrown back like that of a swan, and how her quick eye follows the rustling noise, and her light feet dance and pat the ground, and leap up with eagerness, seeming almost sustained in the air, just as I have seen her, when Brush is beating a hedgerow, and she knows from his questing that there is a hare afoot. See, she has caught that

nut just before it touched the water ; but the water would have been no defence—she fishes them from the bottom, she delves after them amongst the matted grass—even my bonnet—how beggingly she looks at that ! “ Oh what a pleasure nutting is !—Is it not, May ? ” May tosses her graceful head as if she understood the question—“ And we must go home now—must we not ? But we will come nutting again some time or other—shall we not, my May ? ”



THE WOOD

APRIL 20TH.—Spring is actually come now, with the fulness and almost the suddenness of a northern summer. To-day is completely April—clouds and sunshine, wind and showers; blossoms on the trees, grass in the fields, swallows by the ponds, snakes in the hedgerows, nightingales in the thickets, and cuckoos everywhere. My young friend Ellen G. is going with me this evening to gather wood-sorrel. She never saw that most elegant plant, and is so delicate an artist that the introduction will be a mutual benefit? Ellen will gain a subject worthy of her pencil, and the pretty weed will live—no small favour to a flower almost as transitory as the gum cistus; duration is the only charm which it wants, and that Ellen will give it. The weather is, to be sure, a little threatening, but we are not people to mind the weather when we have an object in view; we shall certainly go in quest of the wood-sorrel, and will take May, provided we can escape May's followers; for since the adventure of the lamb, Saladin has had an affair with a gander, furious in defence of his goslings, in which rencontre the gander came off conqueror; and as geese abound

in the wood to which we are going (called by the country people the Pinge), and the victory may not always incline to the right side, I should be very sorry to lead the soldan to fight his battles over again. We will take nobody but May.

So saying, we proceeded on our way through winding lanes, between hedgerows tenderly green, till we reached the hatch-gate, with the white cottage beside it, embosomed in fruit trees, which forms the entrance to the Pinge, and in a moment the whole scene was before our eyes.

“Is not this beautiful, Ellen?” The answer could hardly be other than a glowing, rapid, “Yes!” A wood is generally a pretty place; but this wood—imagine a smaller forest, full of glades and sheep-walks, surrounded by irregular cottages with their blooming orchards, a clear stream winding about the brakes, and a road intersecting it, and giving life and light to the picture; and you will have a faint idea of the Pinge. Every step was opening a new point of view, a fresh combination of glade, and path, and thicket. The accessories, too, were changing every moment. Ducks, geese, pigs, and children, giving way, as we advanced into the wood, to sheep and forest ponies; and they again disappearing as we became more entangled in its mazes, till we heard nothing but the song of the nightingale, and saw only the silent flowers.

What a piece of fairy-land! The tall elms overhead just bursting into tender, vivid leaf, with here and there a hoary oak, or a silver-barked beech, every twig swelling with the brown buds, and yet not quite stripped of the tawny foliage of

autumn; tall hollies and hawthorn beneath, with their crisp, brilliant leaves, mixed with the white blossoms of the sloe, and woven together with garlands of woodbines and wild-briars — what a fairy-land!

Primroses, cowslips, pansies, and the regular open-eyed white blossom of the wood anemone (or to use the more elegant Hampshire name, the wind-flower), were set under our feet as thick as daisies in a meadow; but the pretty weed that we came to seek was coyer; and Ellen began to fear that we had mistaken the place or the season. At last she had herself the pleasure of finding it under a brake of holly—“Oh, look! look! I am sure that this is the wood-sorrel! Look at the pendent white flower, shaped like a snow-drop, and veined with purple streaks, and the beautiful trefoil leaves folded like a heart—some, the young ones, so vividly, yet tenderly green, that the foliage of the elm and the hawthorn would show dully at their side—others of a deeper tint, and lined, as it were, with a rich and changeful purple!—Don’t you see them?” pursued my dear young friend, who is a delightful piece of life and sunshine, and was half inclined to scold me for the calmness with which, amused by her enthusiasm, I stood listening to her ardent exclamations—“Don’t you see them? Oh, how beautiful! and in what quantity! what profusion! See how the dark shade of the holly sets off the light and delicate colouring of the flower!—And see that other bed of them springing from the rich moss in the roots of that old beech tree! Pray let us gather some. Here are baskets.” So, quickly and carefully we began

gathering leaves, blossoms, roots and all, for the plant is so fragile that it will not brook separation—quickly and carefully we gathered, encountering divers petty misfortunes in spite of all our care, now caught by the veil in a holly bush, now hitching our shawls in a bramble, still gathering on, in spite of scratched fingers, till we had nearly filled our baskets and began to talk of our departure.

“But where is May? May! May! No going home without her. May! Here she comes galloping, the beauty!”—(Ellen is almost as fond of May as I am.) “What has she got in her mouth? that rough, round, brown substance which she touches so tenderly? What can it be? A bird’s nest? Naughty May!”

“No! as I live, a hedgehog! Look, Ellen, how it has coiled itself into a thorny ball! Off with it, May! Don’t bring it to me!”—And May, somewhat reluctant to part with her prickly prize, however troublesome of carriage, whose change of shape seemed to me to have puzzled her sagacity more than any event I ever witnessed, for in general she has perfectly the air of understanding all that is going forward—May, at last, dropt the hedgehog; continuing, however, to pat it with her delicate, cat-like paw, cautious and daintily applied, and caught back suddenly and rapidly after every touch, as if her poor captive had been a red-hot coal. Finding that these pats entirely failed in solving the riddle (for the hedgehog shammed dead, like the lamb the other day, and appeared entirely motionless), she gave him so spirited a nudge with her pretty black nose, that she not only turned him over, but sent



C. Brock
1904

*Striving against
the heat*

him rolling some little way along the turfy path—an operation which that sagacious quadruped endured with the most perfect passiveness, the most admirable non-resistance. No wonder that May's discernment was at fault. I myself, if I had not been aware of the trick, should have said that the ugly rough thing which she was trundling along, like a bowl or a cricket-ball, was an inanimate substance, something devoid of sensation and of will. At last my poor pet, thoroughly perplexed and tired out, fairly relinquished the contest, and came slowly away, turning back once or twice to look at the object of her curiosity, as if half inclined to return and try the event of another shove. The sudden flight of a wood-pigeon effectually diverted her attention; and Ellen amused herself by fancying how the hedgehog was scuttling away, till our notice was also attracted by a very different object.

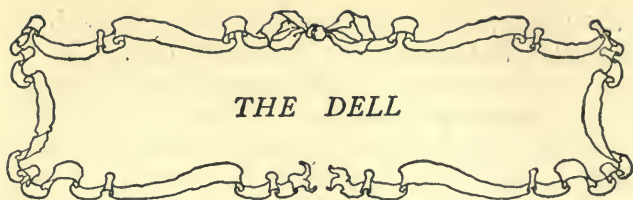
We had nearly threaded the wood, and were approaching an open grove of magnificent oaks on the other side, when sounds other than of nightingales burst on our ear, the deep and frequent strokes of the woodman's axe, and emerging from the Pinge we saw the havoc which that axe had committed. Above twenty of the finest trees lay stretched on the velvet turf. There they lay in every shape and form of devastation: some bare trunks, stripped ready for the timber carriage, with the bark built up in long piles at the side; some with the spoilers busy about them, stripping, hacking, hewing; others with their noble branches, their brown and fragrant shoots, all fresh as if they were alive—majestic corses, the slain of to-day. The grove was like a field of battle.

The young lads who were stripping the bark, the very children who were picking up the chips, seemed awed and silent, as if conscious that death was around them. The nightingales sang faintly and interruptedly—a few low frightened notes like a requiem.

Ah! here we are at the very scene of murder, the very tree that they are felling; they have just hewn round the trunk with those slaughtering axes, and are about to saw it asunder. After all, it is a fine and thrilling operation, as the work of death usually is. Into how grand an attitude was that young man thrown as he gave the final strokes round the root; and how wonderful is the effect of that supple and apparently powerless saw, bending like a riband, and yet overmastering that giant of the woods, conquering and overthrowing that thing of life! Now it has passed half through the trunk, and the woodman has begun to calculate which way the tree will fall; he drives a wedge to direct its course; now a few more movements of the noiseless saw, and then a larger wedge. See how the branches tremble! Hark, how the trunk begins to crack! Another stroke of the huge hammer on the wedge, and the tree quivers, as with a mortal agony, shakes, reels, and falls. How slow, and solemn, and awful it is! How like to death, to human death in its grandest form! Cæsar in the Capitol, Seneca in the bath, could not fall more sublimely than that oak.

Even the heavens seem to sympathise with the devastation. The clouds have gathered into one thick, low canopy, dark and vapoury as the smoke

which overhangs London ; the setting sun is just gleaming underneath with a dim and bloody glare, and the crimson rays spreading upward with a lurid and portentous grandeur, a subdued and dusky glow, like the light reflected on the sky from some vast conflagration. The deep flush fades away, and the rain begins to descend ; and we hurry homeward rapidly, yet sadly, forgetful alike of the flowers, the hedgehog, and the wetting, thinking and talking only of the fallen tree.



THE DELL

MAY 2ND.—A delicious evening ; bright sunshine ; light summer air ; a sky almost cloudless ; and a fresh yet delicate verdure on the hedges and in the fields ; an evening that seems made for a visit to my newly-discovered haunt, the mossy dell, one of the most beautiful spots in the neighbourhood, which, after passing, times out of number, the field which it terminates, we found out about two months ago from the accident of May's killing a rabbit there. May has had a fancy for the place ever since ; and so have I.

Thither accordingly we bend our way—through the village—up the hill—along the common—past the avenue — across the bridge, and by the hill. How deserted the road is to-night ! We have not seen a single acquaintance, except poor blind Robert, laden with his sack of grass plucked from the hedges, and the little boy that leads him. A singular division of labour ! Little Jem guides Robert to the spots where the long grass grows, and tells him where it is most plentiful ; and then the old man cuts it close to the roots, and between them they fill the sack, and sell the contents in the village. Half the cows in the street—for our baker, our wheelwright, and

our shoemaker has each his Alderney—owe the best part of their maintenance to blind Robert's industry.

Here we are at the entrance of the cornfield which leads to the dell, and which commands so fine a view of the Loddon, the mill, the great farm, with its picturesque outbuildings, and the range of woody hills beyond. It is impossible not to pause a moment at that gate, the landscape, always beautiful, is so suited to the season and the hour—so bright, and gay, and spring-like. But May, who has the chance of another rabbit in her pretty head, has galloped forward to the dingle, and poor May, who follows me so faithfully in all my wanderings, has a right to a little indulgence in hers. So to the dingle we go.

At the end of the field, which, when seen from the road, seems terminated by a thick, dark coppice, we come suddenly to the edge of a ravine, on one side fringed with a low growth of alder, birch, and willow, on the other mossy, turfy, and bare, or only broken by bright tufts of blossomed broom. One or two old pollards almost conceal the winding road that leads down the descent, by the side of which a spring as bright as crystal runs gurgling along. The dell itself is an irregular piece of broken ground, in some parts very deep, intersected by two or three high banks of equal irregularity, now abrupt and bare, and rock-like, now crowned with tufts of the feathery willow or magnificent old thorns. Everywhere the earth is covered by short, fine turf, mixed with mosses, soft, beautiful, and various, and embossed with the speckled leaves and lilac flowers of the arum, the paler blossoms of the common orchis, the

enamelled blue of the wild hyacinth, so splendid in this evening light, and large tufts of oxslips and cowslips rising like nose-gays from the short turf.

The ground on the other side of the dell is much lower than the field through which we came, so that it is mainly to the labyrinthine intricacy of these high banks that it owes its singular character of wildness and variety. Now we seemed hemmed in by those green cliffs, shut out from all the world, with nothing visible but those verdant mounds and the deep blue sky; now by some sudden turn we get a peep at an adjoining meadow, where the sheep are lying, dappling its sloping surface like the small clouds on the summer heaven. Poor harmless, quiet creatures, how still they are! Some socially lying side by side; some grouped in threes and fours; some quite apart. Ah! there are lambs amongst them—pretty, pretty lambs—nestled in by their mothers. Soft, quiet, sleepy things! Not all so quiet, though! There is a party of these young lambs as wide-awake as heart can desire; half-a-dozen of them playing together, frisking, dancing, leaping, butting, and crying in the young voice, which is so pretty a diminutive of the full-grown bleat. How beautiful they are with their innocent spotted faces, their mottled feet, their long curly tails, and their light flexible forms, frolicking like so many kittens, but with a gentleness, an assurance of sweetness and innocence, which no kitten, nothing that ever is to be a cat, can have. How complete and perfect is their enjoyment of existence! Ah! little rogues! your play has been too noisy; you have awakened

your mammas; and two or three of the old ewes are getting up; and one of them marching gravely to the troop of lambs has selected her own, given her a gentle butt, and trotted off; the poor rebuked lamb following meekly, but every now and then stopping and casting a longing look at its playmates; who, after a moment's awed pause, had resumed their gambols; whilst the stately dame every now and then looked back in her turn, to see that her little one was following. At last she lay down, and the lamb by her side. I never saw so pretty a pastoral scene in my life.¹

Another turning of the dell gives a glimpse of

¹ I have seen one which affected me much more. Walking in the Church lane with one of the young ladies of the vicarage, we met a large flock of sheep, with the usual retinue of shepherds and dogs. Lingered after them and almost out of sight, we encountered a straggling ewe, now trotting along, now walking, and every now and then stopping to look back, and bleating. A little behind her came a lame lamb, bleating occasionally, as if in answer to its dam, and doing its very best to keep up with her. It was a lameness of both the fore feet; the knees were bent, and it seemed to walk on the very edge of the hoof—on tip-toe, if I may venture such an expression. My young friend thought that the lameness proceeded from original malformation; I am rather of opinion that it was accidental, and that the poor creature was wretchedly foot-sore. However that might be, the pain and difficulty with which it took every step were not to be mistaken; and the distress and fondness of the mother, her perplexity as the flock passed gradually out of sight, the effort with which the poor lamb contrived to keep up a sort of trot, and their mutual calls and lamentations, were really so affecting, that Ellen and I, although not at all lachrymose sort of people, had much ado not to cry. We could not find a boy to carry the lamb, which was too big for us to manage—but I was quite sure that the ewe would not desert it, and as the dark was coming on, we both trusted that the shepherds, on folding their flock, would miss them and return for them—and so I am happy to say it proved.

the dark coppice by which it is backed, and from which we are separated by some marshy, rushy ground, where the springs have formed into a pool, and where the moor-hen loves to build her nest. Ay, there is one scudding away now—I can hear her splash into the water, and the rustling of her wings amongst the rushes. This is the deepest part of the wild dingle. How uneven the ground is! Surely these excavations, now so thoroughly clothed with vegetation, must originally have been huge gravel pits; there is no other way of accounting for the labyrinth, for they do dig gravel in such capricious meanders; but the quantity seems incredible. Well! there is no end of guessing! We are getting amongst the springs, and must turn back. Round this corner, where on ledges like fairy terraces the orchises and arums grow, and we emerge suddenly on a new side of the dell, just fronting the small homestead of our good neighbour, farmer Allen.

This rustic dwelling belongs to what used to be called in this part of the country “a little bargain”; thirty or forty acres, perhaps, of arable land, which the owner and his sons cultivated themselves, whilst the wife and daughters assisted in the husbandry, and eked out the slender earnings by the produce of the dairy, the poultry-yard, and the orchard—an order of cultivators now passing rapidly away, but in which much of the best part of the English character, its industry, its frugality, its sound sense, and its kindness might be found. Farmer Allen himself is an excellent specimen, the cheerful, venerable old man, with his long white hair, and his bright



A singular division
of labour

grey eye ; and his wife is a still finer. They have had a hard struggle to win through the world and keep their little property undivided ; but good management and good principles, and the assistance afforded them by an admirable son, who left our village a poor 'prentice boy, and is now a partner in a great house in London, have enabled them to overcome all the difficulties of these trying times, and they are now enjoying the peaceful evenings of a well-spent life as free from care and anxiety as their best friends could desire.

Ah ! there is Mr Allen in the orchard, the beautiful orchard, with its glorious gardens of pink and white, its pearly pear-blossoms and coral apple-buds. What a flush of bloom it is ! how brightly delicate it appears, thrown into strong relief by the dark house and the weather-stained barn, in this soft evening light ! The very grass is strewed with the snowy petals of the pear and the cherry. And there sits Mrs Allen, feeding her poultry, with her three little granddaughters from London, pretty fairies, from three years old to five (only two-and-twenty months elapsed between the birth of the eldest and the youngest), playing round her feet.

Mrs Allen, my dear Mrs Allen, has been that rare thing, a beauty ; and although she be now an old woman, I had almost said that she is so still. Why should I not say so ? Nobleness of feature and sweetness of expression are surely as delightful in age as in youth. Her face and figure are much like those which are stamped indelibly on the memory of every one who ever saw that grand specimen of woman—Mrs Siddons. The outline of Mrs Allen's

face is exactly the same; but there is more softness, more gentleness, a more feminine composure in the eye and in the smile. Mrs Allen never played Lady Macbeth. Her hair, almost as black as at twenty, is parted on her large, fair forehead, and combed under her exquisitely neat and snowy cap; a muslin neckerchief, a grey stuff gown, and a white apron complete the picture.

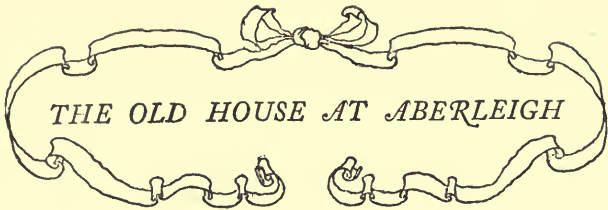
There she sits under an old elder-tree which flings its branches over her like a canopy, whilst the setting sun illumines her venerable figure, and touches the leaves with an emerald light; there she sits, placid and smiling, with her spectacles in her hand and a measure of barley on her lap, into which the little girls are dipping their chubby hands and scattering the corn amongst the ducks and chickens with unspeakable glee. But those ingrates, the poultry, don't seem so pleased and thankful as they ought to be; they mistrust their young feeders. All domestic animals dislike children, partly from an instinctive fear of their tricks and their thoughtlessness; partly, I suspect, from jealousy. Jealousy seems a strange tragic passion to attribute to the inmates of the *basse cour*,—but only look at that strutting fellow of a bantam cock (evidently a favourite), who sidles up to his old mistress with an air half affronted and half tender, turning so scornfully from the barley-corns which Annie is flinging towards him, and say if he be not as jealous as Othello? Nothing can pacify him but Mrs. Allen's notice and a dole from her hand. See, she is calling to him and feeding him, and now how he swells out his feathers, and flutters his wings, and erects his glossy neck, and struts and

crows and pecks, proudest and happiest of bantams, the pet and glory of the poultry-yard !

In the meantime my own pet, May, who has all this while been peeping into every hole, and penetrating every nook and winding of the dell, in hopes of finding another rabbit, has returned to my side, and is sliding her snake-like head into my hand, at once to invite the caress which she likes so well, and to intimate, with all due respect, that it is time to go home. The setting sun gives the same warning ; and in a moment we are through the dell, the field, and the gate, past the farm and the mill, and hanging over the bridge that crosses the Loddon river.

What a sunset ! how golden ! how beautiful ! The sun just disappearing, and the narrow liny clouds, which a few minutes ago lay like soft vapoury streaks along the horizon, lightened up with a golden splendour that the eye can scarcely endure, and those still softer clouds which floated above them wreathing and curling into a thousand fantastic forms, as thin and changeful as summer smoke, now defined and deepened into grandeur, and edged with ineffable, insufferable light ! Another minute and the brilliant orb totally disappears, and the sky above grows every moment more varied and more beautiful as the dazzling golden lines are mixed with glowing red and gorgeous purple, dappled with small, dark specks, and mingled with such a blue as the egg of the hedge-sparrow. To look up at that glorious sky, and then to see that magnificent picture reflected in the clear and lovely Loddon water, is a pleasure never to be described and never forgotten. My heart

swells and my eyes fill as I write of it, and think of the immeasurable majesty of nature, and the unspeakable goodness of God, who has spread an enjoyment so pure, so peaceful, and so intense before the meanest and the lowliest of His creatures.



THE OLD HOUSE AT ABERLEIGH

JUNE 25TH.—What a glowing, glorious day! Summer in its richest prime, noon in its most sparkling brightness, little white clouds dappling the deep blue sky, and the sun, now partially veiled, and now bursting through them with an intensity of light! It would not do to walk to-day, professedly to walk—we should be frightened at the very sound! and yet it is probable that we may be beguiled into a pretty long stroll before we return home. We are going to drive to the old house at Aberleigh, to spend the morning under the shade of those balmy firs, and amongst those luxuriant rose-trees, and by the side of that brimming Loddon river. “Do not expect us before six o’clock,” said I, as I left the house; “Six at soonest!” added my charming companion; and off we drove in our little pony chaise, drawn by our old mare, and with the good-humoured urchin, Henry’s successor, a sort of younger Scrub, who takes care of horse and chaise, and cow, and garden, for our charioteer.

My comrade in this homely equipage was a young lady of high family and high endowments, to whom the novelty of the thing, and her own naturalness of character and simplicity of taste, gave

an unspeakable enjoyment. She danced the little chaise up and down as she got into it, and laughed for very glee like a child. Lizzy herself could not have been more delighted. She praised the horse and the driver, and the roads and the scenery, and gave herself fully up to the enchantment of a rural excursion in the sweetest weather of this sweet season. I enjoyed all this too; for the road was pleasant to every sense, winding through narrow lanes, under high elms, and between hedges garlanded with woodbine and rose trees, whilst the air was scented with the delicious fragrance of blossomed beans. I enjoyed it all—but, I believe, my principal pleasure was derived from my companion herself.

Emily I. is a person whom it is a privilege to know. She is quite like a creation of the older poets, and might pass for one of Shakespeare's or Fletcher's women stepped into life; just as tender, as playful, as gentle, and as kind. She is clever too, and has all the knowledge and accomplishments that a carefully conducted education, acting on a mind of singular clearness and ductility, matured and improved by the very best company, can bestow. But one never thinks of her acquirements. It is the charming artless character, the bewitching sweetness of manner, the real and universal sympathy, the quick taste and the ardent feeling, that one loves in Emily. She is Irish by birth, and has in perfection the melting voice and soft caressing accent by which her fair country-women are distinguished. Moreover, she is pretty—I think her beautiful, and so do all who have heard as well as seen her—but pretty, very



Youth and age

pretty, all the world must confess; and perhaps that is a distinction more enviable, because less envied, than the "palmy state" of beauty. Her prettiness is of the prettiest kind—that of which the chief character is youthfulness. A short but pleasing figure, all grace and symmetry, a fair blooming face, beaming with intelligence and good-humour; the prettiest little feet and the whitest hands in the world—such is Emily I.

She resides with her maternal grandmother, a venerable old lady, slightly shaken with the palsy; and when together (and they are so fondly attached to each other that they are seldom parted), it is one of the loveliest combinations of youth and age ever witnessed. There is no seeing them without feeling an increase of respect and affection for both grandmother and granddaughter — always one of the tenderest and most beautiful of natural connections—as Richardson knew when he made such exquisite use of it in his matchless book. I fancy that grandmamma Shirley must have been just such another venerable lady as Mrs S., and our sweet Emily—Oh, no! Harriet Byron is not half good enough for her! There is nothing like her in the whole seven volumes.

But here we are at the bridge! Here we must alight! "This is the Loddon, Emily. Is it not a beautiful river? rising level with its banks, so clear, and smooth, and peaceful, giving back the verdant landscape and the bright blue sky, and bearing on its pellucid stream the snowy water-lily, the purest of flowers, which sits enthroned on its own cool leaves, looking chastity itself, like the

lady in Comus. That queenly flower becomes the water, and so do the stately swans who are sailing so majestically down the stream, like those who—

‘ On St Mary’s lake
Float double, swan and shadow.’

“ We must dismount here, and leave Richard to take care of our equipage under the shade of these trees, whilst we walk up to the house—See, there it is! We must cross this stile; there is no other way now.”

And crossing the stile, we were immediately in what had been a drive round a spacious park, and still retained something of the character, though the park itself had long been broken into arable fields—and in full view of the Great House, a beautiful structure of James the First’s time, whose glassless windows and dilapidated doors form a melancholy contrast with the strength and entireness of the rich and massive front.

The story of that ruin—for such it is—is always to me singularly affecting: It is that of the decay of an ancient and distinguished family, gradually reduced from the highest wealth and station to actual poverty. The house and park, and a small estate around it, were entailed on a distant cousin, and could not be alienated; and the late owner, the last of his name and lineage, after long struggling with debt and difficulty, farming his own lands, and clinging to his magnificent home with a love of place almost as tenacious as that of the younger Foscarei, was at last forced to abandon it,

retired to a paltry lodging in a paltry town, and died there about twenty years ago, broken-hearted. His successor, bound by no ties of association to the spot, and rightly judging the residence to be much too large for the diminished estate, immediately sold the superb fixtures, and would have entirely taken down the house, if, on making the attempt, the masonry had not been found so solid that the materials were not worth the labour. A great part, however, of one side is laid open, and the splendid chambers, with their carving and gilding, are exposed to wind and rain—sad memorials of past grandeur! The grounds have been left in a merciful neglect; the park, indeed, is broken up, the lawn mown twice a year like a common hay-field, the grotto mouldering into ruin, and the fish-ponds choked with rushes and aquatic plants; but the shrubs and flowering trees are undestroyed, and have grown into a magnificence of size and wildness of beauty, such as we may imagine them to attain in their native forests. Nothing can exceed their luxuriance, especially in the spring, when the lilac, and laburnum, and double-cherry put forth their gorgeous blossoms. There is a sweet sadness in the sight of such floweriness amidst such desolation; it seems the triumph of nature over the destructive power of man. The whole place, in that season more particularly, is full of a soft and soothing melancholy, reminding me, I scarcely know why, of some of the descriptions of natural scenery in the novels of Charlotte Smith, which I read when a girl, and which, perhaps, for that reason hang on my memory.

But here we are, in the smooth, grassy ride, on

the top of a steep turfy slope descending to the river, crowned with enormous firs and limes of equal growth, looking across the winding waters into a sweet, peaceful landscape of quiet meadows, shut in by distant woods. What a fragrance is in the air from the balmy fir trees and the blossomed limes! What an intensity of odour! And what a murmur of bees in the lime trees! What a coil those little winged people make over our heads! And what a pleasant sound it is! the pleasantest of busy sounds, that which comes associated with all that is good and beautiful — industry and forecast, and sunshine and flowers. Surely these lime trees might store a hundred hives; the very odour is of a honeyed richness, cloying, satiating.

Emily exclaimed in admiration as we stood under deep, strong, leafy shadow, and still more when honeysuckles trailed their profusion in our path, and roses, really trees, almost intercepted our passage.

“On, Emily! farther yet! Force your way by that jessamine—it will yield; I will take care of this stubborn white rose bough.”—“Take care of yourself! Pray take care,” said my fairest friend; “let me hold back the branches.”—After we had won our way through the strait, at some expense of veils and flounces, she stopped to contemplate and admire the tall, graceful shrub, whose long, thorny stems, spreading in every direction, had opposed our progress, and now waved their delicate clusters over our heads “Did I ever think,” exclaimed she, “of standing under the shadow of a white rose tree! What an exquisite fragrance! And what a beautiful flower! so pale, and white, and tender, and the petals thin and

smooth as silk! What rose is it?"—"Don't you know? Did you never see it before? It is rare now, I believe, and seems rarer than it is, because it only blossoms in very hot summers; but this, Emily, is the musk rose—that very musk rose of which Titania talks, and which is worthy of Shakespeare and of her. Is it not?—No! do not smell it; it is less sweet so than other roses; but one cluster in a vase, or even that bunch in your bosom, will perfume a large room, as it does the summer air."—"Oh! we will take twenty clusters," said Emily—"I wish grandmamma were here! She talks so often of a musk rose tree that grew against one end of her father's house. I wish she were here to see this!"

Echoing her wish, and well laden with musk roses, planted, perhaps, in the days of Shakespeare, we reached the steps that led to a square summer-house or banqueting-room, overhanging the river: the under part was a boat-house, whose projecting roof, as well as the walls and the very top of the little tower, was covered with ivy and woodbine, and surmounted by tufted barberries, bird cherries, acacias, covered with their snowy chains, and other pendent and flowering trees. Beyond rose two poplars of unrivalled magnitude, towering like stately columns over the dark tall firs, and giving a sort of pillared and architectural grandeur to the scene.

We were now close to the mansion; but it looked sad and desolate, and the entrance, choked with brambles and nettles, seemed almost to repel our steps. The beautiful summer-house was free, and open, and inviting, commanding from the un-

glazed windows, which hung high above the water, a reach of the river terminated by a rustic mill.

There we sat, emptying our little basket of fruit and country cakes, till Emily was seized with a desire of viewing, from the other side of the Loddon, the scenery which had so much enchanted her. "I must," said she, "take a sketch of the ivied boat-house, and of this sweet room, and this pleasant window—Grandmamma would never be able to walk from the road to see the place itself, but she must see its likeness." So forth we sallied, not forgetting the dear musk roses.

We had no way of reaching the desired spot but by retracing our steps a mile, during the heat of the hottest hour of the day, and then following the course of the river to an equal distance on the other side; nor had we any materials for sketching, except the rumpled paper which had contained our repast, and a pencil without a point which I happened to have about me. But these small difficulties are pleasures to gay and happy youth. Regardless of such obstacles, the sweet Emily bounded on like a fawn, and I followed, delighting in her delight. The sun went in, and the walk was delicious; a reviving coolness seemed to breathe over the water, wafting the balmy scent of the firs and limes; we found a point of view presenting the boat-house, the water, the poplars, and the mill, in a most felicitous combination; the little straw fruit-basket made a capital table; and refreshed and sharpened and pointed by our trusty lackey's excellent knife (your country boy is never without a good knife, it is his prime treasure), the pencil did double duty—first

in the skilful hands of Emily, whose faithful and spirited sketch does equal honour to the scene and to the artist, and then in the humbler office of attempting a faint transcript of my own impressions in the following sonnet :—

It was an hour of calmest noon, at day
Of ripest summer ; o'er the deep blue sky
White speckled clouds came sailing peacefully,
Half-shrouding in a chequer'd veil the ray
Of the sun, too ardent else—what time we lay
By the smooth Loddon, opposite the high,
Steep bank, which as a coronet gloriously
Wore its rich crest of firs and lime trees, gay
With their pale tassels ; while from out a bower
Of ivy (where those column'd poplars rear
Their heads) the ruin'd boat-house, like a tower,
Flung its deep shadow on the waters clear.
My Emily ! forget not that calm hour,
Nor that fair scene, by thee made doubly dear !



THE SHAW

SEPTEMBER 9TH.—A bright, sunshiny afternoon. What a comfort it is to get out again—to see once more that rarity of rarities, a fine day! We English people are accused of talking over-much of the weather; but the weather, this summer, has forced people to talk of it. Summer! did I say? Oh! season most unworthy of that sweet, sunny name! Season of coldness and cloudiness, of gloom and rain! A worse November!—for in November the days are short; and shut up in a warm room, lighted by that household sun, a lamp, one feels through the long evenings comfortably independent of the out-of-door tempests. But though we may have, and did have, fires all through the dog-days, there is no shutting out daylight; and sixteen hours of rain, pattering against the windows and dripping from the eaves—sixteen hours of rain, not merely audible, but visible for seven days in the week—would be enough to exhaust the patience of Job or Grizzel; especially if Job were a farmer, and Grizzel a country gentlewoman. Never was known such a season! Hay swimming, cattle drowning, fruit rotting, corn spoiling! and that naughty river, the Loddon, who never can take Puff's advice, and, "keep between

its banks," running about the country, fields, roads, gardens, and houses, like mad! The weather would be talked of. Indeed, it was not easy to talk of anything else. A friend of mine having occasion to write me a letter, thought it worth abusing in rhyme, and bepommelled it through three pages of Bath-guide verse; of which I subjoin a specimen:—

“Aquarius surely *reigns* over the world,
 And of late he his water-pot strangely has twirl'd;
 Or he's taken a cullender up by mistake,
 And unceasingly dips it in some mighty lake;
 Though it is not in Lethe—for who can forget
 The annoyance of getting most thoroughly wet?
 It must be in the river called Styx, I declare,
 For the moment it drizzles it makes the men swear.
 'It did rain to-morrow,' is growing good grammar;
 Vauxhall and camp-stools have been brought to the hammer;
 A pony-gondola is all I can keep,
 And I use my umbrella and pattens in sleep:
 Row out of my window, whene'er 'tis my whim
 To visit a friend, and just ask, 'Can you swim?'"

So far my friend.¹ In short, whether in prose or in verse, everybody railed at the weather. But this

¹ This friend of mine is a person of great quickness and talent, who, if she were not a beauty and a woman of fortune—that is to say, if she were prompted by either of those two powerful *stimuli*, want of money or want of admiration, to take due pains—would inevitably become a clever writer. As it is, her notes and *jeux d'esprit*, struck off *à trait de plume*, have great point and neatness. Take the following billet, which formed the label to a closed basket, containing the ponderous present alluded to, last Michaelmas day:—

“To Miss M.
 ‘When this you see,
 Remember me,
 Was long a phrase in use;
 And so I send
 To you, dear friend,
 My proxy, ‘What?’—A goose!”

is over now. The sun has come to dry the world; mud is turned into dust; rivers have retreated to their proper limits; farmers have left off grumbling; and we are about to take a walk, as usual, as far as the Shaw, a pretty wood about a mile off. But one of our companions being a stranger to the gentle reader, we must do him the honour of an introduction.

Dogs, when they are sure of having their own way, have sometimes ways as odd as those of the unfurred, unfeathered animals, who walk on two legs, and talk, and are called rational. My beautiful white greyhound, Mayflower,¹ for instance, is as whimsical as the finest lady in the land. Amongst her other fancies, she has taken a violent affection for a most hideous stray dog, who made his appearance here about six months ago, and contrived to pick up a living in the village, one can hardly tell how. Now appealing to the charity of old Rachel Strong, the laundress—a dog-lover by profession; now winning a meal from the light-footed and open-hearted lasses at the Rose; now standing on his hind-legs, to extort by sheer beggary a scanty morsel from some pair of “drouthy cronies,” or solitary drover, discussing his dinner or supper on the alehouse bench; now catching a mouthful, flung to him in pure contempt by some scornful gentleman of the shoulder-knot, mounted on his throne, the coach-box, whose notice he had attracted by dint of ugliness; now sharing the commons of Master Keep the shoemaker’s pigs; now succeeding to the reversion of the well-gnawed bone of Master Brown the shopkeeper’s fierce house-dog; now filching the skim-milk of

¹ Dead, alas, since this was written.

Dame Wheeler's cat—spit at by the cat; worried by the mastiff; chased by the pigs; screamed at by the dame; stormed at by the shoemaker; flogged by the shopkeeper; teased by all the children, and scouted by all the animals of the parish—but yet living through his griefs, and bearing them patiently, “for sufferance is the badge of all his tribe”—and even seeming to find, in an occasional full meal, or a gleam of sunshine, or a wisp of dry straw on which to repose his sorry carcass, some comfort in his disconsolate condition.

In this plight was he found by May, the most high-blooded and aristocratic of greyhounds; and from this plight did May rescue him; invited him into her territory, the stable; resisted all attempts to turn him out; re-instated him there, in spite of maid and boy, and mistress and master; wore out everybody's opposition by the activity of her protection, and the pertinacity of her self-will; made him sharer of her bed and of her mess; and, finally, established him as one of the family as firmly as herself.

Dash—for he has even won himself a name amongst us; before he was anonymous—Dash is a sort of a kind of a spaniel; at least there is in his mongrel composition some sign of that beautiful race. Besides his ugliness, which is of the worst sort—that is to say, the shabbiest—he has a limp on one leg that gives a peculiar one-sided awkwardness to his gait; but independently of his great merit in being May's pet, he has other merits which serve to account for that phenomenon—being, beyond all comparison, the most faithful, attached, and affectionate animal that I have ever

known; and that is saying much. He seems to think it necessary to atone for his ugliness by extra good conduct, and does so dance on his lame leg, and so wag his scrubby tail, that it does any one who has a taste for happiness good to look at him—so that he may now be said to stand on his own footing. We are all rather ashamed of him when strangers come in the way, and think it necessary to explain that he is May's pet; but amongst ourselves, and those who are used to his appearance, he has reached the point of favouritism in his own person. I have, in common with wiser women, the feminine weakness of loving whatever loves me—and, therefore, I like Dash. His master has found out that he is a capital finder, and in spite of his lameness will hunt a field or beat a cover with any spaniel in England—and, therefore, *he* likes Dash. The boy has fought a battle, in defence of his beauty, with another boy bigger than himself, and beat his opponent most handsomely—and, therefore, *he* likes Dash; and the maids like him, or pretend to like him, because we do—as is the fashion of that pliant and imitative class. And now Dash and May follow us everywhere, and are going with us to the Shaw, as I said before—or rather to the cottage by the Shaw, to bespeak milk and butter of our little dairy-woman, Hannah Bint—a housewifely occupation, to which we owe some of our pleasantest rambles.

And now we pass the sunny, dusty village street—who would have thought, a month ago, that we should complain of sun and dust again!—and turn the corner where the two great oaks hang so beautifully over the clear, deep pond, mixing their



W. Green
1874

Screamed at by the dog

cool green shadows with the bright blue sky, and the white clouds that flit over it; and loiter at the wheeler's shop, always picturesque, with its tools, and its work, and its materials, all so various in form, and so harmonious in colour; and its noisy, merry workmen, hammering and singing, and making a various harmony also. The shop is rather empty to-day, for its usual inmates are busy on the green beyond the pond—one set building a cart, another painting a waggon. And then we leave the village quite behind, and proceed slowly up the cool, quiet lane, between tall hedgerows of the darkest verdure, overshadowing banks green and fresh as an emerald.

Not so quick as I expected, though—for they are shooting here to-day, as Dash and I have both discovered: he with great delight, for a gun to him is as a trumpet to a war-horse; I with no less annoyance, for I don't think a partridge itself, barring the accident of being killed, can be more startled than I at that abominable explosion. Dash has certainly better blood in his veins than any one would guess to look at him. He even shows some inclination to elope into the fields, in pursuit of those noisy iniquities. But he is an orderly person after all, and a word has checked him.

Ah! here is a shriller din mingling with the small artillery—a shriller and more continuous. We are not yet arrived within sight of Master Weston's cottage, snugly hidden behind a clump of elms; but we are in full hearing of Dame Weston's tongue, raised, as usual, to scolding pitch. The Westons are new arrivals in our neighbourhood, and the first thing heard of them was a complaint from the wife

to our magistrate of her husband's beating her: it was a regular charge of assault—an information in full form. A most piteous case did Dame Weston make of it, softening her voice for the nonce into a shrill, tremulous whine, and exciting the mingled pity and anger—pity towards herself, anger towards her husband—of the whole female world, pitiful and indignant as the female world is wont to be on such occasions. Every woman in the parish railed at Master Weston; and poor Master Weston was summoned to attend the bench on the ensuing Saturday, and answer the charge; and such was the clamour abroad and at home, that the unlucky culprit, terrified at the sound of a warrant and a constable, ran away, and was not heard of for a fortnight.

At the end of that time he was discovered, and brought to the bench; and Dame Weston again told her story, and, as before, on the full cry. She had no witnesses, and the bruises of which she had made complaint had disappeared, and there were no women present to make common cause with the sex. Still, however, the general feeling was against Master Weston; and it would have gone hard with him when he was called in, if a most unexpected witness had not risen up in his favour. His wife had brought in her arms a little girl about eighteen months old, partly, perhaps, to move compassion in her favour; for a woman with a child in her arms is always an object that excites kind feelings. The little girl had looked shy and frightened, and had been as quiet as a lamb during her mother's examination; but she no sooner saw her father, from whom she had been a fortnight separated, than she clapped her hands, and

laughed, and cried, "Daddy! daddy!" and sprang into his arms, and hung round his neck, and covered him with kisses—again shouting, "Daddy, come home! daddy! daddy!"—and finally nestled her little head in his bosom, with a fulness of contentment, an assurance of tenderness and protection, such as no wife-beating tyrant ever did inspire, or ever could inspire, since the days of King Solomon. Our magistrates acted in the very spirit of the Jewish monarch: they accepted the evidence of nature, and dismissed the complaint. And subsequent events have fully justified their decision; Mistress Weston proving not only renowned for the feminine accomplishment of scolding (tongue-banging, it is called in our parts, a compound word which deserves to be Greek), but is actually herself addicted to administering the conjugal discipline, the infliction of which she was pleased to impute to her luckless husband.

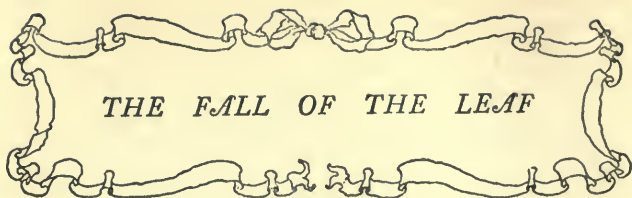
Now we cross the stile, and walk up the fields to the Shaw. How beautifully green this pasture looks! and how finely the evening sun glances between the boles of that clump of trees, beech, and ash, and aspen! and how sweet the hedgerows are with woodbine and wild scabious, or, as the country people call it, the gipsy-rose! Here is little Dolly Weston, the unconscious witness, with cheeks as red as a real rose, tottering up the path to meet her father. And here is the carrot-poll'd urchin, George Coper, returning from work, and singing, "Home! sweet home!" at the top of his voice; and then, when the notes prove too high for him, continuing the air in a whistle, until he has turned the impassable corner; then taking up again

the song and the words, "Home! sweet home!" and looking as if he felt their full import, ploughboy though he be. And so he does; for he is one of a large, an honest, a kind, and an industrious family, where all goes well, and where the poor ploughboy is sure of finding cheerful faces and coarse comforts—all that he has learned to desire. Oh, to be as cheaply and as thoroughly contented as George Coper! All his luxuries, a cricket-match!—all his wants satisfied in "Home! sweet home!"

Nothing but noises to-day! they are clearing Farmer Brooke's great bean-field, and crying the "Harvest Home!" in a chorus, before which all other sounds—the song, the scolding, the gunnery—fade away, and become faint echoes. A pleasant noise is that! though, for one's ears' sake, one makes some haste to get away from it. And here, in happy time, is that pretty wood, the Shaw, with its broad pathway, its tangled dingles, its nuts and its honey-suckles—and, carrying away a faggot of those sweetest flowers, we reach Hannah Bint's; of whom we shall say more another time.

NOTE.—Poor Dash is also dead. We did not keep him long; indeed, I believe that he died of the transition from starvation to good feed, as dangerous to a dog's stomach and to most stomachs, as the less agreeable change from good feed to starvation. He has been succeeded in place and favour by another Dash, not less amiable in demeanour and far more creditable in appearance, bearing no small resemblance to the pet spaniel of my friend Master Dinely, he who stole the bone from the magpies, and who figures as the first Dash of this volume. Let not the unwary reader opine that, in assigning the same name to three several individuals, I am acting as an humble imitator of the inimitable writer who has given immortality to the Peppers and the Mustards, on the one hand; or showing a poverty of invention, or a want of acquaintance with the bead-roll of canine

appellations, on the other. I merely, with my usual scrupulous fidelity, take the names as I find them. The fact is, that half the handsome spaniels in England are called Dash, just as half the tall footmen are called Thomas. The name belongs to the species. Sitting in an open carriage one day last summer at the door of a farmhouse where my father had some business, I saw a noble and beautiful animal of this kind lying in great state and laziness on the steps, and felt an immediate desire to make acquaintance with him. My father, who had had the same fancy, had patted him and called him "poor fellow" in passing, without eliciting the smallest notice in return. "Dash!" cried I, at a venture, "good Dash! noble Dash!" and up he started in a moment, making but one spring from the door into the gig. Of course I was right in my guess. The gentleman's name was Dash.



THE FALL OF THE LEAF

NOVEMBER 6TH.—The weather is as peaceful to-day, as calm, and as mild, as in early April; and, perhaps, an autumn afternoon and a spring morning do resemble each other more in feeling, and even in appearance, than in any two periods of the year. There is in both the same freshness and dewiness of the herbage; the same balmy softness in the air; and the same pure and lovely blue sky, with white fleecy clouds floating across it. The chief difference lies in the absence of flowers and the presence of leaves. But then the foliage of November is so rich, and glowing, and varied, that it may well supply the place of the gay blossoms of the spring; whilst all the flowers of the field or the garden could never make amends for the want of leaves—that beautiful and graceful attire in which nature has clothed the rugged forms of trees—the verdant drapery to which the landscape owes its loveliness, and the forests their glory.

If choice must be between two seasons, each so full of charm, it is at least no bad philosophy to prefer the present good, even whilst looking gratefully back, and hopefully forward, to the past and the future. And of a surety, no fairer specimen of

a November day could well be found than this—a day made to wander

“By yellow commons and birch-shaded hollows,
And hedgerows bordering unfrequented lanes;’

nor could a prettier country be found for our walk than this shady and yet sunny Berkshire, where the scenery, without rising into grandeur or breaking into wildness, is so peaceful, so cheerful, so varied, and so thoroughly English.

We must bend our steps towards the waterside, for I have a message to leave at Farmer Riley's: and sooth to say, it is no unpleasant necessity; for the road thither is smooth and dry, retired, as one likes a country walk to be, but not too lonely, which women never like; leading past the Loddon—the bright, brimming, transparent Loddon—a fitting mirror for this bright blue sky, and terminating at one of the prettiest and most comfortable farmhouses in the neighbourhood.

How beautiful the lane is to-day, decorated with a thousand colours! The brown road, and the rich verdure that borders it, strewed with the pale yellow leaves of the elm, just beginning to fall; hedgerows glowing with long wreaths of the bramble in every variety of purplish red; and overhead the unchanged green of the fir, contrasting with the spotted sycamore, the tawny beech, and the dry sere leaves of the oak, which rustle as the light wind passes through them; a few common hardy yellow flowers (for yellow is the common colour of flowers, whether wild or cultivated, as blue is the rare one), flowers of many sorts, but almost of one tint, still blowing in spite

of the season, and ruddy berries glowing through all. How very beautiful is the lane!

And how pleasant is this hill where the road widens, with the group of cattle by the wayside, and George Hearn, the little post-boy, trundling his hoop at full speed, making all the better haste in his work because he cheats himself into thinking it play! And how beautiful again is this patch of common at the hill-top with the clear pool, where Martha Pither's children—elves of three, and four, and five years old—without any distinction of sex in their sunburnt faces and tattered drapery, are dipping up water in their little homely cups shining with cleanliness, and a small brown pitcher with the lip broken, to fill that great kettle, which, when it is filled, their united strength will never be able to lift! They are quite a group for a painter, with their rosy cheeks, and chubby hands, and round merry faces; and the low cottage in the background, peeping out of its vine leaves and china roses, with Martha at the door, tidy, and comely, and smiling, preparing the potatoes for the pot, and watching the progress of dipping and filling that useful utensil, completes the picture.

But we must go on. No time for more sketches in those short days. It is getting cold too. We must proceed in our walk. Dash is showing us the way, and beating the thick double hedgerow that runs along the side of the meadow, at a rate that indicates game astir, and causes the leaves to fly as fast as an east wind after a hard frost. Ah! a pheasant! a superb cock pheasant! Nothing is more certain than Dash's questing, whether in a

hedgerow or covert, for a better spaniel never went into the field ; but I fancied that it was a hare afoot, and was also as much startled to hear the whirring of those splendid wings as the princely bird himself would have been at the report of a gun. Indeed, I believe that the way in which a pheasant goes off does sometimes make young sportsmen a little nervous (they don't own it very readily, but the observation may be relied on nevertheless), until they get, as it were, broken-in to the sound ; and then that grand and sudden burst of wing becomes as pleasant to them as it seems to be to Dash, who is beating the hedgerow with might and main, and giving tongue louder, and sending the leaves about faster than ever—very proud of finding the pheasant, and perhaps a little angry with me for not shooting it ; at least looking as if he would be angry if I were a man ; for Dash is a dog of great sagacity, and has doubtless not lived four years in the sporting world without making the discovery, that although gentlemen do shoot, ladies do not.

The Loddon at last ! the beautiful Loddon ! and the bridge where every one stops, as by instinct, to lean over the rails, and gaze a moment on a landscape of surpassing loveliness—the fine grounds of the Great House, with their magnificent groups of limes, and firs, and poplars grander than ever poplars were ; the green meadows opposite, studded with oaks and elms ; the clear winding river ; the mill with its picturesque old buildings bounding the scene ; all glowing with the rich colouring of autumn, and harmonised by the soft beauty of the clear blue sky, and the delicious calmness of the hour. The very

peasant whose daily path it is cannot cross the bridge without a pause.

But the day is wearing fast, and it grows colder and colder. I really think it will be a frost. After all, spring is the pleasantest season, beautiful as this scenery is. We must get on. Down that broad yet shadowy lane, between the park, dark with ever-greens and dappled with deer, and the meadows where sheep, and cows, and horses are grazing under the tall elms; that lane, where the wild bank, clothed with fern and tufted with furze, and crowned by rich berried thorn and thick shining holly, on the one side, seems to vie in beauty with the picturesque old paling, the bright laurels, and the plummy cedars, on the other; down that shady lane, until the sudden turn brings us to an opening where four roads meet, where a noble avenue turns down to the Great House; where the village church rears its modest spire from amidst its venerable yew trees: and where, embosomed in orchards and gardens, and backed by barns and ricks, and all the wealth of the farmyard, stands the spacious and comfortable abode of good Farmer Riley—the end and object of our walk.

And in happy time the message is said, and the answer given, for this beautiful mild day is edging off into a dense frosty evening; the leaves of the elm and the linden in the old avenue are quivering and vibrating and fluttering in the air, and at length falling crisply on the earth, as if Dash were beating for pheasants in the tree-tops; the sun gleams dimly through the fog, giving little more of light and heat than his fair sister the lady

moon—I don't know a more disappointing person than a cold sun; and I am beginning to wrap my cloak closely round me, and to calculate the distance to my own fireside, recanting all the way my praises of November, and longing for the showery, flowery April, as much as if I were a half-chilled butterfly, or a dahlia knocked down by the frost.

Ah, dear me! what a climate this is, that one cannot keep in the same mind about it for half-an-hour together! I wonder, by the way, whether the fault is in the weather, which Dash does not seem to care for, or in me? If I should happen to be wet through in a shower next spring, and should catch myself longing for autumn, that would settle the question.

SELECT SKETCHES



THE prettiest cottage on our village-green is the little dwelling of Dame Wilson. It stands in a corner of the common, where the hedgerows go curving off into a sort of bay round a clear bright pond, the earliest haunt of the swallow. A deep woody, green lane, such as Hobbema or Ruysdael might have painted, a lane that hints of nightingales, forms one boundary of the garden, and a sloping meadow the other; whilst the cottage itself, a low thatched irregular building, backed by a blooming orchard, and covered with honeysuckle and jessamine, looks like the chosen abode of snugness and comfort. And so it is.

Dame Wilson was a respected servant in a most respectable family, where she passed all the early part of her life, and which she quitted only on her marriage with a man of character and industry, and of that peculiar universality of genius which forms, what is called in country phrase, a handy fellow. He could do any sort of work; was thatcher, carpenter, bricklayer, painter, gardener, gamekeeper, "everything by turns, and nothing long." No job came amiss to him. He killed pigs, mended shoes, cleaned clocks, doctored cows, dogs, and horses,

and even went as far as bleeding and drawing teeth in his experiments on the human subject. In addition to these multifarious talents, he was ready, obliging, and unfearing; jovial withal, and fond of good fellowship; and endowed with a promptness of resource which made him the general adviser of the stupid, the puzzled, and the timid. He was universally admitted to be the cleverest man in the parish; and his death, which happened about ten years ago, in consequence of standing in the water, drawing a pond for one neighbour, at a time when he was overheated by loading hay for another, made quite a gap in our village commonwealth. John Wilson had no rival, and has had no successor:—for the Robert Ellis, whom certain youngsters would fain exalt to a co-partnery of fame, is simply nobody—a bell-ringer, a ballad-singer, a troller of profane catches—a fiddler—a bruiser—a loller on alehouse benches—a teller of good stories—a mimic—a poet! What is all this to compare with the solid parts of John Wilson?—Whose clock hath Robert Ellis cleaned?—whose windows hath he mended?—whose dog hath he broken?—whose pigs hath he ringed?—whose pond hath he fished?—whose hay hath he saved?—whose cow hath he cured?—whose calf hath he killed?—whose teeth hath he drawn?—whom hath he bled? Tell me that, irreverent whipsters! No! John Wilson is not to be replaced. He was missed by the whole parish; and most of all he was missed at home. His excellent wife was left the sole guardian and protector of two fatherless girls; one an infant at her knee, the other a pretty handy lass about nine years old. Cast thus upon the world,

there must have been much to endure, much to suffer; but it was borne with a smiling patience, a hopeful cheeriness of spirit, and a decent pride, which seemed to command success as well as respect in their struggle for independence. Without assistance of any sort, by needle-work, by washing and mending lace and fine linen, and other skilful and profitable labours, and by the produce of her orchard and poultry, Dame Wilson contrived to maintain herself and her children in their old comfortable home. There was no visible change; she and the little girls were as neat as ever; the house had still within and without the same sunshiny cleanliness, and the garden was still famous over all other gardens for its cloves, and stocks, and double wall-flowers. But the sweetest flower of the garden, and the joy and pride of her mother's heart, was her daughter Hannah. Well might she be proud of her! At sixteen Hannah Wilson was, beyond a doubt, the prettiest girl in the village, and the best. Her beauty was quite in a different style from the common country rosebud—far more choice and rare. Its chief characteristic was modesty. A light youthful figure, exquisitely graceful and rapid in all its movements; springy, elastic, and buoyant as a bird, and almost as shy; a fair innocent face, with downcast blue eyes, and smiles and blushes coming and going almost with her thoughts; a low soft voice, sweet even in its monosyllables; a dress remarkable for neatness and propriety, and borrowing from her delicate beauty an air of superiority not its own;—such was the outward woman of Hannah. Her mind was very like her person; modest, graceful,

gentle, affectionate, grateful, and generous above all. The generosity of the poor is always a very real and fine thing; they give what they want; and Hannah was of all poor people the most generous. She loved to give; it was her pleasure, her luxury. Rosy-cheeked apples, plums with the bloom on them, nosegays of cloves and blossomed myrtle; these were offerings which Hannah delighted to bring to those whom she loved, or those who had shown her kindness; whilst to such of her neighbours as needed other attentions than fruit and flowers, she would give her time, her assistance, her skill; for Hannah inherited her mother's dexterity in feminine employments, with something of her father's versatile power. Besides being an excellent laundress, she was accomplished in all the arts of the needle, millinery, dress-making, and plain work; a capital cutter-out, an incomparable mender, and endowed with a gift of altering, which made old things better than new. She had no rival at a *rifacimento*, as half the turned gowns on the common can witness. As a dairy-woman, and a rearer of pigs and poultry, she was equally successful; none of her ducks and turkeys ever died of neglect or carelessness, or to use the phrase of the poultry-yard on such occasions, of "ill-luck." Hannah's fowls never dreamed of sliding out of the world in such an ignoble way; they all lived to be killed, to make a noise at their deaths, as chickens should do. She was also a famous "scholar"; kept accounts, wrote bills, read letters, and answered them; was a trusty accomptant, and a safe confidante. There was no end to Hannah's usefulness or Hannah's kindness; and her prudence

was equal to either. Except to be kind or useful, she never left her home; attended no fairs, or revels, or mayings; went nowhere but to church; and seldom made a nearer approach to rustic revelry than by standing at her own garden-gate on a Sunday evening, with her little sister in her hand, to look at the lads and lasses on the green. In short, our village beauty had fairly reached her twentieth year without a sweetheart, without the slightest suspicion of her having ever written a love-letter on her own account; when, all on a sudden, appearances changed. She was missing at the "accustomed gate"; and one had seen a young man go into Dame Wilson's; and another had descried a trim, elastic figure walking, not unaccompanied, down the shady lane. Matters were quite clear. Hannah had gotten a lover; and, when poor little Susan, who, deserted by her sister, ventured to peep rather nearer to the gay group, was laughingly questioned on the subject, the hesitating No, and the half Yes, of the smiling child, were equally conclusive.

Since the new marriage act,¹ we, who belong to country magistrates, have gained a priority over the rest of the parish in matrimonial news. We (the privileged) see on a work-day the names which the sabbath announces to the generality. Many a blushing, awkward pair hath our little lame clerk (a sorry Cupid!) ushered in between dark and light to stammer and hacker, to bow and curtsy, to sign or make a

¹ It is almost unnecessary to observe, that this little story was written during the short life of that whimsical experiment in legislation.

mark, as it pleases Heaven. One Saturday, at the usual hour, the limping clerk made his appearance; and walking through our little hall, I saw a fine athletic young man, the very image of health and vigour, mental and bodily, holding the hand of a young woman, who, with her head half buried in a geranium in the window, was turning bashfully away, listening, and yet not seeming to listen, to his tender whispers. The shrinking grace of that bending figure was not to be mistaken. "Hannah!" and she went aside with me, and a rapid series of questions and answers conveyed the story of the courtship. "William was," said Hannah, a "journeyman hatter in B. He had walked over one Sunday evening to see the cricketing, and then he came again. Her mother liked him. Everybody liked her William—and she had promised—she was going—was it wrong?"—"Oh no! and where are you to live?"—"William has got a room in B. He works for Mr Smith, the rich hatter in the market-place, and Mr Smith speaks of him—oh, so well! But William will not tell me where our room is. I suppose in some narrow street or lane, which he is afraid I shall not like, as our common is so pleasant. He little thinks—anywhere."—She stopped suddenly; but her blush and her clasped hands finished the sentence, "anywhere with him!"—"And when is the happy day?"—"On Monday fortnight, Madam," said the bridegroom-elect, advancing with the little clerk to summon Hannah to the parlour, "the earliest day possible." He drew her arm through his, and we parted.

The Monday fortnight was a glorious morning;

one of those rare November days when the sky and the air are soft and bright as in April. "What a beautiful day for Hannah!" was the first exclamation of the breakfast table. "Did she tell you where they should dine?"—"No, Ma'am; I forgot to ask."—"I can tell you," said the master of the house, with somewhat of good-humoured importance in his air, somewhat of the look of a man, who having kept a secret as long as it was necessary, is not sorry to get rid of the burthen. "I can tell you: in London."—"In London!"—"Yes. Your little favourite has been in high luck. She has married the only son of one of the best and richest men in B., Mr Smith, the great hatter. It is quite a romance," continued he: "William Smith walked over one Sunday evening to see a match at cricket. He saw our pretty Hannah, and forgot to look at the cricketers. After having gazed his fill, he approached to address her, and the little damsel was off like a bird. William did not like her the less for that, and thought of her the more. He came again and again; and at last contrived to tame this wild dove, and even to get the *entrée* of the cottage. Hearing Hannah talk is not the way to fall out of love with her. So William, at last finding his case serious, laid the matter before his father, and requested his consent to the marriage. Mr Smith was at first a little startled; but William is an only son, and an excellent son; and, after talking with me, and looking at Hannah (I believe her sweet face was the more eloquent advocate of the two), he relented; and having a spice of his son's romance, finding that he had not mentioned his situation in life, he made a

point of its being kept secret till the wedding-day. We have managed the business of settlements; and William, having discovered that his fair bride has some curiosity to see London (a curiosity, by-the-bye, which I suspect she owes to you or poor Lucy), intends taking her thither for a fortnight. He will then bring her home to one of the best houses in B., a fine garden, fine furniture, fine clothes, fine servants, and more money than she will know what to do with. Really the surprise of Lord E.'s farmer's daughter, when, thinking she had married his steward, he brought her to Burleigh, and installed her as its mistress, could hardly have been greater. I hope the shock will not kill Hannah though, as is said to have been the case with that poor lady."—"Oh no! Hannah loves her husband too well. Anywhere with him."

And I was right. Hannah has survived the shock. She is returned to B., and I have been to call on her. I never saw anything so delicate and bride-like as she looked in her white gown and her lace mob, in a room light and simple, and tasteful and elegant, with nothing fine except some beautiful greenhouse plants. Her reception was a charming mixture of sweetness and modesty, a little more respectful than usual, and far more shamefaced! Poor thing! her cheeks must have pained her! But this was the only difference. In everything else she is still the same Hannah, and has lost none of her old habits of kindness and gratitude. She was making a handsome matronly cap, evidently for her mother, and spoke, even with tears, of her new father's goodness to her and to Susan. She would fetch the cake

and wine herself, and would gather, in spite of all remonstrance, some of her choicest flowers as a parting nosegay. She did, indeed, just hint at her troubles with visitors and servants—how strange and sad it was! seemed distressed at ringing the bell, and visibly shrank from the sound of a double knock. But, in spite of these calamities, Hannah is a happy woman. The double rap was her husband's; and the glow on her cheek, and the smile of her lips and eyes when he appeared, spoke more plainly than ever, "Anywhere with him!"



MODERN ANTIQUES

EARLY in the present century there lived in the ancient town of B. two complete and remarkable specimens of the ladies of eighty years ago—ladies cased inwardly and outwardly in Addison and whalebone. How they had been preserved in this entireness, amidst the collision and ridicule of a country town, seemed as puzzling a question as the preservation of bees in amber, or mummies in pyramids, or any other riddle that serves to amuse the naturalist or the antiquarian. But so it was. They were old maids and sisters, and so alike in their difference from all other women, that they may be best described together; any little non-resemblance may be noted afterwards; it was no more than nature, prodigal of variety, would make in two leaves from the same oak-tree.

Both, then, were as short as women well could be without being entitled to the name of dwarf, or carried about to fairs for a show;—both were made considerably shorter by the highest of all high heels, and the tallest of all tall caps, each of which artificial elevations was as ostentatiously conspicuous as the legs and cover of a pipkin, and served equally to add to the squatness of the real machine; both were lean,

wrinkled, withered, and old ; both enveloped their aged persons in the richest silks, displayed over large hoops, and stays the tightest and stiffest that ever pinched in a beauty of George the Second's reign. The gown was of that make formerly, I believe, called a *sacque*, and of a pattern so enormous, that one flower, with its stalk and leaves, would nearly cover the three quarters of a yard in length, of which the tail might, at a moderate computation, consist. Over this they wore a gorgeously figured apron, whose flourishing white embroidery vied in size with the plants on the robe ; a snowy muslin neckerchief, rigidly pinned down ; and over that a black lace tippet of the same shape, parting at the middle, to display a gay breast-knot. The riband of which this last decoration was composed was generally of the same hue with that which adorned the towering lappeted cap, a sort of poppy colour, which they called *Pompadour*. The sleeves were cut off below the elbows with triple ruffles of portentous length. Brown leather mittens, with peaks turned back, and lined with blue satin, and a variety of tall rings in an odd, out-of-fashion variety of enamelling, and figures of hair, completed the decoration of their hands and arms. The carriage of these useful members was at least equally singular ; they had adapted themselves in a remarkable manner to the little taper wasp-like point in which the waist ended, to which the elbows, ruffles and all, adhered as closely as if they had been glued, whilst the ringed and mittened hands, when not employed in knitting were crossed saltier-wise, in front of the apron. The other termination of their figure was adorned with black stuff shoes, very

peaked, with points upwards, and massive silver buckles. Their walking costume was, in winter, a black silk cloak lined with rabbit skins, with holes for the arms: in summer, another tippet and a calash:—no bonnet could hold the turreted cap. Their motion out of doors was indescribable; it most nearly resembled sailing. They seemed influenced by the wind in a way incidental to no moving thing, except a ship or a shuttlecock; and, indeed, one boisterous blowing night, about the equinox, when standing on some high stone steps, waiting for a carriage to take her home from a party, the wind did catch one of them, and, but for the intervention of a tall footman, who seized her as one would seize a fly-away umbrella, and held her down by main force, the poor little lady would have been carried up like an air-balloon. Her feelings must have been pretty much similar to those of Gulliver in Brobdingnag, when flown away with by the eagle. Half a minute later, and she was gone.

So far they were exact counterparts. The chief variation lay in the face. Amidst the general hue of age and wrinkles, you could just distinguish that Mrs Theodosia had been brown, and Mrs Frances fair. There was a yellow shine here and there amongst the white hairs, curiously rolled over a cushion high above the forehead, that told of Fanny's golden locks; whilst the purely grey rouleau of Mrs Theodosia showed its mixture of black and white still plainer. Mrs Frances, too, had the blue eye, with a laughing light, which so often retains its flash to extreme age; whilst Mrs Theodosia's orbs, bright no longer, had once been hazel. Mrs Theodosia's

aquiline nose, and long sociable chin, evinced that disposition to meet which is commonly known by the name of a pair of nut-crackers; Mrs Frances' features, on the other hand, were rather terse and sharp. Still there was, in spite of these material differences, that look of kindred, that inexplicable and indefinable family likeness, which is so frequently found in sisters; greatly increased in the present case by a similarity in the voice that was quite startling. Both tongues were quick and clear, and high and rattling, to a degree that seemed rather to belong to machinery than to human articulation; and when welcomes and how-d'ye-dos were pouring both at once on either side, a stranger was apt to gaze in ludicrous perplexity, as if beset by a ventriloquist, or haunted by strange echoes. When the immediate cackle subsided, they were easily distinguished. Mrs Theodosia was good, and kind, and hospitable, and social; Mrs Frances was all that, and was besides shrewd, and clever, and literary, to a degree not very common in her day, though not approaching to the pitch of a blue-stockings lady of the present. Accident was partly the cause of this unusual love of letters. They had known Richardson; had been admitted amongst his flower-garden of young ladies; and still talked familiarly of Miss Highmore, Miss Fielding, Miss Collier, and Miss Mulso—they had never learned to call her Mrs Chapone. Latterly the taste had been renewed and quickened, by their having the honour of a distant relationship to one of the most amiable and unfortunate of modern poets. So Mrs Frances studied novels and poetry, in addition to her sister's sermons and cookery books; though

(as she used to boast) without doing a stitch the less of knitting, or playing a pool the fewer in the course of the year. Their usual occupations were those of other useful old ladies; superintending the endowed girls' school of the town with a vigilance and a jealousy of abuses that might have done honour to Mr Hume; taking an active part in the more private charities, donations of flannel petticoats, or the loan of baby-things; visiting in a quiet way; and going to church whenever the church door was open.

Their abode was a dwelling ancient and respectable, like themselves, that looked as if it had never undergone the slightest variation, inside and out, since they had been born in it. The rooms were many, low, and small; full of little windows with little panes, and chimneys stuck perversely in the corners. The furniture was exactly to correspond; little patches of carpets in the middle of the slippery, dry-rubbed floors; tables and chairs of mahogany, black with age, but exceedingly neat and bright; and Japan cabinets and old China, which Mr Beckford might have envied—treasures which have either never gone out of fashion, or have come in again. The garden was beautiful, and beautifully placed; a series of terraces descending to rich and finely timbered meadows, through which the slow magnificent Thames rolled under the chalky hills of the pretty village of C. It was bounded on one side by the remains of an old friary, the end wall of a chapel with a Gothic window of open tracery in high preservation, as rich as point lace. It was full too of old-fashioned durable flowers, jessamine, honeysuckle, and the high-scented *fraxinella*; I never saw that delicious plant in such

profusion. The garden-walks were almost as smooth as the floors, thanks to the two assiduous serving maidens (nothing like a man-servant ever entered that maidenly abode) who attended it. One, the under damsel, was a stout strapping country wench, changed from time to time as it happened; the other was as much a fixture as her mistresses. She had lived with them for forty years, and, except being twice as big and twice as tall, might have passed for another sister. She wore their gowns (the two just made her one), caps, ruffles, and aprons; talked with their voices and their phrases; followed them to church, and school, and market; scolded the school-mistress; heard the children their Catechism; cut out flannel petticoats, and knit stockings to give away. Never was so complete an instance of assimilation! She had even become like them in face.

Having a brother who resided at a beautiful seat in the neighbourhood, and being to all intents and purposes of the patrician order, their visitors were very select, and rather more from the country than the town. Six formed the general number—one table—a rubber or a pool—seldom more. As the only child of a very favourite friend, I used, during the holidays, to be admitted as a supernumerary; at first out of compliment to mamma; latterly I stood on my own merits. I was found to be a quiet little girl; an excellent hander of muffins and cake; a connoisseur in green tea; an amateur of quadrille—the most entertaining of all games to a looker-on; and, lastly and chiefly, a great lover and admirer of certain books, which filled two little shelves at cross corners with the chimney—namely, that volume of

Cowper's Poems which contained "John Gilpin," and the whole seven volumes of "Sir Charles Grandison." With what delight I used to take down those dear books! It was an old edition;—perhaps that very first edition which, as Mrs Barbauld says, the fine ladies used to hold up to one another at Ranelagh—and adorned with prints, not certainly of the highest merit as works of art, but which served exceedingly to realize the story, and to make us, as it were, personally acquainted with the characters. The costume was pretty much that of my worthy hostesses, especially that of the two Miss Selbys; there was even in Miss Nancy's face a certain likeness to Mrs Frances. I remember I used to wonder whether she carried her elbows in the same way. How I read and believed, and believed and read; and liked Lady G., though I thought her naughty; and gave all my wishes to Harriet, though I thought her silly; and loved Emily with my whole heart! Clementina I did not quite understand; nor (I am half afraid to say so) do I now; and Sir Charles I positively disliked. He was the only thing in the book that I disbelieved. Those bowings seemed incredible. At last, however, I extended my faith even to him; partly influenced by the irresistibility of the author, partly by the appearance of a real living beau, who in the matter of bowing might almost have competed with Sir Charles himself. This beau was no other than the town member, who, with his brother, was, when in the country, the constant attendant at these chosen parties.

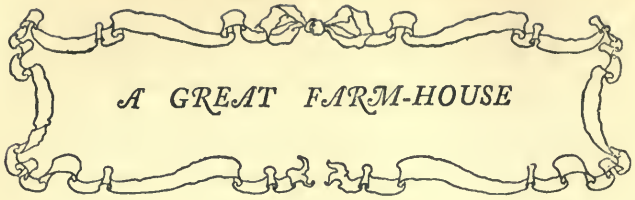
Our member was a man of seventy, or there-

about, but wonderfully young-looking, and well-preserved. It was said, indeed, that no fading belle was better versed in cosmetic secrets, or more devoted to the duties of the toilet. Fresh, upright, unwrinkled, pearly-teethed, and point device in his accoutrements, he might have passed for fifty; and doubtless often did pass for such when apart from his old-looking younger brother; who, tall, lanky, shambling, long-visaged, and loosely dressed, gave a very vivid idea of Don Quixote, when stripped of his armour. Never was so consummate a courtier as our member! Of good family and small fortune, he had early in life been seized with the desire of representing the town in which he resided; and canvassing, sheer canvassing, without eloquence, without talent, without bribery, had brought him in and kept him in. There his ambition stopped. To be a member of parliament was with him not the means but the end of advancement. For forty years he represented an independent borough, and, though regularly voting with every successive ministry, was, at the end of his career, as poor as when he began. He never sold himself, or stood suspected of selling himself—perhaps he might sometimes give himself away. But that he could not help. It was almost impossible for him to say No to anybody—quite so to a minister, or a constituent, or a constituent's wife or daughter. So he passed bowing and smiling through the world, the most disinterested of courtiers, the most subservient of upright men, with little other annoyance than a septennial alarm—for sometimes an opposition was threatened, and sometimes it came; but then he went through a double course of smirks and hand-

shakings, and all was well again. The great grievance of his life must have been the limitation in the number of franks. His apologies, when he happened to be full, were such as a man would make for a great fault; his lamentations, such as might become a great misfortune. Of course there was something ludicrous in his courtliness, but it was not contemptible; it only wanted to be obviously disinterested to become respectable. The expression might be exaggerated; but the feeling was real. He was always ready to show kindness to the utmost of his power to any human being. He would have been just as civil and supple if he had not been M.P. It was his vocation. He could not help it.

This excellent person was an old bachelor; and there was a rumour, some forty or fifty years old, that in the days of their bloom, there had been a little love affair, an attachment, some even said an engagement, how broken none could tell, between him and Mrs Frances. Certain it is, that there were symptoms of flirtation still. His courtesy, always gallant to every female, had something more real and more tender towards "Fanny," as he was wont to call her; and Fanny, on her side, was as conscious as heart could desire. She blushed and bridled! fidgeted with her mittens or her apron; flirted a fan nearly as tall as herself, and held her head on one side with that peculiar air which I have noted in the shy birds, and ladies in love. She manœuvred to get him next her at the tea-table; liked to be his partner at whist; loved to talk of him in his absence; knew to an hour the time of his return;

and did not dislike a little gentle raillery on the subject—even I—But, traitress to my sex, how can I jest with such feelings? Rather let me sigh over the world of woe, that in fifty years of hopeless constancy must have passed through that maiden heart! The timid hope; the sickening suspense; the slow, slow, fear; the bitter disappointment; the powerless anger; the relenting; the forgiveness; and then again, that interest, kinder, truer, more unchanging than friendship, that lingering woman's love—Oh how can I jest over such feelings? They are passed away—for she is gone, and he—but they clung by her to the last, and ceased only in death.



A GREAT FARM-HOUSE

THESE are bad times for farmers. I am sorry for it. Independently of all questions of policy, as a mere matter of taste and of old association, it is a fine thing to witness the hearty hospitality and to think of the social happiness of a great farm-house. No situation in life seemed so richly privileged; none had so much power for good and so little for evil; it seemed a place where pride could not live and poverty could not enter. These thoughts pressed on my mind the other day in passing the green sheltered lane, overhung with trees like an avenue, that leads to the great farm at M., where ten or twelve years ago I used to spend so many pleasant days. I could not help advancing a few paces up the lane, and then turning to lean over the gate, seemingly gazing on the rich undulating valley crowned with woody hills, which, as I stood under the dark and shady arch, lay bathed in the sunshine before me, but really absorbed in thoughts of other times, in recollections of the old delights of that delightful place, and of the admirable qualities of its owners. How often had I opened the gate, and how gaily—certain of meeting a smiling welcome—and what a picture of comfort it was!



*Symptoms of
Christianity still.*

Passing up the lane we used first to encounter a thick solid suburb of ricks of all sorts, shapes, and dimensions. Then came the farm, like a town; a magnificent series of buildings, stables, cart-houses, cow-houses, granaries, and barns, that might hold half the corn of the parish, placed at all angles towards each other, and mixed with smaller habitations for pigs, dogs, and poultry. They formed, together with the old substantial farm-house, a sort of amphitheatre, looking over a beautiful meadow, which swept greenly and abruptly down into fertile enclosures, richly set with hedgerow timber, oak, and ash, and elm. Both the meadow and the farm-yard swarmed with inhabitants of the earth and of the air; horses, oxen, cows, calves, heifers, sheep, and pigs; beautiful greyhounds, all manner of poultry, a tame goat, and a pet donkey.

The master of this land of plenty was well fitted to preside over it; a thick, stout man of middle height, and middle-aged, with a healthy, ruddy, square face, all alive with intelligence and good-humour. There was a lurking jest in his eye, and a smile about the corners of his firmly closed lips, that gave assurance of good-fellowship. His voice was loud enough to have hailed a ship at sea, without the assistance of a speaking-trumpet, wonderfully rich and round in its tones, and harmonising admirably with his bluff, jovial visage. He wore his dark shining hair combed straight over his forehead, and had a trick, when particularly merry, of stroking it down with his hand. The moment his hand approached his head, out flew a jest.

Besides his own great farm, the business of

which seemed to go on like machinery, always regular, prosperous, and unfailing—besides this, and two or three constant stewardships, and a perpetual succession of arbitrations, in which, such was the influence of his acuteness, his temper, and his sturdy justice, that he was oftener named by both parties, and left to decide alone—in addition to these occupations he was a sort of standing overseer and churchwarden; he ruled his own hamlet like a despotic monarch, and took a prime minister's share in the government of the large parish to which it was attached; and one of the gentlemen whose estates he managed, being the independent member of an independent borough, he had every now and then a contested election on his shoulders. Even that did not discompose him. He had always leisure to receive his friends at home, or to visit them abroad; to take journeys to London, or make excursions to the seaside; was as punctual in pleasure as in business, and thought being happy and making happy as much the purpose of his life as getting rich. His great amusement was coursing. He kept several brace of capital greyhounds, so high-blooded, that I remember when five of them were confined in five different kennels on account of their ferocity. The greatest of living painters once called a greyhound, "the line of beauty in perpetual motion." Our friend's large dogs were a fine illustration of this remark. His old dog, Hector, for instance, for whom he refused a hundred guineas—what a superb dog was Hector!—a model of grace and symmetry, necked and crested like an Arabian, and bearing himself with a stateliness and gallantry which showed some "con-

science of his worth." He was the largest dog I ever saw; but so finely proportioned, that the most determined fault-finder could call him neither too long nor too heavy. There was not an inch too much of him. His colour was the purest white, entirely unspotted, except that his head was very regularly and richly marked with black. Hector was certainly a perfect beauty. But the little bitches, on which his master piqued himself still more, were not in my poor judgment so admirable. They were pretty little round, graceful things, sleek and glossy, and for the most part milk-white, with the smallest heads, and the most dove-like eyes that were ever seen. There was a peculiar sort of innocent beauty about them, like that of a roly-poly child. They were as gentle as lambs too: all the evil spirit of the family evaporated in the gentlemen. But, to my thinking, these pretty creatures were fitter for the parlour than the field. They were strong, certainly, excellently loined, cat-footed, and chested like a war-horse; but there was a want of length about them—a want of room, as the coursers say; something a little, a very little, inclined to the clumsy; a dumpiness, a pointer-look. They went off like an arrow from a bow; for the first hundred yards nothing could stand against them; then they began to flag, to find their weight too much for their speed, and to lose ground from the shortness of the stroke. Up-hill, however, they were capital. There their compactness told. They turned with the hare, and lost neither wind nor way in the sharpest ascent. I shall never forget one single-handed course of our good friend's favourite little bitch

Helen, on W. hill. All the coursers were in the valley below, looking up to the hillside as on a moving picture. I suppose she turned the hare twenty times on a piece of greensward not much bigger than an acre, and as steep as the roof of a house. It was an old hare, a famous hare, one that had baffled half the dogs in the country; but she killed him; and then, though almost as large as herself, took it up in her mouth, brought it to her master, and laid it down at his feet. Oh, how pleased he was! and what a pleasure it was to see his triumph! He did not always find W. hill so fortunate. It is a high steep hill, of a conical shape, encircled by a mountain road winding up to the summit like a corkscrew—a deep road dug out of the chalk, and fenced by high mounds on either side. The hares always make for this hollow way, as it is called, because it is too wide for a leap, and the dogs lose much time in mounting and descending the sharp acclivities. Very eager dogs, however, will sometimes dare the leap, and two of our good friend's favourite greyhounds perished in the attempt in two following years. They were found dead in the hollow way. After this he took a dislike to coursing meetings, and sported chiefly on his own beautiful farm.

His wife was like her husband, with a difference, as they say in heraldry. Like him in looks, only thinner and paler; like him in voice and phrase, only not so loud; like him in merriment and good-humour; like him in her talent of welcoming and making happy, and being kind; like him in cherishing an abundance of pets, and in getting through with marvellous

facility an astounding quantity of business and pleasure. Perhaps the quality in which they resembled each other most completely was the happy ease and serenity of behaviour, so seldom found amongst people of the middle rank, who have usually a best manner and a worst, and whose best (that is, the studied, the company manner) is so very much the worst. She was frankness itself; entirely free from prickly defiance or bristling self-love. She never took offence or gave it; never thought of herself or of what others would think of her; had never been afflicted with the besetting sins of her station, a dread of the vulgar, or an aspiration of the genteel. Those "words of fear" had never disturbed her delightful heartiness.

Her pets were her cows, her poultry, her bees, and her flowers; chiefly her poultry, almost as numerous as the bees, and as various as the flowers. The farm-yard swarmed with peacocks, turkeys, geese, tame and wild ducks, fowls, guinea-hens, and pigeons; besides a brood or two of favourite bantams in the green court before the door, with a little ridiculous strutter of a cock at their head, who imitated the magnificent demeanour of the great Tom of the barn-yard, just as Tom in his turn copied the fierce bearing of that warlike and terrible biped, the he-turkey. I am the least in the world afraid of a turkey-cock, and used to steer clear of the turkery as often as I could. Commend me to the peaceable vanity of that jewel of a bird, the peacock, sweeping his gorgeous tail along the grass, or dropping it gracefully from some low-boughed tree, whilst he turns round his crested head with the air of a birthday

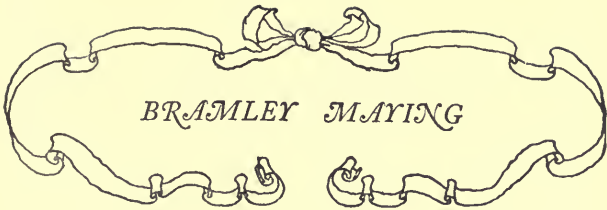
belle, to see who admires him. What a glorious creature it is! How thoroughly content with himself and with all the world!

Next to her poultry our good farmer's wife loved her flower-garden; and, indeed, it was of the very first water, the only thing about the place that was fine. She was a real, genuine florist; valued pinks, tulips, and auriculas, for certain qualities of shape and colour, with which beauty has nothing to do; preferred black ranunculuses, and gave in to all those obliquities of a triple-refined taste by which the professed florist contrives to keep pace with the vagaries of the Bibliomaniac. Of all odd fashions, that of dark, gloomy, dingy flowers, appears to me the oddest. Your true connoisseurs now shall prefer a deep puce hollyhock to the gay pink blossoms which cluster round that splendid plant like a pyramid of roses. So did she. The nomenclature of her garden was more distressing still. One is never thoroughly sociable with flowers till they are naturalised, as it were, christened, provided with decent, homely, well-wearing English names. Now her plants had all sorts of heathenish appellations, which—no offence to her learning—always sounded wrong. I liked the bees' garden best; the plot of ground immediately round their hives, filled with common flowers for their use, and literally "redolent of sweets." Bees are insects of great taste in every way, and seem often to select for beauty as much as for flavour. They have a better eye for colour than the florist. The butterfly is also a dilettante. Rover though he be, he generally prefers the blossoms that become him best. What a pretty picture it is, in a sunshiny

autumn day, to see a bright spotted butterfly, made up of gold and purple and splendid brown, swinging on the rich flower of the china aster!

To come back to our farm. Within doors, everything went as well as without. There were no fine misses sitting before the piano, and mixing the alloy of their new-fangled tinsel with the old sterling metal; nothing but an only son, excellently brought up, a fair, slim youth, whose extraordinary and somewhat pensive elegance of mind and manner was thrown into fine relief by his father's loud hilarity, and harmonised delightfully with the smiling kindness of his mother. His Spencers and Thomsons, too, looked well amongst the hyacinths and geraniums that filled the windows of the little snug room in which they usually sat; a sort of after-thought, built at an angle from the house, and looking into the farm-yard. It was closely packed with favourite arm-chairs, favourite sofas, favourite tables, and a side-board decorated with the prize cups and collars of the greyhounds, and generally loaded with substantial work-baskets, jars of flowers, great pyramids of home-made cakes, and sparkling bottles of gooseberry wine, famous all over the country. The walls were covered with portraits of half-a-dozen greyhounds, a brace of spaniels as large as life, an old pony, and the master and mistress of the house in half-length. She as unlike as possible, prim, mincing, delicate, in lace and satin; he so staringly and ridiculously like, that when the picture fixed its good-humoured eyes upon you as you entered the room, you were almost tempted to say—How d'ye do!—Alas! the portraits are now gone, and the originals.

Death and distance have despoiled that pleasant home. The garden has lost its smiling mistress; the greyhounds their kind master; and new people, new manners, and new cares, have taken possession of the old abode of peace and plenty—the great farm-house.



MR GEOFFREY CRAYON has, in his delightful but somewhat fanciful writings, brought into general view many old sports and customs, some of which, indeed, still linger about the remote counties, familiar as local peculiarities to their inhabitants, whilst the greater part lie buried in books of the Elizabethan age, known only to the curious in English literature. One rural custom which would have enchanted him, and which prevails in the north of Hampshire, he has not noticed, and probably does not know. Did any of my readers ever hear of a Maying? Let not any notions of chimney-sweeps soil the imagination of the gay Londoner! A country Maying is altogether a different affair from the street exhibitions which mix so much pity with our mirth, and do the heart good, perhaps, but not by gladdening it. A country Maying is a meeting of the lads and lasses of two or three parishes, who assemble in certain erections of green boughs called May-houses, to dance and—but I am going to tell all about it in due order, and must not forestall my description.

Last year we went to Bramley Maying. There

had been two or three such merry-makings before in that inaccessible neighbourhood, where the distance from large towns, the absence of great houses, and the consequent want of all decent roads, together with a country of peculiar wildness and beauty, combined to produce a sort of modern Arcadia. We had intended to assist at a Maying in the forest of Pamber, thinking that the deep glades of that fine woodland scenery would be more congenial to the spirit of our English merriment, as it breathed more of Robin Hood and Maid Marian than a mere village green—to say nothing of its being of the two more accessible by four-footed and two-wheeled conveyances. But the Pamber day had been suffered to pass, and Bramley was the last Maying of the season. So to Bramley we went.

As we had a considerable distance to go, we set out about noon, intending to return to dinner at six. Never was a day more congenial to a happy purpose. It was a day made for country weddings and dances on the green—a day of dazzling light, of ardent sunshine falling on hedgerows and meadows fresh with spring showers. You might almost see the grass grow and the leaves expand under the influence of that vivifying warmth; and we passed through the well-known and beautiful scenery of W. Park, and the pretty village of M., with a feeling of new admiration, as if we had never before felt their charms; so glorious did the trees in their young leaves, the grass springing beneath them, the patches of golden broom and deeper furze, the cottages covered with roses, the blooming orchards, and the light snowy

sprays of the cherry trees tossing their fair blossoms across the deep blue sky, pour upon the eye the full magic of colour. On we passed gaily and happily as far as we knew our way—perhaps a little further, for the place of our destination was new to both of us, when we had the luck, good or bad, to meet with a director in the person of the butcher of M. My companion is known to most people within a circuit of ten miles; so we had ready attention and most civil guidance from the man of beef and mutton—a prodigious person, almost as big as a prize ox, as rosy and jovial-looking as Falstaff himself, who was standing in the road with a slender shrewd-looking boy, apt and ready enough to have passed for the page. He soon gave us the proper, customary, and unintelligible directions as to the lanes and turnings—first to the right, then to the left, then round Farmer Jennings' close, then across the Holy Brook, then to the right again—till at last, seeing us completely bewildered, he offered to send the boy, who was going our way for half-a-mile to carry out a shoulder of veal, to attend us to that distance as a guide; an offer gratefully accepted by all parties, especially the lad, whom we relieved of his burden and took up behind, where he swung in an odd but apparently satisfactory posture, between running and riding. While he continued with us we fell into no mistakes; but at last he and the shoulder of veal reached their place of destination; and after listening to a repetition, or perhaps a variation, of the turns right and left which were to conduct us to Bramley green, we and our little guide parted.

On we went, twisting and turning through a labyrinth of lanes, getting deeper and deeper every moment, till at last, after many doubtings, we became fairly convinced that we had lost our way. Not a soul was in the fields; not a passenger in the road; not a cottage by the roadside; so on we went—I am afraid to say how far (for when people have lost their way they are not the most accurate measurers of distance)—till we came suddenly on a small farm-house, and saw at once that the road we had trodden led to that farm, and thither only. The solitary farm-house had one solitary inmate, a smiling middle-aged woman, who came to us and offered her services with the most alert civility:—"All her boys and girls were gone to the Maying," she said, "and she remained to keep house."—"The Maying! We are near Bramley, then?"—"Only two miles the nearest way across the field—were we going?—she would see to the horse—we should soon be there, only over that stile, and then across that field, and then turn to the right, and then take the next turning—no! the next but one to the left."—Right and left again for two miles over those deserted fields!—Right and left! we shuddered at the words. "Is there no carriage-road?—Where are we?"—"At Silchester, close to the walls, only half-a-mile from the church."—"At Silchester!" and in ten minutes we had said a thankful farewell to our kind informant, had retraced our steps a little, had turned up another lane, and found ourselves at the foot of that commanding spot which antiquaries call the amphitheatre, close under the walls of the Roman city, and in full view of an old

acquaintance, the schoolmaster of Silchester, who happened to be there in his full glory, playing the part of Cicerone to a party of ladies, and explaining far more than he knows, or than any one knows, of streets, and gates, and sites of temples, which, by-the-bye, the worthy pedagogue usually calls parish churches. I never was so glad to see him in my life, never thought he could have spoken with so much sense and eloquence as were comprised in the two words, "straight forward," by which he answered our inquiry as to the road to Bramley.

And forward we went by a way beautiful beyond description: a road bounded on one side by every variety of meadow, and corn-field, and rich woodland; on the other, by the rock-like walls of the old city, crowning an abrupt, magnificent bank of turf, broken by fragments, crags as it were, detached from the ruin, and young trees, principally ash, with silver stems standing out in picturesque relief from the green slope, and itself crowned with every sort of vegetation, from the rich festoons of briar and ivy which garlanded its side, to the venerable oaks and beeches which nodded on its summit. I never saw anything so fine in my life. To be sure, we nearly broke our necks. Even I, who, having been overset astonishingly often, without any harm happening, have acquired, from frequency of escape, the confidence of escaping, and the habit of not caring for that particular danger, which is, I suppose, what in a man, and in battle, would be called courage; even I was glad enough to get out, and do all I could towards wriggling the gig round the rock-like stones, or sometimes helping to lift the

wheel over the smaller impediments. We escaped that danger, and left the venerable walls behind us.—But I am losing my way here, too; I must loiter on the road no longer. Our other delays of a broken bridge—a bog—another wrong turning—and a meeting with a loaded wagon, in a lane too narrow to pass—all this must remain untold.

At last we reached a large farm-house at Bramley; another mile remained to the green, but that was impassable. Nobody thinks of riding at Bramley. The late lady of the manor, when at rare and uncertain intervals she resided for a few weeks at her house of B. R., used, in visiting her only neighbour, to drive her coach and four through her farmer's ploughed fields. We must walk: but the appearance of gay crowds of rustics, all passing along one path, gave assurance that this time we should not lose our way. Oh, what a pretty path it was! along one sunny sloping field, up and down, dotted with trees like a park; then across a deep shady lane, with cows loitering and cropping grass from the banks; then up a long narrow meadow, in the very pride and vigour of its greenness, richly bordered by hedgerow timber, and terminating in the churchyard and a little country church.

Bramley church is well worth seeing. It contains that rare thing, a monument fine in itself, and finer in its situation. We had heard of it, and in spite of the many delays we had experienced, could not resist the temptation of sending one of the loiterers, who seemed to stand in the churchyard as a sort of out-guard to the Maying, to the vicar's

house for the key. Prepared as we had been to see something unusual, we were very much struck. The church is small, simple, decaying, almost ruinous; but as you turn from the entrance into the central aisle, and advance up to the altar, your eye falls on a lofty recess, branching out like a chapel on one side, and seen through a Gothic arch. It is almost paved with monumental brasses of the proud family of B., who have possessed the surrounding property from the time of the Conqueror; and in the centre of the large open space stands a large monument, surrounded by steps, on which reclines the figure of a dying man, with a beautiful woman leaning over him, full of a lovely look of anxiety and tenderness. The figures are very fine; but that which makes the grace and glory of this remarkable piece of sculpture, is its being backed by an immense Gothic window, nearly the whole size of the recess, entirely composed of old stained glass. I do not know the story which the artist, in the series of pictures, intended to represent; but there they are, the gorgeous, glorious colours,—reds and purples, and greens, glowing like an anemone bed in the sunshine, or like one of the windows made of amethysts and rubies in the Arabian Tales, and throwing out the monumental figures with an effect almost magical. The parish clerk was at the Maying, and we had only an unlettered rustic to conduct us, so that I do not even know the name of the sculptor—he must have a strange mingled feeling if ever he saw his work in its present home—delight that it looks so well, and regret that there is no one to look at it. That monument alone was worth losing our way for.

But across two fields more, and up a quiet lane, and we are at the Maying, announced afar off by the merry sound of music, and the merrier clatter of childish voices. Here we are at the green—a little turf spot, where three roads meet, close shut in by hedgerows, with a pretty white cottage, and its long slip of a garden at one angle. I had no expectation of scenery so compact, so like a glade in a forest; it is quite a cabinet picture, with green trees for the frame. In the midst grows a superb horse-chestnut, in the full glory of its flowery pyramids, and from the trunk of the chestnut the May-houses commence. They are covered alleys built of green boughs, decorated with garlands and great bunches of flowers, the gayest that blow—lilacs, Guelder-roses, peonies, tulips, stocks—hanging down like chandeliers among the dancers; for of dancers, gay, dark-eyed young girls in straw bonnets and white gowns, and their lovers in their Sunday attire, the May-houses were full. The girls had mostly the look of extreme youth, and danced well and quietly like ladies—too much so; I should have been glad to see less elegance and more enjoyment; and their partners, though not altogether so graceful, were as decorous and as indifferent as real gentlemen. It was quite like a ball-room, as pretty and almost as dull. Outside was the fun. It is the outside, the upper gallery of the world, that has that good thing. There were children laughing, eating, trying to cheat, and being cheated, round an ancient and practised vendor of oranges and gingerbread; and on the other side of the tree lay a merry group of old men, in coats almost as old as themselves, and young ones in no



Teaching little boys
and girls about
their ABC

coats at all, excluded from the dance by the disgrace of a smock-frock. Who would have thought of etiquette finding its way into the May-houses! That group would have suited Teniers; it smoked and drank a little, but it laughed a great deal more. There were a few decent, matronly-looking women, too, sitting in a cluster; and young mothers strolling about with infants in their arms; and ragged boys peeping through the boughs at the dancers; and the bright sun shining gloriously on all this innocent happiness. Oh, what a pretty sight it was! worth losing our way for—worth losing our dinner—both which events happened; whilst a party of friends, who were to have joined us, were far more unlucky; for they not only lost their way and their dinner, but rambled all day about the country, and never reached Bramley Maying.



*A PARTING
GLANCE AT OUR VILLAGE*

IT is now eighteen months since our village first sat for its picture, and I cannot say farewell to my courteous readers without giving them a little intelligence of our goings on—a sort of parting glance at us and our condition. In outward appearance it hath, I suppose, undergone less alteration than any place of its inches in the kingdom. There it stands, the same long straggling street of pretty cottages, divided by pretty gardens, wholly unchanged in size or appearance, unincreased and undiminished by a single brick. To be sure, yesterday evening a slight misfortune happened to our goodly tenement, occasioned by the unlucky diligence mentioned in my first notice, which, under the conduct of a sleepy coachman and a restive horse, contrived to knock down and demolish the wall of our court, and fairly to drive through the front garden, thereby destroying in its course sundry curious stocks, carnations, and geraniums. It is a mercy that the unruly steed was content with battering the wall; for the message itself would come about our ears at the touch of a finger, and really there is one little end-parlour, an afterthought of the original builder, which stands so temptingly in the way, that I wonder the sagacious

quadruped missed it. There was quite din enough without that addition. The three insides (ladies) squalling from the interior of that commodious vehicle; the outsides (gentlemen) swearing on the roof; the coachman, still half asleep, but unconsciously blowing his horn; we in the house screaming and scolding; the passers-by shouting and hallooing; and May, who little brooked such an invasion of her territories, barking in her tremendous lion-note, and putting down the other noises like a clap of thunder. But passengers, coachman, horses, and spectators all righted at last; and there is no harm done but to my flowers and to the wall. May, however, stands bewailing the ruins, for that low wall was her favourite haunt; she used to parade backwards and forwards on the top of it, as if to show herself, just after the manner of a peacock on the top of a house; and would sit or lie for hours on the corner next the gate, basking in the sunshine like a marble statue. Really she has quite the air of one who laments the destruction of personal property; but the wall is to be rebuilt to-morrow, with old weather-stained bricks — no patchwork! and exactly in the same form; May herself will not find the difference; so that in the way of alteration this little misfortune will pass for nothing. Neither have we any improvements worth calling such. Except that the wheeler's green door hath been retouched, out of the same pot (as I judge from the tint) with which he furbished up our new-old pony-chaise; that the shop-window of our neighbour, the universal dealer, hath been beautified, and his name and calling splendidly set forth in yellow letters on a black ground; and that our landlord of the Rose

hath hoisted a new sign of unparalleled splendour; one side consisting of a full-faced damask rose, of the size and hue of a peony, the other of a maiden blush in profile, which looks exactly like a carnation, so that both flowers are considerably indebted to the modesty of the "out-of-door artist," who has warily written *The Rose* under each!—except these trifling ornaments, which nothing but the jealous eye of a lover could detect, the dear place is altogether unchanged.

The only real improvement with which we have been visited for our sins—(I hate all innovations, whether for better or worse, as if I was a furious Tory, or a woman of threescore and ten)—the only misfortune of that sort which has befallen us is under foot. The road has been adjusted on the plan of Mr Macadam; and a tremendous operation it is. I do not know what good may ensue; but for the last six months some part or other of the highway has been impassable for any feet, except such as are shod by the blacksmith; and even the four-footed people who wear iron shoes make wry faces, poor things! at those stones, enemies to man and beast. However, the business is nearly done now; we are covered with sharp flints every inch of us, except a "bad step" up the hill, which, indeed, looks like a bit cut out of the deserts of Arabia, fitter for camels and caravans than for Christian horses and coaches; a point which, in spite of my dislike of alteration, I was forced to acknowledge to our surveyor, a portly gentleman, who, in a smart gig, drawn by a prancing steed, was kicking up a prodigious dust at that very moment. He and I ought to be great enemies; for, besides the

Macadamite enormity of the stony road, he hath actually been guilty of tree murder, having been accessory before the fact in the death of three limes along the rope-walk—dear, sweet, innocent limes, that did no harm on earth except shading the path! I never should have forgiven that offence, had not their removal, by opening a beautiful view from the village up the hill, reconciled even my tree-loving eye to their abstraction. And, to say the truth, though we have had twenty little squabbles, there is no bearing malice with our surveyor; he is so civil and good-humoured, has such a bustling and happy self-importance, such an honest earnestness in his vocation (which is gratuitous, by-the-bye), and such an intense conviction that the state of the turnpike road between B. and K. is the principal affair of this life, that I would not undeceive him for the world. How often have I seen him in a cold winter morning, with a face all frost and business, great-coated up to the eyes, driving from post to post, from one gang of labourers to another, praising, scolding, ordering, cheated, laughed at, and liked by them all! Well, when once the hill is finished, we shall have done with him for ever, as he used to tell me by way of consolation, when I shook my head at him, as he went jolting along over his dear new roads, at the imminent risk of his springs and his bones; we shall see no more of him; for the Macadam ways are warranted not to wear out. So be it; I never wish to see a road-mender again.

But if the form of outward things be all unchanged around us, if the dwellings of man remain the same to the sight and the touch, the little world

within hath undergone its usual mutations—the hive is the same, but of the bees some are dead and some are flown away, and some that we left insects in the shell are already putting forth their young wings. Children in our village really sprout up like mushrooms; the air is so promotive of growth, that the rogues spring into men and women, as if touched by Harlequin's wand, and are quite offended if one happens to say or do anything which has a reference to their previous condition. My father grievously affronted Sally L. only yesterday, by bestowing upon her a great lump of gingerbread, with which he had stuffed his pockets at a fair. She immediately, as she said, gave it to the "children." Now Sally cannot be above twelve, to my certain knowledge, though taller than I am. Lizzy herself is growing womanly. I actually caught that little lady stuck on a chest of drawers, contemplating herself in the glass, and striving with all her might to gather the rich curls that hung about her neck, and turn them under a comb. Well! If Sally and Lizzy live to be old maids, they may probably make the *amende honorable* to time, and wish to be thought young again. In the meanwhile, shall we walk up the street?

The first cottage is that of Mr H., the patriot, the illuminator, the independent and sturdy yet friendly member of our little state, who, stout and comely, with a handsome chaise-cart, a strong mare, and a neat garden, might have passed for a portrait of that enviable class of Englishmen, who, after a youth of frugal industry, sit down in some retired place, to "live upon their means." He and his wife seemed the happiest couple on earth: except a little

too much leisure, I never suspected that they had one trouble or one care. But Care, the witch, will come everywhere, even to that happiest station, and this prettiest place. She came in one of her most terrific forms—blindness—or (which is perhaps still more tremendous) the faint glimmering light and gradual darkness which precede the total eclipse. For a long time we had missed the pleasant bustling officiousness, the little services, the voluntary tasks which our good neighbour loved so well. Fruit-trees were blighted, and escaped his grand specific, fumigation; wasps multiplied, and their nests remained untraced; the cheerful modest knock with which, just at the very hour when he knew it could be spared, he presented himself to ask for the newspaper, was heard no more; he no longer hung over his gate to waylay passengers, and entice them into chat; at last he even left off driving his little chaise, and was only seen moping up and down the garden-walk, or stealing gropingly from the wood-pile to the house. He evidently shunned conversation or questions, forbade his wife to tell what ailed him, and even when he put a green shade over his darkened eyes, fled from human sympathy with a stern pride that seemed almost ashamed of the humbling infirmity. That strange (but to a vigorous and healthy man perhaps natural) feeling soon softened. The disease increased hourly, and he became dependent on his excellent wife for every comfort and relief. She had many willing assistants in her labour of love; all his neighbours strove to return, according to their several means, the kindness which all had received from him in some shape or other. The country boys, to whose

service he had devoted so much time, in shaping bats, constructing bows and arrows, and other quips and trickeries of the same nature, vied with each other in performing little offices about the yard and stable; and John Evans, the half-witted gardener, to whom he had been a constant friend, repaid his goodness by the most unwearied attention. Gratitude even seemed to sharpen poor John's perception and faculties. There is an old man in our parish workhouse who occasionally walks through the streets, led by a little boy holding the end of a long stick. The idea of this man, who had lived in utter blindness for thirty years, was always singularly distressing to Mr H. I shall never forget the address with which our simple gardener used to try to divert his attention from this miserable fellow-sufferer. He would get between them to prevent the possibility of recognition by the dim and uncertain vision; would talk loudly to drown the peculiar noise, the sort of duet of feet, caused by the quick short steps of the child, and the slow irregular tread of the old man; and, if anyone ventured to allude to blind Robert, he would turn the conversation with an adroitness and acuteness which might put to shame the proudest intellect. So passed many months. At last Mr H. was persuaded to consult a celebrated oculist, and the result was most comforting. The disease was ascertained to be a cataract; and now with the increase of darkness came an increase of hope. The film spread, thickened, ripened, speedily and healthily; and to-day the requisite operation has been performed with equal skill and success. You may still see some of the country boys lingering round the gate with looks

of strong and wondering interest ; poor John is going to and fro, he knows not for what, unable to rest a moment ; Mrs H., too, is walking in the garden, shedding tears of thankfulness ; and he who came to support their spirit, the stout, strong-hearted farmer A., seems trembling and overcome. The most tranquil person in the house is probably the patient : he bore the operation with resolute firmness, and *he has seen again*. Think of the bliss bound up in those four words ! He is in darkness now, and must remain so for some weeks ; but he has seen, and will see ; and that humble cottage is again a happy dwelling.

Next we come to the shoemaker's abode. All is unchanged there, except that its master becomes more industrious and more pale-faced, and that his fair daughter is a notable exemplification of the development which I have already noticed amongst our young things. But she is in the real transition state, just emerging from the chrysalis, and the eighteen months, between fourteen and a half and sixteen, would metamorphose a child into a woman all the world over. She is still pretty, but not so elegant as when she wore frocks and pinafores, and unconsciously classical, parted her long brown locks in the middle of her forehead, and twisted them up in a knot behind, giving to her finely shaped head and throat the air of a Grecian statue. Then she was stirring all day in her small housewifery, or her busy idleness, delving and digging in her flower-border, tossing and dandling every infant that came within her reach, feeding pigs and poultry, playing with May, and prattling with an open-hearted frankness

to the country lads, who assemble at evening in the shop to enjoy a little gentle gossiping; for be it known to my London readers, that the shoemaker's in a country village is now what (according to tradition and the old novels) the barber's used to be—the resort of all the male news-mongers, especially the young. Then she talked to these visitors gaily and openly, sang, and laughed, and ran in and out, and took no more thought of a young man than of a gosling. Then she was only fourteen. Now she wears gowns and aprons—puts her hair in paper—has left off singing, talks—has left off running, walks—nurses the infants with a grave solemn grace—has entirely cut her former playmate, Mayflower, who tosses her pretty head as much as to say—who cares?—and has nearly renounced all acquaintance with the visitors to the shop, who are by no means disposed to take matters so quietly. There she stands on the threshold, shy and demure, just vouchsafing a formal nod or a faint smile as they pass, and if she in her turn be compelled to pass the open door of their newsroom (for the working apartment is separate from the house), edging along as slyly and mincingly as if there were no such beings as young men in the world. Exquisite coquette! I think (she is my opposite neighbour, and I have a right to watch her doings—the right of retaliation) there is one youth particularly distinguished by her non-notice, one whom she never will see nor speak to, who stands a very fair chance to carry her off. He is called Jem Tanner, and is a fine lad, with an open ruddy

countenance, a clear blue eye, and curling hair of that tint which the poets are pleased to denominate golden. Though not one of our eleven, he was a promising cricketer. We have missed him lately on the green at the Sunday evening game, and I find on inquiry that he now frequents a chapel about a mile off, where he is the best male-singer, as our nymph of the shoe-shop is incomparably the first female. I am not fond of betting; but I would venture the lowest stake of gentility, a silver three-pence, that, before the winter ends, a wedding will be the result of these weekly meetings at the chapel. In the long dark evenings, when the father has enough to do in piloting the mother with conjugal gallantry through the dirty lanes, think of the opportunity that Jem will have to escort the daughter! A little difficulty he may have to encounter: the lass will be coy for a while; the mother will talk of their youth, the father of their finances; but the marriage, I doubt not, will ensue.

Next in order, on the other side of the street, is the blacksmith's house. Change has been busy here in a different and more awful form. Our sometime constable, the tipsiest of parish officers, of blacksmiths, and of men, is dead. Returning from a revel with a companion as full of beer as himself, one or the other, or both, contrived to upset the cart in a ditch (the living scapegrace is pleased to lay the blame of the mishap on the horse, but that is contrary to all probability, this respectable quadruped being a water-drinker); and inward bruises, acting on inflamed blood and an impaired constitution, carried him off in a very short time, leaving an ailing wife

and eight children, the eldest of whom is only fourteen years of age. This sounds like a very tragical story; yet, perhaps, because the loss of a drunken husband is not quite so great a calamity as the loss of a sober one, the effect of this event is not altogether so melancholy as might be expected. The widow, when she was a wife, had a complaining, broken-spirited air, a peevish manner, a whining voice, a dismal countenance, and a person so neglected and slovenly, that it was difficult to believe that she had once been remarkably handsome. She is now quite another woman. The very first Sunday she put on her weeds, we all observed how tidy and comfortable she looked, how much her countenance, in spite of a decent show of tears, was improved, and how completely through all her sighings her tone had lost its peevishness. I have never seen her out of spirits or out of humour since. She talks and laughs and bustles about, managing her journeymen and scolding her children as notably as any dame in the parish. The very house looks more cheerful; she has cut down the old willow trees that stood in the court, and let in the light; and now the sun glances brightly from the casement windows, and plays amidst the vine-leaves and the clusters of grapes which cover the walls; the door is newly painted, and shines like the face of its mistress; even the forge has lost half its dinginess. Everything smiles. She indeed talks by fits of "poor George," especially when any allusion to her old enemy, mine host of the Rose, brings the deceased to her memory; then she bewails (as is proper) her dear husband and her desolate condition; calls herself a lone widow; sighs

over her eight children; complains of the troubles of business, and tries to persuade herself and others that she is as wretched as a good wife ought to be. But this will not do. She is a happier woman than she has been any time these fifteen years, and she knows it. My dear village husbands, if you have a mind that your wives should be really sorry when you die, whether by a fall from a cart or otherwise, keep from the ale-house!

Next comes the tall thin red house, that ought to boast genteeler inmates than its short fat mistress, its children, its pigs, and its quantity of noise, happiness, and vulgarity. The din is greater than ever. The husband, a merry jolly tar, with a voice that sounds as if issuing from a speaking-trumpet, is returned from a voyage to India; and another little one, a chubby roaring boy, has added his lusty cries to the family concert.

This door, blockaded by huge bales of goods, and half darkened by that moving mountain, the tilted waggon of the S. mill, which stands before it, belongs to the village shop. Increase has been here too in every shape. Within fourteen months two little pretty quiet girls have come into the world. Before Fanny could well manage to totter across the road to her good friend the nymph of the shoe-shop, Margaret made her appearance; and poor Fanny, discarded at once from the maid's arms and her mother's knee, degraded from the rank and privileges of "the baby" (for at that age precedence is strangely reversed), would have had a premature foretaste of the instability of human felicity, had she not taken refuge with that best of nurses, a fond

father. Everything thrives about the shop, from the rosy children to the neat maid and the smart apprentice. No room now for lodgers, and no need! The young mantua-making schoolmistresses, the old inmates, are gone; one of them not very far. She grew tired of scolding little boys and girls about their A B C, and of being scolded in her turn by their sisters and mothers about pelisses and gowns; so she gave up both trades almost a year ago, and has been ever since our pretty Harriet. I do not think she has ever repented of the exchange, though it might not perhaps have been made so soon, had not her elder sister, who had been long engaged to an attendant at one of the colleges of Oxford, thought herself on the point of marriage just as the housemaid left us. Poor Betsy! She had shared the fate of many a prouder maiden, wearing out her youth in expectation of the promotion that was to authorise her union with the man of her heart. Many a year had she waited in smiling constancy, fond of William in no common measure, and proud of him, as well she might be; for, when the vacation so far lessened his duties as to render a short absence practicable, and he stole up here for a few days to enjoy her company, it was difficult to distinguish him in air and manner, as he sauntered about in elegant indolence with his fishing-rod and his flute, from the young Oxonians, his masters. At last promotion came; and Betsy, apprised of it by an affectionate and congratulatory letter from his sister, prepared her wedding-clothes, and looked hourly for the bridegroom. No bridegroom came. A second letter announced, with regret and indignation, that William

had made another choice, and was to be married early in the ensuing month. Poor Betsy! We were alarmed for her health, almost for her life. She wept incessantly, took no food, wandered recklessly about from morning till night, lost her natural rest, her flesh, her colour; and in less than a week she was so altered that no one would have known her. Consolation and remonstrance were alike rejected, till at last Harriet happened to strike the right chord by telling her that "she wondered at her want of spirit." This was touching her on the point of honour; she had always been remarkably high-spirited, and could as little brook the imputation as a soldier or a gentleman. This lucky suggestion gave an immediate turn to her feelings: anger and scorn succeeded to grief; she wiped her eyes, "hemmed away a sigh," and began to scold most manfully. She did still better. She recalled an old admirer, who, in spite of repeated objections, had remained constant in his attachment, and made such good speed that she was actually married the day before her faithless lover, and is now the happy wife of a very respectable tradesman.

Ah! the in-and-out cottage! the dear, dear home! No weddings there! No changes! except that the white kitten, who sits purring at a window under the great myrtle, has succeeded to his lamented grandfather, our beautiful Persian cat. I cannot find one alteration to talk about. The wall of the court indeed—but that will be mended to-morrow.

Here is the new sign, the well-frequented Rose inn. Plenty of changes there! Our landlord

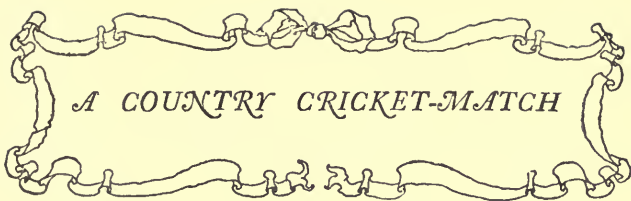
is always improving, if it be only a pig-sty or a watering-trough—plenty of changes and one splendid wedding. Miss Phœbe is married, not to her old lover the recruiting sergeant (for he had one wife already, probably more), but to a patten-maker, as arrant a dandy as ever wore mustachios. How Phœbe could “abase her eyes” from the stately sergeant to this youth, half a foot shorter than herself, whose “waist would go into any alderman’s thumb-ring,” might, if the final choice of a coquette had ever been matter of wonder, have occasioned some speculation. But our patten-maker is a man of spirit; and the wedding was of extraordinary splendour. Three gigs, each containing four persons, graced the procession, besides numerous carts and innumerable pedestrians. The bride was equipped in muslin and satin, and really looked very pretty with her black sparkling eyes, her clear brown complexion, her blushes and her smiles; the bridesmaids were only less smart than the bride; and the bridegroom was “point device in his accoutrements,” and as munificent as a nabob. Cake flew about the village; plum-puddings were abundant; and strong beer, ay, even mine host’s best double X, was profusely distributed. There was all manner of eating and drinking, with singing, fiddling, and dancing between; and in the evening, to crown all, there was Mr Moon, the conjuror. Think of that stroke of good fortune!—Mr Moon, the very pearl of all conjurors, who had the honour of puzzling and delighting their late Majesties with his “wonderful and pleasing exhibition of Thaumaturgics, Tachygraphy, mathematical operations, and magical decep-

tions," happened to arrive about an hour before dinner, and commenced his ingenious deceptions very unintentionally at our house. Calling to apply for permission to perform in the village, being equipped in a gay scarlet coat, and having something smart and sportsmanlike in his appearance, he was announced by Harriet as one of the gentlemen of the C. hunt, and taken (*mistaken* I should have said) by the whole family for a certain captain newly arrived in the neighbourhood. That misunderstanding, which must, I think, have retaliated on Mr Moon a little of the puzzlement that he inflicts on others, vanished of course at the production of his bill of fare; and the requested permission was instantly given. Never could he have arrived in a happier hour. Never were spectators more gratified or more scared. All the tricks prospered. The cock crew after his head was cut off; and half-crowns and sovereigns flew about as if winged; and the very wedding-ring could not escape Mr Moon's incantations. We heard of nothing else for a week. From the bridegroom, *un esprit fort*, who defied all manner of conjuration and *diablerie*, down to my Lizzy, whose boundless faith swallows the Arabian Tales, all believed and trembled. So thoroughly were men, women, and children impressed with the idea of the worthy conjuror's dealings with the devil, that when he had occasion to go to B., not a soul would give him a cast, from pure awe; and if it had not been for our pony-chaise, poor Mr Moon must have walked. I hope he is really a prophet; for he foretold all happiness to the new-married pair.

So this pretty white house with the lime-trees

before it, which has been under repair for these three years, is on the point of being finished. The vicar has taken it, as the vicarage-house is not yet fit for his reception. He has sent before him a neat modest maid-servant, whose respectable appearance gives a character to her master and mistress—a hamper full of flower-roots, sundry boxes of books, a pianoforte, and some simple and useful furniture. Well, we shall certainly have neighbours, and I have a presentiment that we shall find friends.

Lizzy, you may now come along with me round the corner and up the lane, just to the end of the wheeler's shop, and then we shall go home; it is high time. What is this *affiche* in the parlour window? "Apartments to let—enquire within." These are certainly the curate's lodgings—is he going away? Oh, I suppose the new vicar will do his own duty—yet, however well he may do it, rich and poor will regret the departure of Mr B. Well, I hope that he may soon get a good living. "Lodgings to let"—who ever thought of seeing such a placard hereabout? The lodgings, indeed, are very convenient for "a single gentleman, a man and his wife, or two sisters," as the newspapers say—comfortable apartments, neat and tasty withal, and the civilest of all civil treatment from the host and hostess. But who would ever have dreamt of such a notice? Lodgings to let in our village!



A COUNTRY CRICKET-MATCH

I DOUBT if there be any scene in the world more animating or delightful than a cricket-match:—I do not mean a set match at Lord's Ground for money, hard money, between a certain number of gentlemen and players, as they are called—people who make a trade of that noble sport, and degrade it into an affair of bettings, and hedgings, and cheatings, it may be, like boxing or horse-racing; nor do I mean a pretty *fête* in a gentleman's park, where one club of cricketing dandies encounter another such club, and where they show off in graceful costume to a gay marquee of admiring belles, who condescend so to purchase admiration, and while away a long summer morning in partaking cold collations, conversing occasionally, and seeming to understand the game—the whole being conducted according to ball-room etiquette, so as to be exceedingly elegant and exceedingly dull. No! the cricket that I mean is a real solid old-fashioned match between neighbouring parishes, where each attacks the other for honour and a supper, glory and half-a-crown a man. If there be any gentleman amongst them, it is well—if not, it is so much the better. Your gentleman cricketer is in general rather an anomalous character.

Elderly gentlemen are obviously good for nothing; and your beaux are, for the most part, hampered and trammelled by dress and habit; the stiff cravat, the pinched-in waist, the dandy-walk—oh, they will never do for cricket! Now, our country lads, accustomed to the flail or the hammer (your blacksmiths are capital hitters), have the free use of their arms; they know how to move their shoulders; and they can move their feet too—they can run; then they are so much better made, so much more athletic, and yet so much lissomer—to use a Hampshire phrase, which deserves at least to be good English. Here and there, indeed, one meets with an old Etonian, who retains his boyish love for that game which formed so considerable a branch of his education; some even preserve their boyish proficiency, but in general it wears away like the Greek, quite as certainly, and almost as fast; a few years of Oxford, or Cambridge, or the continent, are sufficient to annihilate both the power and the inclination. No! a village match is the thing—where our highest officer—our conductor (to borrow a musical term) is but a little farmer's second son; where a day-labourer is our bowler, and a blacksmith our long-stop; where the spectators consist of the retired cricketers, the veterans of the green, the careful mothers, the girls, and all the boys of two parishes, together with a few amateurs, little above them in rank, and not at all in pretension; where laughing and shouting, and the very ecstasy of merriment and good-humour prevail: such a match, in short, as I attended yesterday, at the expense of getting twice wet through, and as I would attend to-

morrow, at the certainty of having that ducking doubled.

For the last three weeks our village has been in a state of great excitement, occasioned by a challenge from our north-western neighbours, the men of B., to contend with us at cricket. Now, we have not been much in the habit of playing matches. Three or four years ago, indeed, we encountered the men of S., our neighbours south-by-east, with a sort of doubtful success, beating them on our own ground, whilst they in the second match returned the compliment on theirs. This discouraged us. Then an unnatural coalition between a high-church curate and an evangelical gentleman-farmer drove our lads from the Sunday-evening practice, which, as it did not begin before both services were concluded, and as it tended to keep the young men from the ale-house, our magistrates had winked at, if not encouraged. The sport, therefore, had languished until the present season, when under another change of circumstances the spirit began to revive. Half-a-dozen fine active lads, of influence amongst their comrades, grew into men and yearned for cricket; an enterprising publican gave a set of ribands: his rival, mine host of the Rose, an out-doer by profession, gave two; and the clergyman and his lay ally, both well-disposed and good-natured men, gratified by the submission to their authority, and finding, perhaps, that no great good resulted from the substitution of public-houses for out-of-door diversions, relaxed. In short, the practice recommenced, and the hill was again alive with men and boys, and innocent merriment; but farther than the riband matches amongst

ourselves nobody dreamed of going, till this challenge—we were modest, and doubted our own strength. The B. people, on the other hand, must have been braggers born, a whole parish of gasconaders. Never was such boasting! such crowing! such ostentatious display of practice! such mutual compliments from man to man—bowler to batter, batter to bowler! It was a wonder they did not challenge all England. It must be confessed that we were a little astounded; yet we firmly resolved not to decline the combat; and one of the most spirited of the new growth, William Grey by name, took up the glove in a style of manly courtesy, that would have done honour to a knight in the days of chivalry.—“We were not professed players,” he said, “being little better than school-boys, and scarcely older; but, since they had done us the honour to challenge us, we would try our strength. It would be no discredit to be beaten by such a field.”

Having accepted the wager of battle, our champion began forthwith to collect his forces. William Grey is himself one of the finest youths that one shall see—tall, active, slender and yet strong, with a piercing eye full of sagacity, and a smile full of good humour,—a farmer’s son by station, and used to hard work as farmers’ sons are now, liked by everybody, and admitted to be an excellent cricketer. He immediately set forth to muster his men, remembering with great complacency that Samuel Long, a bowler *comme il y en a peu*, the very man who had knocked down nine wickets, had beaten us, bowled us out at the fatal return match some years ago at S., had luckily, in a remove of

a quarter of a mile last Ladyday, crossed the boundaries of his old parish, and actually belonged to us. Here was a stroke of good fortune! Our captain applied to him instantly; and he agreed at a word. Indeed, Samuel Long is a very civilised person. He is a middle-aged man, who looks rather old amongst our young lads, and whose thickness and breadth give no token of remarkable activity; but he is very active, and so steady a player! so safe! We had half gained the match when we had secured him. He is a man of substance, too, in every way; owns one cow, two donkeys, six pigs, and geese and ducks beyond count—dresses like a farmer, and owes no man a shilling—and all this from pure industry, sheer day-labour. Note that your good cricketer is commonly the most industrious man in the parish; the habits that make him such are precisely those which make a good workman—steadiness, sobriety, and activity—Samuel Long might pass for the *beau ideal* of the two characters. Happy were we to possess him! Then we had another piece of good luck. James Brown, a journeyman blacksmith and a native, who, being of a rambling disposition, had roamed from place to place for half-a-dozen years, had just returned to settle with his brother at another corner of our village, bringing with him a prodigious reputation in cricket and in gallantry—the gay Lothario of the neighbourhood. He is said to have made more conquests in love and in cricket than any blacksmith in the county. To him also went the indefatigable William Grey, and he also consented to play. No end to our good fortune! Another celebrated batter, called Joseph Hearne,

had likewise recently married into the parish. He worked, it is true, at the A. mills, but slept at the house of his wife's father in our territories. He also was sought and found by our leader. But he was grand and shy; made an immense favour of the thing; courted courting and then hung back:—"Did not know that he could be spared; had partly resolved not to play again—at least not this season; thought it rash to accept the challenge; thought they might do without him——" "Truly I think so too," said our spirited champion; "we will not trouble you, Mr Hearne."

Having thus secured two powerful auxiliaries, and rejected a third, we began to reckon and select the regular native forces. Thus ran our list:—William Grey, 1.—Samuel Long, 2.—James Brown, 3.—George and John Simmons, one capital, the other so-so—an uncertain hitter, but a good fieldsmen, 5.—Joel Brent, excellent, 6.—Ben Appleton—here was a little pause—Ben's abilities at cricket were not completely ascertained; but then he was so good a fellow, so full of fun and waggyery! no doing without Ben. So he figured in the list, 7.—George Harris—a short halt there too! Slowish—slow but sure. I think the proverb brought him in, 8.—Tom Coper—oh, beyond the world, Tom Coper! the red-headed gardening lad, whose left-handed strokes send *her* (a cricket-ball, like that other moving thing, a ship, is always of the feminine gender), send her spinning a mile, 9.—Harry Willis, another blacksmith, 10.

We had now ten of our eleven, but the choice of the last occasioned some demur. Three young

Martins, rich farmers of the neighbourhood, successively presented themselves, and were all rejected by our independent and impartial general for want of merit — *cricketal* merit. “Not good enough,” was his pithy answer. Then our worthy neighbour, the half-pay lieutenant, offered his services — he, too, though with some hesitation and modesty, was refused — “Not quite young enough” was his sentence. John Strong, the exceeding long son of our dwarfish mason, was the next candidate — a nice youth — everybody likes John Strong — and a willing, but so tall and so limp, bent in the middle — a thread-paper, six feet high! We were all afraid that, in spite of his name, his strength would never hold out. “Wait till next year, John,” quoth William Grey, with all the dignified seniority of twenty speaking to eighteen. “Coper’s a year younger,” said John. “Coper’s a foot shorter,” replied William: so John retired: and the eleventh man remained unchosen, almost to the eleventh hour. The eve of the match arrived, and the post was still vacant, when a little boy of fifteen, David Willis, brother to Harry, admitted by accident to the last practice, saw eight of them out, and was voted in by acclamation.

That Sunday evening’s practice (for Monday was the important day) was a period of great anxiety, and, to say the truth, of great pleasure. There is something strangely delightful in the innocent spirit of party. To be one of a numerous body, to be authorised to say *we*, to have a rightful interest in triumph or defeat, is gratifying at once to social feeling and to personal pride. There was not a ten-year-old urchin, or a septuagenary woman in the

parish, who did not feel an additional importance, a reflected consequence, in speaking of "our side." An election interests in the same way; but that feeling is less pure. Money is there, and hatred, and politics, and lies. Oh, to be a voter, or a voter's wife, comes nothing near the genuine and hearty sympathy of belonging to a parish, breathing the same air, looking on the same trees, listening to the same nightingales! Talk of a patriotic elector! Give me a parochial patriot, a man who loves his parish! Even we, the female partisans, may partake the common ardour. I am sure I did. I never, though tolerably eager and enthusiastic at all times, remember being in a more delicious state of excitement than on the eve of that battle. Our hopes waxed stronger and stronger. Those of our players who were present were excellent. William Grey got forty notches off his own bat; and that brilliant hitter, Tom Coper, gained eight from two successive balls. As the evening advanced, too, we had encouragement of another sort. A spy, who had been despatched to reconnoitre the enemy's quarters, returned from their practising ground with a most consolatory report. "Really," said Charles Grover, our intelligence—a fine old steady judge, one who had played well in his day—"they are no better than so many old women. Any five of ours would beat their eleven." This sent us to bed in high spirits.

Morning dawned less favourably. The sky promised a series of deluging showers, and kept its word as English skies are wont to do on such occasions; and a lamentable message arrived at the headquarters from our trusty comrade Joel Brent.

His master, a great farmer, had begun the hay-harvest that very morning, and Joel, being as eminent in one field as in another, could not be spared. Imagine Joel's plight! the most ardent of all our eleven! a knight held back from the tourney! a soldier from the battle! The poor swain was inconsolable. At last, one who is always ready to do a good-natured action, great or little, set forth to back his position; and, by dint of appealing to the public spirit of our worthy neighbour and the state of the barometer, talking alternately of the parish honour and thunder-showers, of lost matches and sopped hay, he carried his point, and returned triumphantly with the delighted Joel.

In the meantime we became sensible of another defalcation. On calling over our roll, Brown was missing; and the spy of the preceding night, Charles Grover—the universal scout and messenger of the village, a man who will run half-a-dozen miles for a pint of beer, who does errands for the very love of the trade, who, if he had been a lord, would have been an ambassador—was instantly despatched to summon the truant. His report spread general consternation. Brown had set off at four o'clock in the morning to play in a cricket match at M., a little town twelve miles off, which had been his last residence. Here was desertion! Here was treachery! Here was treachery against that goodly state, our parish! To send James Brown to Coventry was the immediate resolution; but even that seemed too light a punishment for such delinquency. Then how we cried him down! At ten on Sunday night (for the rascal had actually practised with us, and never said

a word of his intended disloyalty) he was our faithful mate, and the best player (take him for all in all) of the eleven. At ten in the morning he had run away, and we were well rid of him; he was no batter compared with William Grey or Tom Coper; not fit to wipe the shoes of Samuel Long, as a bowler; nothing of a scout to John Simmons; the boy David Willis was worth fifty of him—

“I trust we have within our realm,
Five hundred good as he,”

was the universal sentiment. So we took tall John Strong, who, with an incurable hankering after the honour of being admitted, had kept constantly with the players, to take the chance of some such accident—we took John for our *pis-aller*. I never saw any one prouder than the good-humoured lad was of this not very flattering piece of preferment.

John Strong was elected, and Brown sent to Coventry; and when I first heard of his delinquency, I thought the punishment only too mild for the crime. But I have since learned the secret history of the offence (if we could know the secret histories of all offences, how much better the world would seem than it does now!) and really my wrath is much abated. It was a piece of gallantry, of devotion to the sex, or rather a chivalrous obedience to one chosen fair. I must tell my readers the story. Mary Allen, the prettiest girl of M., had, it seems, revenged upon our blacksmith the numberless inconsistencies of which he stood accused. He was in love over head and ears, but the nymph was cruel. She said no, and no, and no, and poor Brown, three times rejected, at last resolved to leave the place, partly in despair,

and partly in that hope which often mingles strangely with a lover's despair, the hope that when he was gone he should be missed. He came home to his brother's accordingly; but for five weeks he heard nothing from or of the inexorable Mary, and was glad to beguile his own "vexing thoughts" by endeavouring to create in his mind an artificial and factitious interest in our cricket-match—all unimportant as such a trifle must have seemed to a man in love. Poor James, however, is a social and warm-hearted person, not likely to resist a contagious sympathy. As the time for the play advanced, the interest which he had at first affected became genuine and sincere: and he was really, when he left the ground on Sunday night, almost as enthusiastically absorbed in the event of the next day as Joel Brent himself. He little foresaw the new and delightful interest which awaited him at home, where, on the moment of his arrival, his sister-in-law and confidante presented him with a billet from the lady of his heart. It had, with the usual delay of letters sent by private hands in that rank of life, loitered on the road, in a degree inconceivable to those who are accustomed to the punctual speed of the post, and had taken ten days for its twelve miles' journey. Have my readers any wish to see this *billet-doux*? I can show them (but in strict confidence) a literal copy. It was addressed,

“For mistur jem browne
“blaxmith by
“S.”

The inside ran thus:—“Mistur browne this is to Inform you that oure parish plays bramley men

next monday is a week, i think we shall lose without yew. from your humbell servant to command

“MARY ALLEN.”

Was there ever a prettier relenting? a summons more flattering, more delicate, more irresistible? The precious epistle was undated; but, having ascertained who brought it, and found, by cross-examining the messenger, that the Monday in question was the very next day, we were not surprised to find that *Mistur browne* forgot his engagement to us, forgot all but Mary and Mary's letter, and set off at four o'clock the next morning to walk twelve miles, and play for her parish, and in her sight. Really we must not send James Brown to Coventry—must we? Though if, as his sister-in-law tells our damsel Harriet he hopes to do, he should bring the fair Mary home as his bride, he will not greatly care how little we say to him. But he must not be sent to Coventry—True-love forbid!

At last we were all assembled, and marched down to H. common, the appointed ground, which, though in our dominions according to the maps, was the constant practising place of our opponents, and *terra incognita* to us. We found our adversaries on the ground as we expected, for our various delays had hindered us from taking the field so early as we wished; and, as soon as we had settled all preliminaries, the match began.

But, alas! I have been so long settling my preliminaries, that I have left myself no room for the detail of our victory, and must squeeze the account of our grand achievements into as little compass as

Cowley, when he crammed the names of eleven of his mistresses into the narrow space of four eight-syllable lines. *They* began the warfare—those boastful men of B. And what think you, gentle reader, was the amount of their innings! These challengers—the famous eleven—how many did they get? Think! imagine! guess!—You cannot?—Well!—they got twenty-two, or, rather, they got twenty; for two of theirs were short notches, and would never have been allowed, only that, seeing what they were made of, we and our umpires were not particular.—They should have had twenty more if they had chosen to claim them. Oh, how well we fielded! and how well we bowled! our good play had quite as much to do with their miserable failure as their bad. Samuel Long is a slow bowler, George Simmons a fast one, and the change from Long's lobbing to Simmons's fast balls posed them completely. Poor simpletons! they were always wrong, expecting the slow for the quick, and the quick for the slow. Well, we went in. And what were our innings? Guess again!—guess! A hundred and sixty-nine! in spite of soaking showers, and wretched ground, where the ball would not run a yard, we headed them by a hundred and forty-seven; and then they gave in, as well they might. William Grey pressed them much to try another innings. "There was so much chance," as he courteously observed, "in cricket, that advantageous as our position seemed, we might, very possibly, be overtaken. The B. men had better try." But they were beaten sulky, and would not move—to my great disappointment; I wanted to prolong the pleasure of success. What a glorious

sensation it is to be for five hours together—winning—winning! always feeling what a whist-player feels when he takes up four honours, seven trumps! Who would think that a little bit of leather, and two pieces of wood, had such a delightful and delighting power!

The only drawback on my enjoyment was the failure of the pretty boy, David Willis, who, injudiciously put in first, and playing for the first time in a match amongst men and strangers, who talked to him, and stared at him, was seized with such a fit of shamefaced shyness, that he could scarcely hold his bat, and was bowled out without a stroke, from actual nervousness. "He will come off that," Tom Coper says—I am afraid he will. I wonder whether Tom had ever any modesty to lose. Our other modest lad, John Strong, did very well; his length told in fielding, and he got good fame. Joel Brent, the rescued mower, got into a scrape, and out of it again; his fortune for the day. He ran out his mate, Samuel Long; who, I do believe, but for the excess of Joel's eagerness, would have stayed in till this time, by which exploit he got into sad disgrace; and then he himself got thirty-seven runs, which redeemed his reputation. Will Grey made a hit which actually lost the cricket-ball. We think she lodged in a hedge, a quarter of a mile off, but nobody could find her. And George Simmons had nearly lost his shoe, which he tossed away in a passion, for having been caught out, owing to the ball glancing against it. These, together with a very complete somerset of Ben Appleton, our long-stop, who floundered about in the mud, making faces and attitudes as laughable as



*Oh, they will never do
for cricket--*

Grimaldi, none could tell whether by accident or design, were the chief incidents of the scene of action. Amongst the spectators nothing remarkable occurred, beyond the general calamity of two or three drenchings, except that a form, placed by the side of a hedge, under a very insufficient shelter, was knocked into the ditch, in a sudden rush of the cricketers to escape a pelting shower, by which means all parties shared the fate of Ben Appleton, some on land and some by water; and that, amidst the scramble, a saucy gipsy of a girl contrived to steal from the knee of the demure and well-apparelled Samuel Long, a smart handkerchief which his careful dame had tied round it to preserve his new (what is the mincing feminine word?)—his new—inexpressibles, thus reversing the story of Desdemona, and causing the new Othello to call aloud for his handkerchief, to the great diversion of the company. And so we parted; the players retired to their supper, and we to our homes; all wet through, all good-humoured and happy—except the losers.

To-day we are happy too. Hats, with ribands in them, go glancing up and down; and William Grey says, with a proud humility, “We do not challenge any parish; but if we be challenged, we are ready.”



A MORNING RAMBLE

MAY THE 3RD.—Cold, bright weather. All within doors sunny and chilly; all without windy and dusty. It is quite tantalising to see that brilliant sun careering through so beautiful a sky, and to feel little more warmth from his presence than one does from that of his fair but cold sister, the moon. Even the sky, beautiful as it is, has the look of that one sometimes sees in a very bright moonlight night—deeply, intensely blue, with white clouds driven vigorously along by a strong breeze—now veiling, and now exposing the dazzling luminary around which they sail. A beautiful sky! and, in spite of its coldness, a beautiful world! The effect of this backward spring has been to arrest the early flowers, to which heat is the great enemy; whilst the leaves and the later flowers have, nevertheless, ventured to peep out slowly and cautiously in sunny places—exhibiting in the copses and hedgerows a pleasant mixture of March and May. And we, poor chilly mortals, must follow, as nearly as we can, the wise example of the May blossoms, by avoiding bleak paths and open commons, and creeping up the

sheltered road to the vicarage—the pleasant sheltered road, where the western sun steals in between two rows of bright green elms, and the east wind is fenced off by the range of woody hills which rise abruptly before us, forming so striking a boundary to the picture.

How pretty this lane is, with its tall elms, just dressed in their young leaves, bordering the sunny path, or sweeping in a semicircle behind the clear pools and the white cottages that are scattered along the way! You shall seldom see a cottage hereabout without an accompanying pond, all alive with geese and ducks, at the end of the little garden. Ah! here is Dame Simmons making a most original use of her piece of water, standing on the bank that divides it from her garden, and most ingeniously watering her onion-bed with a new mop—now a dip, and now a twirl! Really, I give her credit for the invention. It is as good an imitation of a shower as one should wish to see on a summer day. A squirt is nothing to it!

And here is another break to the tall line of elms—the gate that leads into Farmer Thorpe's great enclosures. Eight, ten, fourteen people in this large field, wheat-hoeing. The couple nearest the gate, who keep aloof from all the rest, and are hoeing this furrow so completely in concert, step by step, and stroke for stroke, are Jem Tanner and Mabel Green. There is not a handsomer pair in the field or in the village. Jem, with his bright complexion, his curling hair, his clear blue eye, and his trim figure—set off to great advantage by his short jacket and trousers and new straw hat; Mabel, with her little stuff

gown, and her white handkerchief and apron—defining so exactly her light and flexible shape—and her black eyes flashing from under a deep bonnet lined with pink, whose reflection gives to her bright dark countenance and dimpled cheeks a glow innocently artificial, which was the only charm that they wanted.

Jem and Mabel are, beyond all doubt, the handsomest couple in the field, and I am much mistaken if each have not a vivid sense of the charms of the other. Their mutual admiration was clear enough in their work; but it speaks still more plainly in their idleness. Not a stroke have they done for these five minutes; Jem, propped on his hoe, and leaning across the furrow, whispering soft nonsense; Mabel, blushing and smiling—now making believe to turn away—now listening, and looking up with a sweeter smile than ever, and a blush that makes her bonnet-lining pale. Ah, Mabel! Mabel! Now they are going to work again;—no!—after three or four strokes the hoes have somehow become entangled, and without either advancing a step nearer the other, they are playing with these rustic implements as pretty a game at romps—showing off as nice a piece of rural flirtation—as ever was exhibited since wheat was hoed.

Ah, Mabel! Mabel! beware of Farmer Thorpe! He'll see at a glance that little will his corn profit by such labours. Beware, too, Jem Tanner!—for Mabel is, in some sort, an heiress; being the real niece and adopted daughter of our little lame clerk, who, although he looks such a tattered ragamuffin that the very grave-diggers are ashamed of him, is well to

pass in the world—keeps a scrub pony—indeed he can hardly walk up the aisle—hath a share in the County fire-office—and money in the funds. Mabel will be an heiress, despite the tatterdemalion costume of her honoured uncle, which I think he wears out of coquetry, that the remarks which might otherwise fall on his miserable person—full as misshapen as that of any Hunchback recorded in the *Arabian Tales*—may find a less offensive vent on his raiment. Certain such a figure hath seldom been beheld out of church or in. Yet will Mabel, nevertheless, be a fortune; and, therefore, she must intermarry with another fortune, according to the rule made and provided in such cases; and the little clerk hath already looked her out a spouse, about his own standing—a widower in the next parish, with four children and a squint. Poor Jem Tanner! Nothing will that smart person or that pleasant speech avail with the little clerk—never will he officiate at your marriage to his niece—“Amen” would “stick in his throat.” Poor things! in what a happy oblivion of the world and its cares, Farmer Thorpe and the wheat-hoeing, the squinting shopkeeper and the little clerk, are they laughing and talking at this moment! Poor things! poor things!

Well, I must pursue my walk. How beautiful a mixture of flowers and leaves is in the high bank under this north hedge—quite an illustration of the blended seasons of which I spoke. An old irregular hedgerow is always beautiful, especially in the spring-time, when the grass, and mosses, and flowering weeds mingle best with the bushes and creeping plants that overhang them. But this

bank is, most especially, various and lovely. Shall we try to analyse it? First, the clinging white-veined ivy, which crawls up the slope in every direction, the masterpiece of that rich mosaic: then the brown leaves and the lilac blossoms of its fragrant namesake, the ground ivy, which grows here so profusely; then the late-lingering primrose; then the delicate wood-sorrel; then the regular pink stars of the cranesbill, with its beautiful leaves; then the golden oxslip and the cowslip, "cinque-spotted"; then the blue pansy, and the enamelled wild hyacinth; then the bright foliage of the briar-rose, which comes trailing its green wreaths amongst the flowers; then the bramble and the woodbine, creeping round the foot of a pollard oak, with its brown folded leaves; then a verdant mass—the blackthorn, with its lingering blossoms—the hawthorn, with its swelling buds—the bushy maple—the long stems of the hazel—and between them, hanging like a golden plume over the bank, a splendid tuft of the blossomed broom; then, towering high above all, the tall and leafy elms. And this is but a faint picture of this hedge, on the meadowy side of which sheep are bleating, and where every here and there a young lamb is thrusting its pretty head between the trees.

Who is this approaching? Farmer Thorpe? Yes, of a certainty, it is that substantial yeoman, sallying forth from his substantial farmhouse, which peeps out from between two huge walnut-trees on the other side of the road, with intent to survey his labourers in the wheat-field. Farmer Thorpe is a stout, square, sturdy personage of fifty, or there-

about, with a hard weather-beaten countenance, of that peculiar vermilion, all over alike, into which the action of the sun and wind sometimes tans a fair complexion; sharp, shrewd features, and a keen grey eye. He looks completely like a man who will neither cheat nor be cheated: and such is his character—an upright, downright English Yeoman—just always, and kind in a rough way—but given to fits of anger, and filled with an abhorrence of pilfering, and idleness, and trickery of all sorts, that makes him strict as a master, and somewhat stern at workhouse and vestry. I doubt if he will greatly relish the mode in which Jem and Mabel are administering the hoe in his wheat-drills. He will not reach the gate yet; for his usual steady, active pace is turned, by a recent accident, into an unequal, impatient halt—as if he were alike angry with his lameness and the cause. I must speak to him as he passes—not merely as a due courtesy to a good neighbour, but to give the delinquents in the field notice to resume their hoeing; but not a word of the limp—that is a sore subject.

“A fine day, Mr Thorpe!”

“We want rain, ma’am!”

And on, with great civility, but without pausing a moment, he is gone. He’ll certainly catch Mabel and her lover philandering over his wheat-furrows. Well, that may take its chance!—they have his lameness in their favour—only that the cause of that lameness has made the worthy farmer unusually cross. I think I must confide the story to my readers.

Gipsies and beggars do not in general much inhabit our neighbourhood; but about half-a-mile

off there is a den so convenient for strollers and vagabonds, that it sometimes tempts the rogues to a few days' sojourn. It is, in truth, nothing more than a deserted brick-kiln, by the side of a lonely lane. But there is something so snug and comfortable in the old building (always keeping in view gipsy notions of comfort); the blackened walls are so backed by the steep hill on whose side they are built—so fenced from the bleak north-east, and letting in so gaily the pleasant western sun; and the wide, rugged, impassable lane (used only as a road to the kiln, and with that abandoned) is at once so solitary and deserted, so close to the inhabited and populous world, that it seems made for a tribe whose prime requisites in a habitation are shelter, privacy, and a vicinity to farmyards.

Accordingly, about a month ago, a pretty strong encampment, evidently gipsies, took up their abode in the kiln. The party consisted of two or three tall, lean, sinister-looking men, who went about the country mending pots and kettles, and driving a small trade in old iron; one or two children, unnaturally quiet, the spies of the crew; an old woman, who sold matches and told fortunes; a young woman with an infant strapped to her back, who begged; several hungry-looking dogs, and three ragged donkeys. The arrival of the vagabonds spread a general consternation through the village. Gamekeepers and housewives were in equal dismay. Snares were found in the preserves—poultry vanished from the farmyards—a lamb was lost from the lea—and a damask tablecloth, belonging to the worshipful the Mayor of W——, was abstracted from the drying-ground of

Rachel Strong, the most celebrated laundress in these parts, to whom it had been sent for the benefit of country washing. No end to the pilfering, and the stories of pilfering! The inhabitants of the kiln were not only thieves in themselves, but the cause of thievery in others. "The gipsies!" was the answer general to every inquiry for things missing.

Farmer Thorpe—whose dwelling, with its variety of out-buildings—barns, ricks, and stables—is only separated by a meadow and a small coppice from the lane that leads to the gipsy retreat—was particularly annoyed by this visitation. Two couple of full-grown ducks, and a whole brood of early chickens, disappeared in one night; and Mrs Thorpe fretted over the loss, and the farmer was indignant at the roguery. He set traps, let loose mastiffs, and put in action all the resources of village police—but in vain. Every night property went; and the culprits, however strongly suspected, still continued unamenable to the law.

At last, one morning, the great Chanticleer of the farm-yard—a cock of a million, with an unrivalled crow, a matchless strut, and plumage all gold and green, and orange and purple—gorgeous as a peacock, and fierce as a he-turkey—Chanticleer, the pride and glory of the yard, was missing! and Mrs Thorpe's lamentations and her husband's anger redoubled. Vowing vengeance against the gipsies, he went to the door to survey a young blood-mare of his own breeding; and as he stood at the gate—now bemoaning Chanticleer—now cursing the gipsies—now admiring the bay filly—his neighbour, Dame Simmons—the identical lady of the mop, who

occasionally chared at the house—came to give him the comfortable information that she had certainly heard Chanticleer—she was quite ready to swear to Chanticleer's voice—crowing in the brick-kiln. No time, she added, should be lost, if Farmer Thorpe wished to rescue that illustrious cock, and to punish the culprits—since the gipsies, when she passed the place, were preparing to decamp.

No time *was* lost. In one moment Farmer Thorpe was on the bay filly's unsaddled back, with the halter for a bridle; and, in the next, they were on full gallop towards the kiln. But, alas! alas! "the more haste the worse speed," says the wisdom of nations. Just as they arrived at the spot from which the procession—gipsies, dogs, and donkeys—and Chanticleer in a sack, shrieking most vigorously—were proceeding on their travels, the young blood-mare—whether startled at the unusual *cortège*, or the rough ways, or the hideous noise of her old friend, the cock—suddenly reared and threw her master, who lay in all the agony of a sprained ankle, unable to rise from the ground; whilst the whole tribe, with poor Chanticleer a prisoner, marched triumphantly past him, utterly regardless of his threats and imprecations. In this plight was the unlucky farmer discovered, about half-an-hour afterwards, by his wife, the constable, and a party of his own labourers, who came to give him assistance in securing the culprits; of whom, notwithstanding an instant and active search through the neighbourhood, nothing has yet transpired. We shall hardly see them again in these parts, and have almost done talking of them. The village is returned to its old state of order and

honesty; the Mayor of W—— has replaced his table-cloth, and Mrs Thorpe her cock; and the poor farmer's lame ankle is all that remains to give token of the gipsies.

Here we are at the turning, which, edging round by the coppice, branches off to their sometime den: the other bend to the right leads up a gentle ascent to the vicarage, and that is our way. How fine a view of the little parsonage we have from hence, between those arching elms, which enclose it like a picture in a frame! and how pretty a picture it forms, with its three pointed roofs, its snug porch, and its casement windows glittering from amid the china-roses! What a nest of peace and comfort! Farther on, almost at the summit of the hill, stands the old church with its massy tower—a row of superb lime-trees running along one side of the churchyard, and a cluster of dark yews shading the other. Few country churches have so much to boast in architectural beauty or in grandeur of situation.

We lose sight of it as we mount the hill, the lane narrowing and winding between deep banks, surmounted by high hedges, excluding all prospects till we reach the front of the vicarage, and catch across the gate of the opposite field a burst of country the most extensive and the most beautiful—field and village, mansion and cot, town and river, all smiling under the sparkling sun of May, and united and harmonised by the profusion of hedgerow timber in its freshest verdure, giving a rich woodland character to the scene, till it is terminated in the distance by the blue line of the Hampshire hills almost melting into the horizon. Such is the view

from the vicarage. But it is too sunny and too windy to stand about out of doors, and time to finish our ramble. Down the hill, and round the corner, and past Farmer Thorpe's house, and one glance at the wheat-hoers, and then we will go home.

Ah! it is just as I feared. Jem and Mabel have been parted: they are now at opposite sides of the field—he looking very angry, working rapidly and violently, and doing more harm than good—she looking tolerably sulky, and just moving her hoe, but evidently doing nothing at all. Farmer Thorpe, on his part, is standing in the middle of the field, observing, but pretending not to observe, the little humours of the separated lovers. There is a lurking smile about the corners of his mouth that bespeaks him more amused than angry. He is a kind person after all, and will certainly make no mischief. I should not even wonder if he espoused Jem Tanner's cause; and, for certain, if any one can prevail on the little clerk to give up his squinting favourite in favour of true love, Farmer Thorpe is the man.



WHITSUN-EVE

THE pride of my heart and the delight of my eyes is my garden. Our house, which is in dimensions very much like a bird-cage, and might, with almost equal convenience, be laid on a shelf or hung up in a tree, would be utterly unbearable in wet weather were it not that we have a retreat out of doors, and a very pleasant retreat it is. To make my readers comprehend it I must describe our whole territories.

Fancy a small plot of ground with a pretty, low, irregular cottage at one end; a large granary, divided from the dwelling by a little court running along one side; and a long thatched shed, open towards the garden, and supported by wooden pillars, on the other. The bottom is bounded half by an old wall and half by an old paling, over which we see a pretty distance of woody hills. The house, granary, wall, and paling, are covered with vines, cherry-trees, roses, honey-suckles, and jessamines, with great clusters of tall hollyhocks running up between them; a large elder overhanging the little gate, and a magnificent bay-tree, such a tree as shall scarcely be matched in these parts, breaking with its beautiful conical form the horizontal lines of the buildings.

This is my garden; and the long pillared shed, the sort of rustic arcade, which runs along one side, parted from the flower-beds by a row of geraniums, is our out-of-door drawing-room.

I know nothing so pleasant as to sit there on a summer afternoon, with the western sun flickering through the great elder-tree, and lighting up our gay parterres, where flowers and flowering shrubs are set as thick as grass in a field, a wilderness of blossom, interwoven, intertwined, wreathy, garlandy, profuse beyond all profusion, where we may guess that there is such a thing as mould, but never see it. I know nothing so pleasant as to sit in the shade of that dark bower, with the eye resting on that bright piece of colour, lighted so gloriously by the evening sun, now catching a glimpse of the little birds as they fly rapidly in and out of their nests—for there are always two or three birds'-nests in the thick tapestry of cherry-trees, honeysuckles, and china-roses, which covers our walls—now tracing the gay gambols of the common butterflies as they sport around the dahlias; now watching that rarer moth, which the country people, fertile in pretty names, call the bee-bird;¹ that bird-like insect, which flutters in the hottest days over the sweetest flowers, inserting its long proboscis into the small tube of the jessamine, and hovering over the scarlet blossom of the geranium, whose bright colour seems reflected on its own feathery breast: that insect which seems so thoroughly a creature of the air, never at rest; always, even when feeding, self-poised and self-supported, and whose wings, in their ceaseless

¹ *Sphinx ligustri*, privet hawk-moth.

motion, have a sound so deep, so full, so lulling, so musical. Nothing so pleasant as to sit amid that mixture of rich flowers and leaves, watching the bee-bird! Nothing so pretty to look at as my garden! It is quite a picture; only unluckily it resembles a picture in more qualities than one—it is fit for nothing but to look at. One might as well think of walking in a bit of framed canvas. There are walks, to be sure—tiny paths of smooth gravel, by courtesy called such—but they are so overhung by roses and lilies, and such gay encroachers—so overrun by convolvulus, and heart's-ease, and mignonette, and other sweet stragglers, that except to edge through them occasionally for the purpose of planting, or weeding, or watering, there might as well be no paths at all. Nobody thinks of walking in my garden. Even May glides along with a delicate and trackless step, like a swan through the water; and we, its two-footed denizens, are fain to treat it as if it were really a saloon, and go out for a walk towards sunset, just as if we had not been sitting in the open air all day.

What a contrast from the quiet garden to the lively street! Saturday night is always a time of stir and bustle in our village, and this is Whitsun-Eve, the pleasantest Saturday of all the year, when London journeymen and servant lads and lasses snatch a short holiday to visit their families. A short and precious holiday, the happiest and liveliest of any; for even the gambols and merry-makings of Christmas offer but a poor enjoyment compared with the rural diversions, the Mayings, revels, and cricket-matches of Whitsuntide.

We ourselves are to have a cricket-match on Monday, not played by the men, who, since a certain misadventure with the Beech-hillers, are, I am sorry to say, rather chopfallen, but by the boys, who, zealous for the honour of their parish, and headed by their bold leader, Ben Kirby, marched in a body to our antagonists' ground the Sunday after our melancholy defeat, challenged the boys of that proud hamlet, and beat them out and out on the spot. Never was a more signal victory. Our boys enjoyed this triumph with so little moderation that it had like to have produced a very tragical catastrophe. The captain of the Beech-hill youngsters, a capital bowler, by name Amos Stone, enraged past all bearing by the crowing of his adversaries, flung the ball at Ben Kirby with so true an aim that if that sagacious leader had not warily ducked his head when he saw it coming, there would probably have been a coroner's inquest on the case, and Amos Stone would have been tried for manslaughter. He let fly with such vengeance, that the cricket-ball was found embedded in a bank of clay five hundred yards off, as if it had been a cannon shot. Tom Coper and Farmer Thackum, the umpires, both say they never saw so tremendous a ball. If Amos Stone live to be a man (I mean to say if he be not hanged first) he'll be a pretty player. He is coming here on Monday with his party to play the return match, the umpires having respectively engaged, Farmer Thackum that Amos shall keep the peace, Tom Coper that Ben shall give no unnecessary or wanton provocation—a nicely worded and lawyer-like clause, and one that proves that Tom Coper hath his doubts of the young gentle-



C.F. Berde
1904

*Not a stroke have they done
for these five minutes.*

man's discretion; and, of a truth, so have I. I would not be Ben Kirby's surety, cautiously as the security is worded—no! not for a white double dahlia, the present object of my ambition.

This village of ours is swarming to-night like a hive of bees, and all the church bells round are pouring out their merriest peals, as if to call them together. I must try to give some notion of the various figures.

First, there is a group suited to Teniers, a cluster of out-of-door customers of the Rose, old benchers of the inn, who sit round a table smoking and drinking in high solemnity to the sound of Timothy's fiddle. Next, a mass of eager boys, the combatants of Monday, who are surrounding the shoemaker's shop, where an invisible hole in their ball is mending by Master Keep himself, under the joint superintendence of Ben Kirby and Tom Coper. Ben showing much verbal respect and outward deference for his umpire's judgment and experience, but managing to get the ball done his own way after all; whilst outside the shop, the rest of the eleven, the less trusted commons, are shouting and bawling round Joel Brent, who is twisting the waxed twine round the handles of the bats—the poor bats, which please nobody, which the taller youths are despising as too little and too light, and the smaller are abusing as too heavy and too large. Happy critics! winning their match can hardly be a greater delight—even if to win it they be doomed! Farther down the street is the pretty black-eyed girl, Sally Wheeler, come home for a day's holiday from B., escorted by a tall footman in a dashing livery, whom she is trying to curtsy off

before her deaf grandmother sees him. I wonder whether she will succeed!

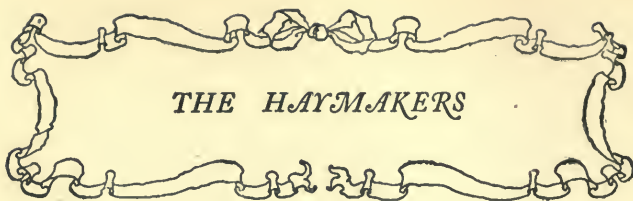
Ascending the hill are two couples of a different description. Daniel Tubb and his fair Valentine, walking boldly along like licensed lovers; they have been asked twice in church, and are to be married on Tuesday; and closely following that happy pair, near each other but not together, come Jem Tanner and Mabel Green, the poor culprits of the wheat-hoeing. Ah! the little clerk hath not relented! The course of true love doth not yet run smooth in that quarter. Jem dodges along, whistling "Cherry-ripe," pretending to walk by himself, and to be thinking of nobody; but every now and then he pauses in his negligent saunter, and turns round outright to steal a glance at Mabel, who, on her part, is making believe to walk with poor Olive Hathaway, the lame mantua-maker, and even affecting to talk and to listen to that gentle, humble creature, as she points to the wild-flowers on the common, and the lambs and children disporting among the gorse, but whose thoughts and eyes are evidently fixed on Jem Tanner, as she meets his backward glance with a blushing smile, and half springs forward to meet him: whilst Olive has broken off the conversation as soon as she perceived the pre-occupation of her companion, and began humming, perhaps unconsciously, two or three lines of Burns, whose "Whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad," and "Gie me a glance of thy bonny black e'e," were never better exemplified than in the couple before her. Really, it is curious to watch them, and to see how gradually the attraction of this tantalising vicinity becomes irresistible, and the rustic lover



C. & B. Brockton
1904

*Mending by Master
Keep himself -*

rushes to his pretty mistress like the needle to the magnet. On they go, trusting to the deepening twilight, to the little clerk's absence, to the good humour of the happy lads and lasses who are passing and repassing on all sides—or rather, perhaps, in a happy oblivion of the cross uncle, the kind villagers, the squinting lover, and the whole world. On they trip, arm in arm, he trying to catch a glimpse of her glowing face under her bonnet, and she hanging down her head, and avoiding his gaze with a mixture of modesty and coquetry, which well becomes the rural beauty. On they go, with a reality and intensity of affection which must overcome all obstacles; and poor Olive follows her with an evident sympathy in their happiness which makes her almost as enviable as they; and we pursue our walk amidst the moonshine and the nightingales, with Jacob Frost's cart looming in the distance, and the merry sounds of Whitsuntide, the shout, the laugh, and the song, echoing all around us, like "noises of the air."



THE HAYMAKERS

A COUNTRY STORY

AMONGST the country employments of England none is so delightful to see or to think of as hay-making. It comes in the pleasantest season, amidst a green, and flowery, and sunshiny world; it has for scene the prettiest places—park, or lawn, or meadow, or upland pasture; and withal it has more of innocent merriment, more of the festivity of an out-of-door sport, and less of the drudgery and weariness of actual labour, than any other of the occupations of husbandry. One looks on it, pretty picture as it is, without the almost saddening sympathy produced by the slow and painful toil of the harvest-field, and, moreover, one looks on it much oftener. A very little interval of dressed garden shall divide a great country mansion from the demesne, where hay-cocks repose under noble groups of oaks and elms, or mingle their fragrance with the snowy wreaths of the acacia, or the honeyed tassels of the lime; and the fair and delicate lady who cannot tell wheat from barley, and the mincing fine gentleman who “affects an *ignorance* if he have it not,” shall yet condescend not merely to know hay when they see it, but even

to take some interest in the process of getting it up. In short, at the most aristocratic country tables, from the high-sheriff of the county to the lord-lieutenant, hay is a permitted subject; and the state of the clouds, or of the weather-glass, shall be inquired into as diligently, and be listened to with as much attention, as speculations on the St Leger or the Derby, discussions on the breed of pheasants, or calculations on a contested election. Hay is very naturally felt to be a gentlemanly topic, since from the richest to the poorest every country gentleman is a hay-owner.

I have been used all my life to take a lively interest, and even so much participation as may belong to a mere spectator, in this pleasant labour; for I cannot say that I ever actually handled the fork or the rake. In former times our operations were on a grand scale, since the lawn before and around our old house, and the park-like paddock behind, were of such an extent as to make the getting in of the crop an affair of considerable moment in a pecuniary point of view. Now we have in our own hands only two small fields, the one a meadow of some three acres, about a mile off, the other a bit of upland pasture not much bigger, and rather nearer. The consequence of which diminution of property is, that I am ten times more interested in our small possession than ever I was in our large demesne, and that the produce of these two little bits of land—the minikin rick, not much better than a hay-cock itself, all of which is to be consumed by that special friend of mine, our pretty, frisky cream-coloured horse,¹ of whom it is every day predicted that he will break our necks—

¹ Now, alas! no more! Would that the beauty were alive

appears much more important in my eyes than the mountains of dried grass, which, after feeding some dozen horses, and half a dozen cows, were sold out amongst the inn-keepers, coach proprietors, cattle-dealers, and hay-buyers of all sorts, and, sometimes, in a plentiful year, had even the honour to be advertised in a country newspaper, put up to public sale, puffed by the auctioneer, abused by the bidders, talked about, and lied about, and finally knocked down by the hammer—as great a piece of promotion as a hay-rick can well come to.

This trick of estimating one's possessions in an inverse ratio to their real value is, I believe, strange as the assertion may seem, no uncommon freak of that whimsical, but good-for-*something* piece of perversity called human nature. In my own case I can, besides, claim in mitigation for the mistake (if mistake it be to take an interest in anything innocent!) the extreme beauty of the two patches of ground on which grows the hay in question.

One of these grass-plots is a breezy, airy, upland field, abutting on the southernmost nook of an open common, forming, so to say, one side of a sunny bay, half filled with a large clear pond of bright water, water always bright; the first swallows of the year are regularly seen there; a great farmhouse with its bustling establishment directly opposite; a winding road leading across the green; and trees, cottages, children, horses, cows, sheep, and geese, scattered around in the gayest profusion—a living and moving picture. The most populous street of a populous

again, even if he did put our lives in jeopardy! I shall never entertain so strong a personal friendship for any steed.

city gives a less vivid idea of habitation than the view from the gate, or from the high bank, feathered with broom and hazel—for the fence consists rather of a ditch than of a hedge, the field being, as it were, moated—of that lightsome and cheerful bit of pasture land.

The more distant meadow is prettier still; it has no regular approach, and is reached only through a chain of fields belonging to different neighbours, whose gates, close locked upon all other occasions, open only to admit the ponderous hay waggon, creaking under its burthen, and the noisy procession of pitchers and rakers by which it is accompanied. Surrounded by close and high hedges, richly studded by hedgerow timber, no spot can be more completely shut out from the world than this small meadow. A stream of considerable variety and beauty winds along one end, fringed on each margin by little thickets of copse wood, hawthorn, and hazel, mixed with trees of a larger growth, and clothed, inter-twisted, matted, by garlands of wild rose and wild honeysuckle; whilst here and there a narrow strip of turf intervenes between these natural shrubberies and the sparkling, glittering, babbling stream, which runs so clearly over its narrow bed that every shoal of minnows is visible as they pass. Every vagary that a nameless brooklet well can play does this brook show off in its short course across the end of our meadow; now driven rapidly through a narrow channel by the curvature of the banks, fretting, and fuming, and chafing over the transparent pebbles; now creeping gently between clusters of the rich willow herb and golden flag; now sleeping quietly

in a wider and deeper pool, where the white water-lily has found room for its dark leaves and its snowy flowers, and where those quiet but treacherous waters seem about to undermine the grassy margent which already overhangs them, and to lay bare the roots of the old willows. On the banks of that tricky stream lies the scene of our little story.

Last summer was, as most of my readers probably remember, one of no small trial to haymakers in general, the weather being what is gently and politely termed "unsettled," which in this pretty climate of ours, during "the leafy month of June," may commonly be construed into cloudy, stormy, drizzly, cold. In this instance the silky, courtly, flattering epithet, being translated, could hardly mean other than wet—fixed, determined, settled rain. From morning to night the clouds were dropping; roses stood tottering on their stalks; strawberries lay sopping in their beds; cherries and currants hung all forlorn on their boughs, with the red juice washed out of them; gravel roads turned into sand; pools into ponds; ditches into rivulets; rivers overflowed their channels; and that great evil—a summer flood—appeared inevitable. "The rain it raineth every day" was the motto for the month. Sheridan's wicked interpolation in Mr Coleridge's tragedy, "drip, drip, drip, there's nothing here but dripping," seemed made expressly for the season. Cut or uncut, the grass was spoiling; the more the hay was made the clearer it appeared that it would never make to any purpose; the poor cattle shook their ears as if aware of an impending scarcity; salt, the grand

remedy for sopped hay, rose in the market; farmers fretted, and gentlemen fumed.”¹

So passed the “merry month of June.” Towards the beginning of July, however, matters mended. A new moon made her appearance in the world, and that great stranger, the sun, as if out of compliment to his fair, cold sister, ventured out of the clouds to salute her across the sky, one evening just before his usual time of setting, and even continued the civility by leaving behind him such a glow of purple rosiness, and such a line of golden light, as illumined the whole horizon, and gave the most gracious promise for the ensuing day—a promise unusually well kept for so great a personage—that is to say, not quite forgotten. The weather, to be sure, was not quite perfect—when was the weather known to be so?—it was, on the contrary, of that description which is termed “catching”; but still there were intervals of brightness; the rain was less heavy; the sun did shine sometimes; and even when he refused to show that resplendent face of his, a light stirring breeze answered all hay-making purposes almost as well. In short, between wind and sunshine, we managed to get in our upland crop with little danger and less damage, and encouraged by that success, and by the slow, gentle rising of the weather-glass, which the knowing in such matters

¹ It is well if they did no worse. A fair young friend of mine, whose father, one of the most accomplished persons that I have ever known, and by no means addicted to the use of naughty words on common occasions, rented about thirty acres of water-meadow, known by the name of “the moors,” used always to call the hay-making time his “swearing month.” He was wont to laugh at the expression—but I never heard him deny that it was true.

affirm to be much more reliable than a sudden and violent jump of the quicksilver, we gave orders to cut the little mead without delay, and prepared for a day's hay-making in that favourite spot.

We were not without other encouragements with respect to the weather. The sun himself had had the goodness to make "a golden set" and a rosy dawning, and those vegetable barometers, the scarlet pimpernel in the hedgerows, and the purple Venus's looking-glass in the garden, threw open their rich cups to receive his earliest beams, with a fulness of expansion seldom shown by those, I had almost said, sentient flowers, when there is the slightest appearance of rain. Our good neighbour the shoemaker, too, an in-door oracle, whose speculations on the atmosphere are not very remarkable for their correctness, prognosticated wet; whilst our other good neighbour, Farmer Bridgwater, an out-of-door, practical personage, whose predictions—and it is saying much for them—are almost as sure to come true as the worthy cordwainer's to prove false, boldly asseverated that the day would prove fine, and made his preparations and mustered his troops (for Farmer Bridgwater is generalissimo in our hay-field) with a vigour and energy that would have become a higher occasion. He set six men on to mowing by a little after sunrise, and collected fourteen efficient hay-makers by breakfast-time. Fourteen active hay-makers for our poor three acres! not to count the idle assistants; we ourselves, with three dogs and two boys to mind them, advisers who came to find fault and look on, babies who came to be nursed, children who came to rock the babies, and other

children who came to keep the rockers company and play with the dogs; to say nothing of this small rabble, we had fourteen able-bodied men and women in one hay-field, besides the six mowers who had got the grass down by noon, and finding the strong beer good and plentiful, magnanimously volunteered to stay and help to get in the crop. *N.B.*—This abundance of aid is by no means so extravagant as it seems, especially in catching weather. Beer, particularly in country affairs, will go twice as far as money, and, if discreetly administered (for we must not make even haymakers quite tipsy), really goes as near to supply the place of the sun as anything well can do. In our case the good double X was seconded by this bright luminary, and our operations prospered accordingly.

Besides being a numerous, ours was a merry group, very merry and very noisy; for amongst the country people, as amongst children, those two words may almost be reckoned synonymous. There was singing that might pass for screaming; laughter that burst forth in peals and in shouts; and talking in every variety of key, from the rough, bluff, commanding halloo of Farmer Bridgwater, issuing his orders from one end of the field to another, to the shrill cry of Dame Wilson's baby, which seemed to pierce upwards, and cleave the very sky. A mingled buzz of talking was, however, the predominant sound, talking of which little could be collected except a general expression of happiness, Dame Wilson's roaring infant being, with one exception, the only dissatisfied person in the field.

Nobody could imagine the joyous din of that

little place. A "jovial crew" they were, though by no means "merry beggars"; for our haymakers were for that profession, persons of respectability, rather, indeed, amateurs than professors — saving, perhaps, Dame Wilson and her set of boys and girls, who might be accounted poor, and a certain ragged Irishman called Jerry, who comes over every year harvesting, and is a general favourite with high and low; with these small drawbacks (*N.B.*—Dame Wilson is a mountain of a woman, at least five feet in the girth, and Jerry a maypole of a man, who stands six feet three without his shoes), with these trifling exceptions, our troop of haymakers might really pass for people of substance.

First came the commander-in-chief, Farmer Bridgwater, a hearty, sturdy old bachelor, rough and bluff, and merry, and kind, a great although a general admirer of our pretty lasses, to whom his blunt compliments and rustic raillery, of which the point lay rather in a knowing wink, a sly turn of the head, and a peculiar dryness of manner, than in the words, added to his unfailing good nature, rendered him always welcome.

Next in the list figures our respectable neighbour, Aaron Keep, the shoemaker, who came to help us and to watch the weather. He is an excellent person is Aaron Keep, and he came, as he said, to help us; and I daresay he would have been very sorry if the hay had been quite spoiled; nevertheless, having predicted that it would rain, I cannot help thinking he considered it a little hard that no rain came. The least little shower, just to confirm his prognostics, would have made him happy, and he

kept watching the clouds, and hoping and foretelling a thunderstorm; but the clouds were obstinate, and the more he predicted that a storm would come, the more it stayed away.

Then arrived Master Wheatley, our worthy neighbour, the wheelwright, who, being also parish constable, might have abated the noise if he himself had not been the noisiest. I think he came to please his daughter Mary, a smiling, airy damsel of thirteen, who never made hay before in her life. How enraptured the little girl was with the holiday! My dog Dash was the only creature in the field gay enough to keep pace with her frolics. They were playmates during the whole day.

Mine host of the Rose was also present, that model of all village landlords, mine host in his red waistcoat; and he also brought with him his pretty daughters, lasses of eighteen and twenty, who care no more for poor Dash than I do for a wax doll; I daresay they don't even know that he's a spaniel. Lucy had been to London this spring, and brought home a beau, whom she had picked up there, as a visitor to her papa, and, our hay-field being a good place for love-making, there too was he, displaying in handling a prong all the awkwardness that might be expected from a Cheapside haberdasher accustomed to the yard. He laughed at himself, however, with a very good grace, and seemed a well-conditioned and well-behaved person, his misfortune of cockneyism notwithstanding. They said that Miss Lucy would soon leave the Rose and take to measuring ribands herself. Patty, too, the round-faced, rosy-cheeked, fair-haired, younger sister, my favourite (but that is

a secret, for both are equally civil, and, as far as I know, equally good; I would not make any difference in the world, only — Patty is my favourite); Patty, said the world—the village world—was also not unlikely to leave the Rose, though for an abode only two doors removed from it; Mr George Waring, our smart young saddler, having, they affirmed, won her heart; but upon looking out for Patty and George, thinking to find them engaged as the other couple were, what was my astonishment to see the poor little lass, her smiles gone and her roses faded, moping under the hedge alone, rather making believe to rake than actually raking; whilst Mr George Waring was tossing about the hay in company with the handsome brunette Sally Wheeler, who was just (as I remembered to have heard) come home from service to be married, and looked prodigiously as if the young saddler was her intended spouse. Nothing was ever more suspicious. He looked brighter and gayer than ever, and so did Sally, and for certain they were talking of something interesting, something at which the gentleman smiled and the lady blushed, talking so earnestly that they even forgot to toss the hay about, and that Farmer Bridgwater's loudest reprimand, although it startled every one else in the field, was apparently unheard by either of them.

“Alas! I fear Mr George Waring will play poor Patty false,” was my involuntary thought, as I glided amongst the thickets by the side of the stream, and established myself in a verdant nook quite out of sight of the gay scene I had quitted, from which I was parted by a natural shrubbery of



*His own visions
growing into reality*

honeysuckle and wild roses, covered with blossoms and over-canopied by the spreading branches of a large oak. A pleasant seat was that green bank, with the clear water flowing at my feet, gay with the yellow flag, the white lily, and the blue forget-me-not, and fragrant with the rich tufts of the elegant meadow-sweet, mingling its delicious odour with that of the wild rose, the honeysuckle, and the new-mown hay. A pleasant seat was that turfy bank, and, as the haymakers adjourned to the farther end of the field to dinner, a quiet one; until suddenly I heard first a deep sigh, and then two voices, from the other side of the oak tree. I listened with somewhat of curiosity, but more of interest, to the following dialogue:—

“Why, my queen,” said the bluff, good-humoured voice of Farmer Bridgwater, “what are you moping here for? And what have you done with your rosy cheeks? A’nt you well?”

“Yes,” answered the sighing Patty.

“Go to dinner, then,” responded the generalissimo of the hay-field.

“No,” sighed the damsel; “I’d rather stay here.”

“Shall Lucy bring you something to eat?” pursued the good farmer.

“No.”

“Or your father?”

“No.”

“Or Aaron Keep? I see he has done.”

“No.”

“Or little Mary Wheatley? she’ll be here like a bird.”

“No, I don’t want any dinner, thank you”; and then came a deep sigh—such a sigh!

“Or I myself?” continued the honest farmer, not at all diverted from his purpose.

“No. It’s very good of you,” said Patty, half crying, “and I am very much obliged—but——”

“Perhaps you’d rather George Waring should bring it?” pursued the pertinacious inquirer, with a slight change of voice. “I’ll go and send him directly.”

“Don’t think of such a thing,” interrupted Patty, breathlessly; “he’s engaged.”

“No,” chuckled the farmer, “that business is over; Sally and he have settled the wedding-day, and I have recommended you for bridesmaid.”

“Me!”

“Ay, you! One wedding leads to another. Wednesday week is to be the day; and after George Waring has given Sally to his brother Tom, he’ll have an excellent opportunity for courting you.”

“Tom! Tom Waring! Of whom are you speaking?”

“Of George’s brother, to be sure, and Sally’s beau. There he is, just coming into the field. Did you never hear of Tom Waring? He only arrived from Andover last night, where Sally and he have been living next door to each other; and now they are going to marry and settle, as true lovers should. Why, what’s the girl crying for?” exclaimed the good farmer, “crying and smiling, and blushing, and looking so happy! Did you think George was making love to her in his own

proper person, you goosecap? Will you come to dinner now, you simpleton? you'd better, or I'll tell."

"Oh, Farmer Bridgewater!"

"Wipe your eyes and come to dinner, or I'll send George Waring to fetch you; come along, I say."

"Oh, Farmer Bridgewater!" and off they marched; and the next I saw of the haymakers, George and Patty were at work together, and so were Tom and Sally, looking as happy all the four as ever people could do in this world.



AT one end of the cluster of cottages, and cottage-like houses, which formed the little street of Hilton Cross—a pretty but secluded village, a few miles to the south,—stood the shop of Judith Kent, widow, “Licensed”—as the legend imported—“to vend tea, coffee, tobacco, and snuff.” Tea, coffee, tobacco, and snuff formed, however, but a small part of the multifarious merchandise of Mrs Kent; whose shop, the only repository of the hamlet, might have seemed an epitome of the wants and luxuries of humble life. In her window, candles, bacon, sugar, mustard, and soap, flourished amidst calicoes, oranges, dolls, ribands, and gingerbread. Crockeryware was piled on one side of her doorway, Dutch cheese and Irish butter encumbered the other; brooms and brushes rested against the wall; and ropes of onions and bunches of red herrings hung from the ceiling. She sold bread, butcher’s meat, and garden-stuff, on commission; and engrossed, at a word, the whole trade of Hilton Cross.

Notwithstanding this monopoly, the world went ill with poor Judith. She was a mild, pleasant-looking, middle-aged woman, with a heart too soft for her

calling. She could not say, no ! to the poor creatures who came to her on a Saturday night, to seek bread for their children, however deep they might already be in her debt, or however certain it was that their husbands were, at that moment, spending, at the Chequers or the Four Horse-shoes, the money that should have supported their wives and families ; for in this village, as in others, there were two flourishing ale-houses, although but one ill-accustomed shop—“but one halfpenny-worth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack !”

She could not say, no ! as a prudent woman might have said ; and, accordingly, half the poor people in the parish might be found on her books, whilst she herself was gradually getting in arrears with her baker, her grocer, and her landlord. Her family consisted of two children : Mary, a pretty, fair-haired, smiling lass, of twelve or thirteen, and Robert, a fine youth, nearly ten years older, who worked in the gardens of a neighbouring gentleman. Robert, conscious that his mother's was no gainful trade, often pressed her to give up business, sell off her stock, relinquish her house, and depend on his labour for her support ; but of this she would not hear.

Many motives mingled in her determination ; a generous reluctance to burthen her dutiful son with her maintenance—a natural fear of losing *caste* among her neighbours—a strong love of the house which, for five-and-twenty years, had been her home—a vague hope that times would mend, and all come right again (wiser persons than Mrs Kent have lulled reason to sleep with such an opiate !)—and, above all,

a want of courage to look her difficulties fairly in the face. Besides, she liked her occupation—its petty consequence, its bustle, and its gossipry; and she had a sense of gain in the small peddling bargains—the pennyworths of needles, and balls of cotton, and rows of pins, and yards of tape, which she was accustomed to vend for ready money, that overbalanced, for the moment, her losses and her debts; so that, in spite of her son's presages and warnings, the shop continued in full activity.

In addition to his forebodings respecting his mother, Robert had another misfortune;—the poor youth was in love.

About a quarter of a mile down the shady lane, which ran by one side of Mrs Kent's dwelling, was the pretty farmhouse, orchard, and homestead of Farmer Bell, whose eldest daughter, Susan—the beauty of the parish—was the object of a passion, almost amounting to idolatry. And, in good sooth, Susan Bell was well fitted to inspire such a passion. Besides a light graceful figure, moulded with the exactest symmetry, she had a smiling, innocent countenance, a complexion coloured like the brilliant blossoms of the balsam, and hair of a shining golden brown, like the fruit of the horse-chestnut. Her speech was at once modest and playful, her temper sweet, and her heart tender. She loved Robert dearly, although he often gave her cause to wish that she loved him not; for Robert was subject to the intermitting fever, called jealousy, causelessly—as he himself would declare, when a remission of the disease gave room for his natural sense to act—causelessly and penitently, but still pertinaciously jealous.

I have said that he was a fine young man, tall, dark, and slender ; I should add, that he was a good son, a kind brother, a pattern of sobriety and industry, and possessed of talent and acquirement far beyond his station. But there was about him an ardour, a vigour, a fiery restlessness, commonly held proper to the natives of the south of Europe, but which may be found sometimes amongst our own peasantry ; all his pursuits, whether of sport or labour, took the form of passion. At ten years old, he had far outstripped his fellow-pupils at the Foundation School, to which, through the kindness of the 'squire of the parish, his mother had been enabled to send him ;—at eighteen, he was the best cricketer, the best flute-player, the best bell-ringer, and the best gardener in the county ; and some odd volumes of Shakspeare having come into his possession, there was some danger at twenty of his turning out a dramatic poet, had not the kind discouragement of his master, to whom some of his early scenes were shown by his patron and admirer, the head gardener, acted as a salutary check. Indeed, so strong at one time was the poetical *furor*, that such a catastrophe as an entire play might, probably, have ensued, notwithstanding Mr Lescombe's judicious warnings, had not love, the master-passion, fallen, about this time, in poor Robert's way, and engrossed all the ardour of his ardent temperament.

The beauty and playfulness of his mistress, whilst they enchanted his fancy, kept the jealous irritability of his nature in perpetual alarm. He suspected a lover in every man who approached her ; and the firm refusal of her father to sanction their union, till her impatient wooer was a little more

forward in the world, completed his disquiet. Affairs were in this posture, when a new personage arrived at Hilton Cross.

In addition to her other ways and means, Mrs Kent tried to lessen her rent by letting lodgings, and the neat, quiet, elderly gentlewoman, the widow of a long-deceased rector, who had occupied her rooms ever since Robert was born, being at last gathered to her fathers, an advertisement of "pleasant apartments to let, in the airy village of Hilton Cross," appeared in the county paper. This announcement was as true as if it had not formed an advertisement in a country newspaper. Very airy *was* the pretty village of Hilton Cross—with its breezy uplands, and its open common, dotted, as it were, with cottages and clumps of trees; and very pleasant *were* Mrs Kent's apartments, for those who had sufficient taste to appreciate their rustic simplicity, and sufficient humility to overlook their smallness. The little chamber glittering with whiteness; its snowy dimity bed, and "fresh sheets smelling of lavender," the sitting-room, a thought larger, carpeted with India matting, its shining cane-chairs, and its bright casement wreathed, on one side, by a luxuriant jessamine, on the other by the tall cluster musk-rose, sending its bunches of odorous blossoms into the very window; the little flower-court underneath, full of holly-oaks, cloves, and dahlias, and the large sloping meadow beyond, leading up to Farmer Bell's tall irregular house, half-covered with a flaunting vine; his barns, and ricks, and orchard;—all this formed an apartment too tempting to remain long untenanted, in the bright month of August: accordingly, it was almost im-

mediately engaged by a gentleman in black, who walked over one fair morning, paid ten pounds as a deposit, sent for his trunk from the next town, and took possession on the instant.

Her new inmate, who, without positively declining to give his name, had yet contrived to evade all the questions Mrs Kent could devise, proved a perpetual source of astonishment, both to herself and her neighbours.

He was a well-made little man, near upon forty ; with considerable terseness of feature, a forehead of great power, whose effect was increased by a slight baldness on the top of the head, and an eye like a falcon. Such an eye ! It seemed to go through you—to strike all that it looked upon, like a *coup-de-soleil*. Luckily, the stranger was so merciful as, generally, to wear spectacles ; under cover of which those terrible eyes might see, and be seen, without danger.

His habits were as peculiar as his appearance. He was moderate, and rather fanciful, in his diet ; drank nothing but water, or strong coffee, made, as Mrs Kent observed, very wastefully ; and had, as she also remarked, a great number of heathenish-looking books scattered about the apartment—Lord Berners's *Froissart*, for instance, Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*, the Baskerville *Ariosto*, Goethe's *Faust*, a Spanish *Don Quixote*, and an interleaved *Philoctetes*, full of outline drawings. The greater part of his time was spent out of doors.—He would even ramble away, for three or four days together, with no other companion than a boy, hired in the village, to carry what Mrs Kent denominated his odds and ends ; which odds and ends consisted, for the most part, of

an angling rod and a sketching apparatus—our incognito being, as my readers have, by this time, probably discovered, no other than an artist, on his summer progress.

Robert speedily understood the stranger, and was delighted with the opportunity of approaching so gifted a person; although he contemplated with a degree of generous envy, which a king's regalia would have failed to excite in his bosom, those *chef-d'œuvres* of all nations, which were to him as "sealed books," and the pencils, whose power seemed to him little less than creative. He redoubled his industry in the garden, that he might, conscientiously, devote hours and half-hours to pointing out the deep pools and shallow eddies of their romantic stream, where he knew, from experience (for Robert, amongst his other accomplishments, was no mean "brother of the angle"), that fish were likely to be found; and, better still, he loved to lead to the haunts of his childhood, the wild bosky dells, and the sunny ends of lanes, where a sudden turn in the track, an overhanging tree, an old gate, a cottage chimney, and a group of cattle or children, had, sometimes, formed a picture, on which his mind had fed for hours.

It was Robert's chief pleasure to entice his lodger to scenes such as these, and to see his own visions growing into reality, under the glowing pencil of the artist; and he, in his turn, would admire, and marvel at, the natural feeling of the beautiful, which could lead an uninstructed country youth instinctively to the very elements of the picturesque. A general agreement of taste had brought about a degree of association unusual between persons so different in

rank : a particular instance of this accordance dissolved the intimacy.

Robert had been, for above a fortnight, more than commonly busy in Mr Lescombe's gardens and hot-houses, so busy that he even slept at the hall; the stranger, on the other hand, had been, during the same period, shut up, painting, in the little parlour. At last they met; and the artist invited his young friend to look at the picture, which had engaged him during his absence. On walking into the room he saw on the easel a picture in oils, almost finished. The style was of that delightful kind, which combines figures with landscape, the subject was hay-carrying; and the scene, that very sloping meadow—crowned by Farmer Bell's tall irregular house, its vine-wreathed porch, and chimneys, the great walnut-tree before the door, the orchard and the homestead—which formed the actual prospect from the windows before them. In the foreground was a waggon piled with hay, surrounded by the Farmer and his fine family—some pitching, some loading, some raking after, all intent on their pleasant business. The only disengaged persons in the field were young Mary Kent and Harry Bell, an urchin of four years old, who rode on her knee on the top of the waggon, crowned and wreathed with garlands of vine-leaves, and bind-weed, and poppies, and corn-flowers. In the front, looking up at Mary Kent and her little brother, and playfully tossing to them the lock of hay which she had gathered on her rake, stood Susan Bell, her head thrown back, her bonnet half off, her light and lovely figure shown, in all its grace, by the pretty attitude and the short cool dress; while her

sweet face, glowing with youth and beauty, had a smile playing over it, like a sunbeam. The boy was nodding and laughing to her, and seemed longing—as well he might—to escape from his flowery bondage, and jump into her arms. Never had poet framed a lovelier image of rural beauty! Never had painter more felicitously realized his conception.

“Well, Robert!” exclaimed our artist, a little impatient of the continued silence, and missing the expected praise, “Well!” but still Robert spoke not. “Don’t you think it a good subject?” continued the man of the easel; “I was sitting at the window, reading Froissart, whilst they were carrying the after-crop, and by good luck happened to look up, just as they had arranged themselves into this very group, and as the evening sun came slanting, exactly as it does now, across the meadow; so I dashed in the sketch instantly, got Mary to sit to me—and a very pretty nymph-like figure she makes—dressed the boy with flowers, just as he was decked out for the harvest home—the rogue is, really, a fit model for a Cupid; they are a glorious family!—and persuaded Susan—” at that name, Robert, unable to control himself longer, rushed out of the room, leaving the astonished painter in the full belief that his senses had forsaken him.

The unhappy lover, agonised by jealousy, pursued his way to the farm. He had, hitherto, contrived, although without confessing his motive, even to himself, to keep his friend and his mistress asunder. He had no fears of her virtue, or of his honour; but, to Robert’s romantic simplicity, it seemed that no one could gaze on Susan without feeling ardent love,

and that such a man as the artist could never love in vain. Besides, in the conversations which they had held together, he had dwelt on beauty and simplicity as the most attractive points of female character:—Robert had felt, as he spoke, that Susan was the very being whom he described, and had congratulated himself that they were still unacquainted. But now, they had met; he had seen, he had studied, had transferred to canvas that matchless beauty; had conquered the timidity which, to Robert, had always seemed unconquerable; had won her to admit his gaze, had tamed that shyest, coyest dove; had become familiar with that sweetest face, and that dearest form;—oh! the very thought was agony!

In this mood, he arrived at the farm; and there, working at her needle under the vine-wreathed porch, with the evening sun shining full upon her, and her little brother playing at her feet, sat his own Susan. She heard his rapid step, and advanced to meet him with a smile and a blush of delight, just the smile and blush of the picture. At such a moment, they increased his misery; he repulsed her offered hand, and poured forth a torrent of questions on the subject which possessed his mind. Her innocent answers were fuel to his frenzy:—“The picture! had he seen the picture? and was it not pretty? much too pretty, she thought, but everybody called it like! and Mary and Harry—was not he pleased with them? What a wonderful thing it was to make a bit of canvas so like living creatures! and what a wonderful man the strange gentleman was! she had been afraid of him, at first—sadly afraid of those two bright eyes—and so had Harry;—poor Harry had

cried ! but he was so merry and so kind, that neither of them minded sitting to him, now ! And she was so glad that Robert had seen the picture ! she had so wanted him to see it ! it was too pretty, to be sure, —but, then, Robert would not mind that. She had told the gentleman” —“Go to the gentleman now,” interrupted Robert, “and tell him that I relinquish you ! It will be welcome news ! Go to him, Susan, your heart is with him. Go to him, I say !” and, throwing from him, with a bitter laugh, the frightened and weeping girl, who had laid her trembling hand on his arm, to detain him, he darted from the door, and returned to his old quarters at the hall.

Another fortnight passed, and Robert still kept aloof from his family and his home. His mother and sister, indeed, occasionally saw him ; and sad accounts had poor little Mary to give to her friend Susan, of Robert’s ill looks and worse spirits. And Susan listened, and said she did not care ; and burst into a passion of tears, and said she was very happy ; and vowed never to speak to him again, and desired Mary never to mention her to him, or him to her, and then asked her a hundred questions respecting his looks, and his words, and his illness, and charged her with a thousand tender messages, which, in the next breath, she withdrew. And Mary, too young to understand the inconsistencies of love, pitied and comforted, and thought it “passing strange.”

In the meantime misfortunes of a different kind were gathering round Mrs Kent. The mealman and baker, whose bread she vended, her kindest friend and largest creditor, died, leaving his affairs in the hands of an attorney in the next town, the pest and

terror of the neighbourhood ; and, on the same day, she received two letters from this formidable lawyer—one on account of his dead client, the baker, the other on behalf of his living client, the grocer, who ranked next amongst her creditors, both threatening that if their respective claims were not liquidated, on or before a certain day, proceedings would be commenced against her forthwith.

It is in such a situation that woman most feels her helplessness,—especially that forlorn creature whom the common people, adopting the pathetic language of Scripture, designate by the expressive phrase, “a lone woman !” Poor Judith sat down to cry, in powerless sorrow and vain self-pity. She opened, indeed, her hopeless day-book,—but she knew too well that her debtors could not pay. She had no one to consult,—for her lodger, in whose general cleverness she had great confidence, had been absent, on one of his excursions, almost as long as her son,—and time pressed upon her,—for the letters, sent with the usual indirectness of country conveyance, originally given to the carrier, confided by the carrier to the buttermilk man, carried on by the buttermilk man to the next village, left for three days at a public-house, and, finally, delivered at Hilton Cross, by a return post-boy—had been nearly a week on the road. Saturday was the day fixed for payment, and this was Friday night ! and Michaelmas and rent-day were approaching ! and unable even to look at this accumulation of misery, poor Judith laid her head on her fruitless account-book, and sobbed aloud !

It was with a strangely mingled feeling of comfort in such a son, and sorrow so to grieve him,

that she heard Robert's voice at her side, asking tenderly, what ailed her? She put the letters into his hands; and he, long prepared for the blow, soothed and cheered her. "All must be given up," he said, "and he would go with her the next day, to make over the whole property. Let us pay as far as our means go, mother," pursued he, "and do not fear but, some day or other, we shall be able to discharge all our debts. God will speed an honest purpose. In the meantime, Mr Lescombe will give us a cottage—I know he will—and I shall work for you and Mary. It will be something to live for—something worth living for. Be comforted, dear mother!" He stooped, as he said this, and kissed her; and when he arose, he saw Susan standing opposite to him, and behind her the stranger. They had entered separately, during the conversation between the mother and son, and Susan was still unconscious of the artist's presence.

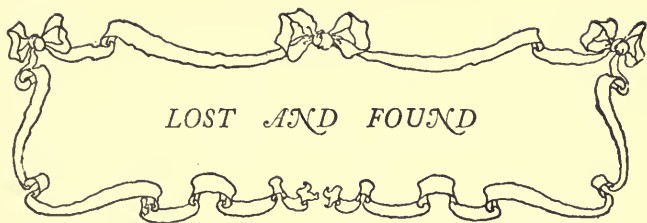
She stood, in great agitation, pressing Mary's hand (from whom she had heard the story), and immediately began questioning Mrs Kent as to the extent of the calamity. "She had twenty pounds of her own, that her grandmother had left her;—but a hundred! did they want a whole hundred?—and would they send Mrs Kent to prison? and sell her goods? and turn Mary out of doors? and Robert—Oh! how ill Robert looked! It would kill Robert!—Oh!" continued Susan, wringing her hands, "I would sell myself for a bondswoman, I would be like a negro-slave, for one hundred pounds!" "Would you?" said the stranger, advancing suddenly from the door, and producing two bank bills; "would

you? well! we will strike a bargain. I will give you two hundred pounds for this little hand, only this little hand!"—"What do you mean, Sir?" exclaimed Mrs Kent, "what can you mean!" "Nothing but what is fair and honourable," returned her lodger; "let Susan promise to meet me at church, to-morrow, and here are two hundred pounds to dispose of, at her pleasure, to-night." "Susan! my dear Susan!"—"Let her alone, mother!" interrupted Robert; "she must choose for herself!" and, for a few moments, there was a dead silence. Robert stood, leaning against the wall, pale as marble, his eyes cast down, and his lips compressed, in a state of forced composure. Mrs Kent, her head turning, now towards the bank-notes, and now towards her son, was in a state of restless and uncontrollable instability; Mary clung, crying, about her mother; and Susan, her colour varying, and her lips quivering, sat, unconsciously twisting and untwisting the bank-notes in her hand.

"Well, Susan!" said the artist, who had remained in tranquil expectation, surveying the group with his falcon eye, "Well, Susan! have you determined?"—The colour rose to her temples, and she answered firmly, "Yes, Sir! be pleased to take back the notes. I love nobody but Robert, and Robert loves me dearly, dearly! I know he does! Oh Mrs Kent! you would not have me vex Robert, your own dear son, and he so ill,—would you? Let them take these things! they never can be so cruel as to put you in prison—you, who were always so kind to everybody; and he will work for you! and I will work for you! Never mind being poor! better anything

than be false-hearted to my Robert!" "God for ever bless you, my Susan!" "God bless you, my dear child!" burst, at once, from Robert and his mother, as they, alternately, folded her in their arms.

"Pray take the notes, Sir," repeated Susan after a short interval. "No! that I will not do," replied the stranger, smiling. "The notes shall be yours, —are yours,—and what is more, on my own conditions! Meet me at church to-morrow morning, and I shall have the pleasure of bestowing this pretty hand, as I always intended, on my good friend, Robert, here. I have a wife of my own at home, my dear, whom I would not exchange, even for you; and I am quite rich enough to afford myself the luxury of making you happy. Besides, you have a claim to the money. These very bank-notes were gained by that sweet face! Your friend, Mr Lescombe, Robert, has purchased the hay-carrying! We have had a good deal of talk about you, and I am quite certain that he will provide for you all. No thanks!" continued he, interrupting something that Robert was going to say, — "No thanks! no apologies! I won't hear a word. Meet me at church to-morrow! but remember, young man, no more jealousy!" and, followed by a glance from Susan, of which Robert might have been jealous, the artist left the shop.



LOST AND FOUND

ANYBODY may be lost in a wood. It is well for me to have so good an excuse for my wanderings! for I am rather famous for such misadventures, and have sometimes been accused by my kindest friends of committing intentional blunders, and going astray out of malice prepense. To be sure, when in two successive rambles I contrived to get mazed on Burghfield Common, and bewildered in Kibe's Lane, those exploits did seem to overpass the common limits of stupidity. But in a wood, and a strange wood, a new place, a fresh country, untrodden ground beneath the feet, unknown landmarks before the eyes, wiser folks than I might require the silken clue of Rosamond, or the bag of ashes given to Finette Cendron (*Anglicè*, Cinderella) by the good fairy her godmother, to help them home again. Now, my luck exceeded even hers of the Glass Slipper, for I found something not unlike the good fairy herself, in the pleasant earthly guise of an old friend. But I may as well begin my story.

About two years ago we had the misfortune to lose one of the most useful and popular inhabitants of our village, Mrs Bond, the butter-woman. She—

for although there was a very honest and hard-working Farmer Bond, who had the honour to be Mrs Bond's husband, she was so completely the personage of the family that nobody ever thought of him—she lived on a small dairy-farm at the other side of the parish, where she had reared ten children in comfort and respectability, contriving in all years and in all seasons to look and to be flourishing, happy, and contented, and to drive her tilted cart twice a week into B., laden with the richest butter, the freshest eggs, and the finest poultry of the county. Never was market-woman so reliable as Mrs Bond, so safe to deal with, or so pleasant to look at. She was a neat, comely woman of five-and-forty, or thereabout, with dark hair, laughing eyes, a bright smile, and a brighter complexion—red and white like a daisy. People used to say how pretty she must have been; but I think she was then in the prime of her good looks; just as a full-blown damask rose is more beautiful than the same flower in the bud.

Very pleasant she was to look at, and still pleasanter to talk to; she was so gentle, so cheerful, so respectful, and so kind. Everybody in the village loved Mrs Bond. Even Lizzy and May, the two most aristocratical of its inhabitants, and the most tenacious of the distinctions of rank, would run to meet the butter-cart as if it were a carriage and four; a mark of preference which the good-humoured dairy-woman did not fail to acknowledge and confirm by gifts suited to their respective tastes—an occasional pitcher of butter-milk to May, and a stick with cherries tied round it to poor Lizzy.

Nor was Mrs Bond's bounty confined to largesses

of so suspicious a nature, as presents to the pets of a good customer. I have never known any human being more thoroughly and universally generous, more delicate in her little gifts, or with so entire an absence of design or artifice in her attentions. It was a prodigality of kindness that seemed never weary of well-doing. What posies of pinks and sweet-williams, backed by marjoram and rosemary, she used to carry to the two poor old ladies who lodged at the pastry-cook's at B. ! What fagots of lilac and laburnum she would bring to deck the poor widow Hay's open hearth ! What baskets of water-cresses, the brownest, the bitterest, and the crispest of the year, for our fair neighbour, the nymph of the shoe-shop, a delicate girl, who could only be tempted in to her breakfast by that pleasant herb ! What pots of honey for John Brown's cough ! What gooseberries and currants for the baker's little children ! And as soon as her great vine ripened, what grapes for everybody ! No wonder that when Mrs Bond left the parish to occupy a larger farm in a distant county, her absence was felt as a misfortune by the whole village ; that poor Lizzy inquired after her every day for a week ; and that May watched for the tilted cart every Wednesday and Friday for a month or more.

I myself joined very heartily in the general lamentation. But time and habit reconcile us to most privations, and I must confess that, much as I liked her, I had nearly forgotten our good butter-woman, until an adventure which befell me last week placed me once more in the way of her ready kindness.

I was on a visit at a considerable distance from

home, in one of the most retired parts of Oxfordshire. Nothing could be more beautiful than the situation, or less accessible; shut in amongst woody hills, remote from great towns, with deep chalky roads, almost impassable, and a broad bridgeless river, coming, as if to intercept your steps, whenever you did seem to have fallen into a beaten track. It was exactly the country and the season in which to wander about all day long.

One fair morning I set out on my accustomed ramble. The sun was intensely hot; the sky almost cloudless; I had climbed a long abrupt ascent, to enjoy the sight of the magnificent river, winding like a snake amidst the richly-clothed hills: the pretty village, with its tapering spire; and the universal freshness and brilliancy of the gay and smiling prospect—too gay, perhaps! I gazed till I became dazzled with the glare of the sunshine, oppressed by the very brightness, and turned into a beech-wood by the side of the road, to seek relief from the overpowering radiance. These beech-woods should rather be called coppices. They are cut down occasionally, and consist of long flexible stems, growing out of the old roots. But they are like no other coppices, or rather none other can be compared with them. The young beechen stems, perfectly free from underwood, go arching and intertwining overhead, forming a thousand mazy paths, covered by a natural trellis; the shining green leaves, just bursting from their golden sheaths, contrasting with the smooth silvery bark, shedding a cool green light around, and casting a thousand dancing shadows on the mossy flowery path, pleasant to the eye and to the tread, a fit haunt

for wood-nymph or fairy. There is always much of interest in the mystery of a wood; the uncertainty produced by the confined boundary; the objects which crowd together, and prevent the eye from penetrating to any distance; the strange flickering mixture of shadow and sunshine, the sudden flight of birds—oh, it was enchanting! I wandered on, quite regardless of time or distance, now admiring the beautiful wood-sorrel which sprang up amongst the old roots—now plucking the fragrant wood-ruff—now trying to count the countless varieties of woodland-moss, till, at length, roused by my foot's catching in a rich trail of the white-veined ivy, which crept, wreathing and interlaced, over the ground, I became aware that I was completely lost, had entirely forsaken all track, and out-travelled all landmarks. The wood was, I knew, extensive, and the ground so tumbled about, that every hundred yards presented some flowery slope or broken dell, which added greatly to the picturesqueness of the scenery, but much diminished my chance of discovery or extrication.

In this emergency I determined to proceed straight onward, trusting in this way to reach at last one side of the wood, although I could not at all guess which; and I was greatly solaced, after having walked about a quarter of a mile, to find myself crossed by a rude cart track; and still more delighted, on proceeding a short distance farther, to hear sounds of merriment and business; none of the softest, certainly, but which gave token of rustic habitation; and to emerge suddenly from the close wood, amongst an open grove of huge old trees, oaks, with their brown-plaited leaves, cherries, covered with snowy

garlands, and beeches almost as gigantic as those of Windsor Park, contrasting, with their enormous trunks and majestic spread of bough, the light and flexible stems of the coppice I had left.

I had come out at one of the highest points of the wood, and now stood on a platform overlooking a scene of extraordinary beauty. A little to the right, in a very narrow valley, stood an old farmhouse, with pointed roofs and porch and pinnacles, backed by a splendid orchard, which lay bathed in the sunshine, exhaling its fresh aromatic fragrance, all one flower; just under me was a strip of rich meadow land, through which a stream ran sparkling, and directly opposite a ridge of hanging coppices, surrounding and crowning, as it were, an immense old chalk-pit, which, overhung by bramble, ivy, and a hundred pendent weeds, irregular and weather-stained, had an air as venerable and romantic as some grey ruin. Seen in the gloom and stillness of evening, or by the pale glimpses of the moon, it would have required but little aid from the fancy to picture out the broken shafts and mouldering arches of some antique abbey. But, besides that daylight is the sworn enemy of such illusions, my attention was imperiously claimed by a reality of a very different kind. One of the gayest and noisiest operations of rural life—sheep-washing—was going on in the valley below—

“the turmoil that unites
Clamour of boys with innocent despites
Of barking dogs, and bleatings from strange fear.”
—WORDSWORTH.

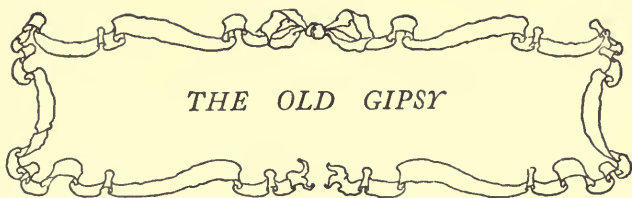
All the inhabitants of the farm seemed assembled

in the meadow. I counted a dozen, at least, of men and boys of all ages, from the stout, sunburnt, vigorous farmer of fifty, who presided over the operation, down to the eight-year old urchin, who, screaming, running, and shaking his ineffectual stick after an eloped sheep, served as a sort of aide-de-camp to the sheep-dog. What a glorious scene of confusion it was! what shouting! what scuffling! what glee! Four or five young men, and one amazon of a barefooted girl, with her petticoats tucked up to her knees, stood in the water where it was pent between two hurdles, ducking, sousing, and holding down by main force, the poor, frightened, struggling sheep, who kicked, and plunged, and bleated, and butted, and, in spite of their imputed innocence, would certainly, in the ardour of self-defence, have committed half a dozen homicides, if their power had equalled their inclination. The rest of the party were fully occupied; some in conducting the purified sheep, who showed a strong disposition to go the wrong way, back to their quarters; others in leading the uncleansed part of the flock to their destined ablution, from which they also testified a very ardent and active desire to escape. Dogs, men, boys, and girls, were engaged in marshalling these double processions, the order of which was constantly interrupted by the outbreaking of some runaway sheep, who turned the march into a pursuit, to the momentary increase of the din which seemed already to have reached the highest possible pitch.

The only quiet persons in the field were a delicate child of nine years old, and a blooming woman of forty-five—a comely, blooming woman,

with dark hair, bright eyes, and a complexion like a daisy, who stood watching the sheep-washers with the happiest smiles, and was evidently the mother of half the lads and lasses in the *mêlée*. It would be, and it was, no other than my friend Mrs Bond, and resolving to make myself and my difficulties known to her, I scrambled down no very smooth or convenient path, and keeping a gate between me and the scene of action, contrived, after sundry efforts, to attract her attention.

Here, of course, my difficulties ceased. But if I were to tell how glad she was to see her old neighbour, how full of kind questions and of hospitable cares—how she would cut the great cake intended for the next day's sheep-shearing, would tap her two-year-old currant wine, would gather a whole bush of early honeysuckles, and finally would see me home herself, I being, as she observed, rather given to losing my way;—if I were to tell all these things, when should I have done? I will rather conclude in the words of an old French fairy tale:—“*Je crains déjà d'avoir abusé de la patience du lecteur. Je finis avant qu'il me dise de finir.*”



THE OLD GIPSY

WE have few gipsies in our neighbourhood. In spite of our tempting green lanes, our woody dells and heathy commons, the rogues don't take to us. I am afraid that we are too civilised, too cautious; that our sheep-folds are too closely watched; our barnyards too well guarded; our geese and ducks too fastly penned; our chickens too securely locked up; our little pigs too safe in their sty; our game too scarce; our laundresses too careful. In short, we are too little primitive: we have a snug brood of vagabonds and poachers of our own, to say nothing of their regular followers, constables and justices of the peace:—we have stocks in the village, and a treadmill in the next town: and therefore we go gipsyless—a misfortune of which every landscape painter, and every lover of that living landscape, the country, can appreciate the extent. There is nothing under the sun that harmonises so well with nature, especially in her woodland recesses, as that picturesque people, who are, so to say, the wild genus—the pheasants and roe-bucks of the human race.

Sometimes, indeed, we used to see a gipsy procession passing along the common, like an eastern caravan, men, women, and children, donkeys and

dogs; and sometimes a patch of bare earth, strewed with ashes and surrounded with scathed turf, on the broad green margin of some cross road, would give token of a gipsy halt; but a regular gipsy encampment has always been so rare an event, that I was equally surprised and delighted to meet with one in the course of my walks last autumn, particularly as the party was of the most innocent description, quite free from those tall, dark, lean, Spanish-looking men, who, it must be confessed, with all my predilection for the caste, are rather startling to meet when alone in an unfrequented path: and a path more solitary than that into which the beauty of a bright October morning had tempted me could not well be imagined.

Branching off from the high road, a little below our village, runs a wide green lane, bordered on either side by a row of young oaks and beeches, just within the hedge, forming an avenue, in which, on a summer afternoon, you may see the squirrels disporting from tree to tree, whilst the rooks, their fellow-denizens, are wheeling in noisy circles over their heads. The fields sink gently down on one side, so that, being the bottom of a natural winding valley, and crossed by many little hills and rivulets, the turf exhibits even in the driest summers an emerald verdure. Scarcely any one passes the end of that lane without wishing to turn into it; but the way is in some sort dangerous and difficult for foot-passengers, because the brooklets which intersect it are in many instances bridgeless, and in others bestridden by planks so decayed, that it were rashness to pass them; and the nature of the ground, treacherous and

boggy, and in many places as unstable as water, renders it for carriages wholly impracticable.

I, however, who do not dislike a little difficulty where there is no absolute danger, and who am moreover almost as familiar with the one only safe track as the heifers who graze there, sometimes venture along this seldom-trodden path, which terminates, at the end of a mile and a half, in a spot of singular beauty. The hills become abrupt and woody, the cultivated enclosures cease, and the long narrow valley ends in a little green, bordered on one side by a fine old park, whose mossy paling, overhung with thorns and hollies, comes sweeping round it, to meet the rich coppices which clothe the opposite acclivity. Just under the high and irregular paling, shaded by the birches and sycamores of the park, and by the venerable oaks which are scattered irregularly on the green, is a dark deep pool, whose broken banks, crowned with fern and wreathed with briar and bramble, have an air of wildness and grandeur that might have suited the pencil of Salvator Rosa.

In this lonely place (for the mansion to which the park belongs has long been uninhabited) I first saw our gipsies. They had pitched their tent under one of the oak trees, perhaps from a certain dim sense of natural beauty, which those who live with nature in the fields are seldom totally without; perhaps because the neighbourhood of the coppices, and of the deserted hall, was favourable to the acquisition of game, and of the little fuel which their hardy habits required. The party consisted only of four—an old crone, in a tattered red cloak and black bonnet, who was stooping over a kettle, of which the contents

were probably as savoury as that of Meg Merrilies, renowned in story; a pretty black-eyed girl, at work under the trees; a sun-burnt urchin of eight or nine, collecting sticks and dead leaves to feed their out-of-door fire, and a slender lad two or three years older, who lay basking in the sun, with a couple of shabby dogs, of the sort called mongrel, in all the joy of idleness, whilst a grave, patient donkey stood grazing hard by. It was a pretty picture, with its soft autumnal sky, its rich woodiness, its sunshine, its verdure, the light smoke curling from the fire, and the group disposed around it so harmless, poor outcasts! and so happy—a beautiful picture! I stood gazing on it till I was half ashamed to look longer, and came away half afraid that they should depart before I could see them again.

This fear I soon found to be groundless. The old gipsy was a celebrated fortune-teller, and the post having been so long vacant, she could not have brought her talents to a better market. The whole village rang with the predictions of this modern Cassandra—unlike her Trojan predecessor, inasmuch as her prophecies were never of evil. I myself could not help admiring the real cleverness, the genuine gipsy tact with which she adapted her foretellings to the age, the habits, and the known desires and circumstances of her clients.

To our little pet, Lizzy, for instance, a damsel of seven, she predicted a fairing; to Ben Kirby, a youth of thirteen, head batter of the boys, a new cricket-ball; to Ben's sister Lucy, a girl some three years his senior, and just promoted to that ensign of womanhood a cap, she promised a pink top-knot;

whilst for Miss Sophia Matthews, our old-maidish school-mistress, who would be heartily glad to be a girl again, she foresaw one handsome husband, and for the smart widow Simmons, two. These were the least of her triumphs. George Davis, the dashing young farmer of the hill-house, a gay sportsman, who scoffed at fortune-tellers and matrimony, consulted her as to whose greyhound would win the courser's cup at the beacon meeting: to which she replied, that she did not know to whom the dog would belong, but that the winner of the cup would be a white greyhound, with one blue ear, and a spot on its side, being an exact description of Mr George Davis's favourite Helen, who followed her master's steps like his shadow, and was standing behind him at this very instant. This prediction gained our gipsy half-a-crown. And Master Welles—the thriving, thrifty yeoman of the Lea—she managed to win sixpence from his hard, honest, frugal hand, by a prophecy that his old brood mare, called Blackfoot, should bring forth twins. And Ned the blacksmith, who was known to court the tall nursemaid at the mill—she got a shilling from Ned, simply by assuring him that his wife should have the longest coffin that ever was made in our wheelwright's shop. A most tempting prediction! ingeniously combining the prospect of winning and of surviving the lady of his heart—a promise equally adapted to the hot and cold fits of that ague called love; lightening the fetters of wedlock; uniting in a breath the bridegroom and the widower. Ned was the best pleased of all her customers, and enforced his suit with such vigour, that he and the fair giantess were asked in church

the next Sunday, and married at the fortnight's end.

No wonder that all the world—that is to say, all our world—were crazy to have their fortunes told—to enjoy the pleasure of hearing from such undoubted authority, that what they wished to be should be. Amongst the most eager to take a peep into futurity was our pretty maid Harriet, although her desire took the not unusual form of disclamation—“Nothing should induce her to have her fortune told, nothing upon earth! She never thought of the gipsy, not she!” and, to prove the fact, she said so at least twenty times a day. Now Harriet's fortune seemed told already; her destiny was fixed. She, the belle of the village, was engaged, as everybody knows, to our village beau, Joel Brent; they were only waiting for a little more money to marry; and as Joel was already head carter to our head farmer, and had some prospects of a bailiff's place, their union did not appear very distant. But Harriet, besides being a beauty, was a coquette, and her affection for her betrothed did not interfere with certain flirtations which came in like Isabella, “by-the-bye,” and occasionally cast a shadow of coolness between the lovers, which, however, Joel's cleverness and good-humour generally contrived to chase away. There had probably been a little fracas in the present instance, for at the end of one of her daily professions of unfaith in gipsies and their predictions, she added, “that none but fools did believe them; that Joel had had his fortune told, and wanted to treat her to a prophecy—but she was not such a simpleton.”

About an hour after the delivery of this speech,

I happened in tying up a chrysanthemum, to go to our wood-yard for a stick of proper dimensions, and there, enclosed between the faggot-pile and the coal-shed, stood the gipsy, in the very act of palmistry, conning the lines of fate in Harriet's hand. Never was a stronger contrast than that between the old withered sibyl, dark as an Egyptian, with bright laughing eyes, and an expression of keen humour under all her affected solemnity, and our village beauty, tall, and plump, and fair, blooming as a rose, and simple as a dove. She was listening too intently to see me, but the fortune-teller did, and stopped so suddenly that her attention was awakened, and the intruder discovered.

Harriet at first meditated a denial. She called up a pretty innocent unconcerned look; answered my silence (for I never spoke a word) by muttering something about "coals for the parlour"; and catching up my new-painted green watering-pot, instead of the coal-scuttle, began filling it with all her might, to the unspeakable discomfiture of that useful utensil, on which the dingy dust stuck like bird-lime—and of her own clean apron, which exhibited a curious interchange of black and green on a white ground. During the process of filling the watering-pot, Harriet made divers signs to the gipsy to decamp. The old sibyl, however, budged not a foot, influenced probably by two reasons—one, the hope of securing a customer in the new-comer, whose appearance is generally, I am afraid, the very reverse of dignified, rather merry than wise; the other, a genuine fear of passing through the yard-gate, on the outside of which a much more imposing

person, my greyhound Mayflower, who has a sort of beadle instinct anent drunkards and pilferers, and disorderly persons of all sorts, stood barking most furiously.

This instinct is one of May's remarkable qualities. Dogs are all, more or less, physiognomists, and commonly pretty determined aristocrats, fond of the fine and averse to the shabby, distinguishing, with a nice accuracy, the master castes from the pariahs of the world. But May's power of perception is another matter, more, as it were, moral. She has no objection to honest rags; can away with dirt, or age, or ugliness, or any such accident, and, except just at home, makes no distinction between kitchen and parlour. Her intuition points entirely to the race of people commonly called suspicious, on whom she pounces at a glance. What a constable she would have made! What a jewel of a thief-taker! Pity that those four feet should stand in the way of her preferment! she might have risen to be a Bow Street officer. As it is, we make the gift useful in a small way. In the matter of hiring and marketing the whole village likes to consult May. Many a chap has stared when she has been whistled up to give her opinion as to his honesty; and many a pig bargain has gone off on her veto. Our neighbour, mine host of the Rose, used constantly to follow her judgment in the selection of his lodgers. His house was never so orderly as when under her government. At last he found out that she abhorred tipplers as well as thieves—indeed, she actually barked away three of his best customers: and he left off appealing to her sagacity, since which he has, at different times, lost



C. Brock
1904

An old crone... stooping
over a kettle

three silver spoons and a leg of mutton. With every one else May is an oracle. Not only in the case of wayfarers and vagrants, but amongst our own people, her fancies are quite a touchstone. A certain hump-backed cobbler, for instance—May cannot abide him, and I don't think he has had so much as a job of heel-piecing to do since her dislike became public. She really took away his character.

Longer than I have taken to relate Mayflower's accomplishments stood we, like the folks in *The Critic*, at a deadlock; May, who probably regarded the gipsy as a sort of rival, an interloper on her oracular domain, barking with the voice of a lioness—the gipsy trying to persuade me into having my fortune told—and I endeavouring to prevail on May to let the gipsy pass. Both attempts were unsuccessful: and the fair consulter of destiny, who had by this time recovered from the shame of her detection, extricated us from our dilemma by smuggling the old woman away through the house.

Of course Harriet was exposed to some raillery, and a good deal of questioning about her future fate, as to which she preserved an obstinate but evidently satisfied silence. At the end of three days, however—my readers are, I hope, learned enough in gipsy lore to know, that unless kept secret for three entire days, no prediction can come true—at the end of three days, when all the family except herself had forgotten the story, our pretty soubrette, half bursting with the long retention, took the opportunity of lacing on my new half-boots to reveal the prophecy. “She was to see within the week, and this was Saturday, the young man, the real young man, whom

she was to marry.”—“Why, Harriet, you know poor Joel.” “Joel, indeed! the gipsy said that the young man, the real young man, was to ride up to the house dressed in a dark great-coat (and Joel never wore a great-coat in his life—all the world knew that he wore smock-frocks and jackets), and mounted on a white horse—and where should Joel get a white horse?”—“Had this real young man made his appearance yet?”—“No; there had not been a white horse past the place since Tuesday; so it must certainly be to-day.”

A good look-out did Harriet keep for white horses during this fateful Saturday, and plenty did she see. It was the market-day at B., and team after team came by with one, two, and three white horses; cart after cart, and gig after gig, each with a white steed; Colonel M.'s carriage, with its prancing pair—but still no horseman. At length one appeared; but he had a great-coat whiter than the animal he rode; another, but he was old farmer Lewington, a married man; a third, but he was little Lord L., a schoolboy, on his Arabian pony. Besides, they all passed the house; and as the day wore on, Harriet began, alternately, to possess her old infidelity on the score of fortune-telling, and to let out certain apprehensions that, if the gipsy did really possess the power of foreseeing events, and no such horseman arrived, she might possibly be unlucky enough to die an old maid—a fate for which, although the proper destiny of a coquette, our village beauty seemed to entertain a very decided aversion.

At last, at dusk, just as Harriet, making believe to close our casement shutters, was taking her last

peep up the road, something white appeared in the distance coming leisurely down the hill. Was it really a horse? Was it not rather Titus Strong's cow driving home to milking? A minute or two dissipated that fear; it certainly was a horse, and as certainly it had a dark rider. Very slowly he descended the hill, pausing most provokingly at the end of the village, as if about to turn up the Vicarage lane. He came on, however, and after another short stop at the Rose, rode up full to our little gate, and catching Harriet's hand as she was opening the wicket, displayed to the half-pleased, half-angry damsel, the smiling triumphant face of her own Joel Brent, equipped in a new great-coat, and mounted on his master's newly-purchased market nag. Oh, Joel! Joel! The gipsy! the gipsy!



THE weather continuing fine and dry, I did not fail to revisit my gipsy encampment, which became more picturesque every day in the bright sun-gleams and lengthening shadows of a most brilliant autumn. A slight frost had strewed the green lane with the light yellow leaves of the elm—those leaves on whose yielding crispness it is so pleasant to tread, and which it is so much pleasanter to watch whirling along, “thin dancers upon air,” in the fresh October breeze; whilst the reddened beech, and spotted sycamore, and the rich oaks drooping with acorns, their foliage just edging into its deep orange brown, added all the magic of colour to the original beauty of the scenery. It was undoubtedly the prettiest walk in the neighbourhood, and the one which I frequented the most.

Ever since the adventure of May, the old fortune-teller and I understood each other perfectly. She knew that I was no client, no patient, no customer (which is the fittest name for a goosecap who goes to a gipsy to ask what is to befall her?) but she also knew that I was no enemy to either her or her profession; for, after all, if people choose to amuse themselves by being simpletons, it is no part of their neighbours' business to hinder them. I, on my side,

liked the old gipsy exceedingly; I liked both her humour and her good humour, and had a real respect for her cleverness. We always interchanged a smile and a nod, meet where we might. May, too, had become accustomed to the whole party. The gift of a bone from the caldron—a bare bone—your well-fed dog likes nothing so well as such a windfall, and if stolen the relish is higher—a bare bone brought about that reconciliation. I am sorry to accuse May of accepting a bribe, but such was the fact. She now looked at the fortune-teller with great complacency, would let the boys stroke her long neck, and, in her turn, would condescend to frolic with their shabby curs, who, trained to a cat-like caution and mistrust of their superiors, were as much alarmed at her advances as if a lioness had offered herself as their playfellow. There was no escaping her civility, however, so they submitted to their fate, and really seemed astonished to find themselves alive when the gambol was over. One of them, who from a tail turned over his back like a squirrel, and an amazingly snub nose, had certainly some mixture of the pug in his composition, took a great fancy to her when his fright was past; which she repaid by the sort of scornful kindness, the despotic protection, proper to her as a beauty, and a favourite, and a high-blooded greyhound—always a most proud and stately creature. The poor little mongrel used regularly to come jumping to meet her, and she as regularly turned him over and over and over, and round and round and round, like a teetotum. He liked it apparently, for he never failed to come and court the tossing whenever she went near him.

The person most interesting to me of the whole party was the young girl. She was remarkably pretty, and of the peculiar prettiness which is so frequently found amongst that singular people. Her face resembled those which Sir Joshua has often painted—rosy, round, and bright, set in such a profusion of dark curls, lighted by such eyes, and such a smile! and she smiled whenever you looked at her—she could not help it. Her figure was light and small, of low stature, and with an air of great youthfulness. In her dress she was, for a gipsy, surprisingly tidy. For the most part, that ambulatory race have a preference for rags, as forming their most appropriate wardrobe, being a part of their tools of trade, their insignia of office. I do not imagine that Harriet's friend, the fortune-teller, would have exchanged her stained tattered cloak for the thickest and brightest red cardinal that ever came out of a woollen-draper's shop. And she would have been a loser if she had. Take away that mysterious mantle, and a great part of her reputation would go too. There is much virtue in an old cloak. I question if the simplest of her clients, even Harriet herself, would have consulted her in a new one. But the young girl was tidy; not only accurately clean, and with clothes neatly and nicely adjusted to her trim little form, but with the rents darned, and the holes patched in a way that I should be glad to see equalled by our own villagers.

Her manners were quite as ungipsy-like as her apparel, and so was her conversation; for I could not help talking to her, and was much pleased with her frankness and innocence, and the directness and

simplicity of her answers. She was not the least shy; on the contrary, there was a straightforward look, a fixing of her sweet eyes full of pleasure and reliance right upon you, which, in the description, might seem almost too assured, but which, in reality, no more resembled vulgar assurance than did the kindred artlessness of Shakespeare's *Miranda*. It seems strange to liken a gipsy girl to that loveliest creation of genius; but I never saw that innocent gaze without being sure that just with such a look of pleased attention, of affectionate curiosity, did the island princess listen to Ferdinand.

All that she knew of her little story she told without scruple, in a young liquid voice, and with a little curtsy between every answer, that became her extremely. "Her name," she said, "was Fanny. She had no father or mother; they were dead; and she and her brothers lived with her grandmother. They lived always out of doors, sometimes in one place—sometimes in another; but she should like always to live under that oak tree, it was so pleasant. Her grandmother was very good to them all, only rather particular. She loved her very much; and she loved Dick (her eldest brother), though he was a sad unlucky boy, to be sure. She was afraid he would come to some bad end."

And, indeed, Dick at that moment seemed in imminent danger of verifying his sister's prediction. He had been trying for a gleaning of nuts amongst the tall hazels on the top of a bank, which, flanked by a deep ditch, separated the coppice from the green. We had heard him for the last five minutes smashing and crashing away at a prodigious rate,

swinging himself from stalk to stalk, and tugging and climbing like a sailor or a monkey; and now, at the very instant of Fanny's uttering this prophecy, having missed a particularly venturesome grasp, he was impelled forward by the rebound of the branches, and fell into the ditch with a tremendous report, bringing half the nuttery after him, and giving us all a notion that he had broken his neck. His time, however, was not yet come; he was on his feet again in half a minute, and in another half minute we again heard him rustling among the hazel boughs; and Fanny and I went on with our talk, which the fright and scolding, consequent on this accident, had interrupted. My readers are of course aware that when any one meets with a fall, the approved medicament of the most affectionate relatives is a good dose of scolding.

“She liked Dick,” she continued, “in spite of his unluckiness—he was so quick and good-humoured; but the person she loved most was her youngest brother, Willy. Willy was the best boy in the world, he would do anything she told him” (indeed the poor child was in the very act of picking up acorns under her inspection, to sell, as I afterwards found, in the village), “and never got into mischief, or told a lie in his life; she had had the care of him ever since he was born, and she wished she could get him a place.” By this time the little boy had crept towards us, and, still collecting the acorns in his small brown hands, had turned up his keen intelligent face, and was listening with great interest to our conversation. “A place!” said I, much surprised. “Yes,” replied she firmly, “a place. ’Twould be a fine

thing for my poor Willy to have a house over him in the cold winter nights." And with a grave tenderness, that might have beseemed a young mother, she stooped her head over the boy and kissed him. "But *you* sleep out of doors in the cold winter nights, Fanny?"—"Me! Oh, I don't mind it, and sometimes we creep into a barn. But poor Willy! If I could but get Willy a place, my lady!"

This "my lady," the first gipsy word that Fanny had uttered, lost all that it would have had of unpleasing in the generosity and affectionateness of the motive. I could not help promising to recommend her Willy, although I could not hold out any very strong hopes of success, and we parted, Fanny following me, with thanks upon thanks, almost to the end of the lane.

Two days after I again saw my pretty gipsy; she was standing by the side of our gate, too modest even to enter the court, waiting for my coming out to speak to me. I brought her into the hall, and was almost equally delighted to see her, and to hear her news; for although I had most faithfully performed my promise, by mentioning Master Willy to everybody likely to want a servant of his qualifications, I had seen enough in the course of my canvass to convince me that a gipsy boy of eight years old would be a difficult *protégé* to provide for.

Fanny's errand relieved my perplexity. She came to tell me that Willy had gotten a place—"That Thomas Lamb, my lord's head gamekeeper, had hired him to tend his horse and his cow, and serve the pigs, and feed the dogs, and dig the garden, and clean the shoes and knives, and run on errands—

in short, to be a man of all work. Willy was gone that very morning. He had cried to part with her, and she had almost cried herself, she should miss him so; he was like her own child. But then it was such a great place; and Thomas Lamb seemed such a kind master—talked of new-clothing him, and meant him to wear shoes and stockings, and was very kind indeed. But poor Willy had cried sadly at leaving her,”—and the sweet matronly elder sister fairly cried too.

I comforted her all I could, first by praises of Thomas Lamb, who happened to be of my acquaintance, and was indeed the very master whom, had I had the choice, I would have selected for Willy; and secondly, by the gift of some unconsidered trifles, which one should have been ashamed to offer to any one who had ever had a house over her head, but which the pretty gipsy girl received with transport, especially some working materials of the commonest sort. Poor Fanny had never known the luxury of a thimble before; it was as new to her finger as shoes and stockings were likely to be to Willy's feet. She forgot her sorrows, and tripped home to her oak-tree, the happiest of the happy.

Thomas Lamb, Willy's new master, was, as I have said, of my acquaintance. He was a remarkably fine young man, and as well-mannered as those of his calling usually are. Generally speaking, there are no persons, excepting real gentlemen, so gentlemanly as gamekeepers. They keep good company. The beautiful and graceful creatures whom they at once preserve and pursue, and the equally noble and generous animals whom they train, are their principal

associates; and even by their masters they are regarded rather as companions than as servants. They attend them in their sports more as guides and leaders than as followers, pursuing a common recreation with equal enjoyment, and often with superior skill. Gamekeepers are almost always well behaved, and Thomas Lamb was eminently so. He had quite the look of a man of fashion; the person, the carriage, the air. His figure was tall and striking; his features delicately carved, with a paleness of complexion, and a slight appearance of ill-health that added to their elegance. In short, he was exactly what the ladies would have called interesting in a gentleman; and the gentleness of his voice and manner, and the constant propriety of his deportment, tended to confirm the impression.

Luckily for him, however, this delicacy and refinement lay chiefly on the surface. His constitution, habits, and temper were much better fitted to his situation, much hardier and heartier, than they appeared to be. He was still a bachelor, and lived by himself in a cottage, almost as lonely as if it had been placed in a desert island. It stood in the centre of his preserves, in the midst of a wilderness of coppice and woodland, accessible only by a narrow winding path, and at least a mile from the nearest habitation. When you had threaded the labyrinth, and were fairly arrived in Thomas's dominion, it was a pretty territory. A low thatched cottage, very irregularly built, with a porch before the door, and a vine half covering the casements; a garden a good deal neglected (Thomas Lamb's four-footed subjects, the hares, took care to eat up all his flowers: hares

are animals of taste, and are particularly fond of pinks and carnations, the rogues!), an orchard, and a meadow completed the demeane. There was also a commodious dog-kennel, and a stable, of which the outside was completely covered with the trophies of Thomas's industry—kites, jack-daws, magpies, hawks, crows, and owls, nailed by the wings, *displayed*, as they say in heraldry, against the wall, with polecats, weasels, stoats, and hedgehogs figuring at their side, a perfect menagerie of dead game-killers.¹

But the prettiest part of this woodland cottage was the real living game that flitted about it, as tame as barn-door fowls; partridges flocking to be fed, as if there were not a dog, or a gun, or a man in the world; pheasants, glorious creatures! coming at a call; hares almost as fearless as Cowper's, that would stand and let you look at them: would let you approach quite near, before they raised one quivering ear and darted off; and that even then, when the instinct of timidity was aroused, would turn at a safe distance to look again. Poor, pretty things! What a pity it seemed to kill them!

Such was to be Willy's future habitation. The day after he entered upon his place, I had an opportunity of offering my double congratulations, to the master on his new servant, to the servant on his new master. Whilst taking my usual walk, I found

¹ Foxes, the destruction of which is so great an object in a pheasant preserve, never are displayed, especially if there be a pack of hounds in the neighbourhood. That odious part of a game-keeper's occupation is as quietly and unostentatiously performed as any operation of gunnery can be. Lords of manors will even affect to preserve foxes—Heaven forgive them! just as an unpopular ministry is sure to talk of protecting the liberty of the subject.

Thomas Lamb, Dick, Willy, and Fanny, about half-way up the lane, engaged in the animating sport of unearthing a weasel, which one of the gipsy dogs followed into a hole by the ditch-side. The boys showed great sportsmanship on this occasion: and so did their poor curs, who, with their whole bodies inserted into the different branches of the burrow, and nothing visible but their tails (the one, the long puggish brush, of which I have already made mention, the other a terrier-like stump, that maintained an incessant wag), continued to dig and scratch, throwing out showers of earth, and whining with impatience and eagerness. Every now and then, when quite gasping and exhausted, they came out for a moment's air; whilst the boys took their turn, poking with a long stick, or loosening the ground with their hands, and Thomas stood by, superintending and encouraging both dog and boy, and occasionally cutting a root or a bramble that impeded their progress. Fanny also entered into the pursuit with great interest, dropping here and there a word of advice, as nobody can help doing when they see others in perplexity. In spite of all these aids, the mining operation proceeded so slowly, that the experienced keeper sent off his new attendant for a spade to dig out the vermin, and I pursued my walk

After this encounter, it so happened that I never went near the gipsy tent without meeting Thomas Lamb—sometimes on foot, sometimes on his pony; now with a gun, and now without; but always loitering near the oak-tree, and always, as it seemed, reluctant to be seen. It was very unlike Thomas's usual manner to seem ashamed of being caught in any

place, or in any company; but so it was. Did he go to the ancient sibyl to get his fortune told? or was Fanny the attraction? A very short time solved the query.

One night, towards the end of the month, the keeper presented himself at our house on justice business. He wanted a summons for some poachers who had been committing depredations in the preserve. Thomas was a great favourite; and was of course immediately admitted, his examination taken, and his request complied with. "But how," said the magistrate, looking up from the summons which he was signing, "how can you expect, Thomas, to keep your pheasants, when that gipsy boy with his finders has pitched his tent just in the midst of your best coppices, killing more game than half the poachers in the country?"—"Why, as to the gipsy, sir," replied Thomas; "Fanny is as good a girl——" "I was not talking of Fanny," interrupted the man of warrants, smiling,—“as good a girl,” pursued Thomas—“A very pretty girl!” ejaculated his worship,—“as good a girl,” resumed Thomas, “as ever trod the earth!”—“A sweet, pretty creature, certainly,” was again the provoking reply. “Ah, sir, if you could but hear how her little brother talks of her!”—“Why, Thomas, this gipsy has made an impression.”—“Ah, sir! she is such a good girl!”—and the next day they were married.

It was a measure to set every tongue in the village a-wagging; for Thomas, besides his personal good gifts, was well-to-do in the world—my lord's head keeper, and prime favourite. He might have pretended to any farmer's daughter in the

parish : everybody cried out against the match. It was rather a bold measure, certainly ; but I think it will end well. They are, beyond a doubt, the handsomest couple in these parts ; and as the fortune-teller and her eldest grandson have had the good sense to decamp, and Fanny, besides being the most grateful and affectionate creature on earth, turns out clever and docile, and comports herself just as if she had lived in a house all her days, there are some hopes that in process of time her sin of gipsyism may be forgiven, and Mrs Lamb be considered as visitable, at least by her next neighbours, the wives of the shoemaker and the parish clerk. At present, I am sorry to say that those worthy persons have sent both Thomas and her to Coventry—a misfortune which they endure with singular resignation.



JACK HATCH

I PIQUE myself on knowing by sight, and by name, almost every man and boy in our parish, from eight years old to eighty—I cannot say quite so much for the women. They—the elder of them at least—are more within doors, more hidden. One does not meet them in the fields and highways; their duties are close housekeepers, and live under cover. The girls, to be sure, are often enough in sight, “true creatures of the element,” basking in the sun, racing in the wind, rolling in the dust, dabbling in the water,—hardier, dirtier, noisier, more sturdy defiers of heat, and cold, and wet, than boys themselves. One sees them quite often enough to know them; but then the little elves alter so much at every step of their approach to womanhood, that recognition becomes difficult, if not impossible. It is not merely growing,—boys grow; it is positive, perplexing, and perpetual change: a butterfly hath not undergone more transmutations in its progress through this life, than a village belle in her arrival at the age of seventeen.

The first appearance of the little lass is something after the manner of a caterpillar, crawling and creeping upon the grass, set down to roll by some tired little nurse of an elder sister, or mother with her



Isaac is a tall lean
gloomy personage

hands full. There it lies—a fat, boneless, rosy piece of health, aspiring to the accomplishments of walking and talking; stretching its chubby limbs; scrambling and sprawling; laughing and roaring; there it sits, in all the dignity of the baby, adorned in a pink-checked frock, a blue-spotted pinafore, and a little white cap, tolerably clean, and quite whole. One is forced to ask if it be boy or girl; for these hardy country rogues are all alike, open-eyed, and weather-stained, and nothing fearing. There is no more mark of sex in the countenance than in the dress.

In the next stage, dirt-encrusted enough to pass for the chrysalis, if it were not so very unquiet, the gender remains equally uncertain. It is a fine, stout, curly-pated creature of three or four, playing and rolling about, amongst grass or mud, all day long; shouting, jumping, screeching—the happiest compound of noise and idleness, rags and rebellion, that ever trod the earth.

Then comes a sunburnt gipsy of six, beginning to grow tall and thin, and to find the cares of the world gathering about her; with a pitcher in one hand, a mop in the other, an old straw bonnet of ambiguous shape, half hiding her tangled hair; a tattered stuff petticoat, once green, hanging below an equally tattered cotton frock, once purple; her longing eyes fixed on a game of baseball at the corner of the green, till she reaches the cottage door, flings down the mop and pitcher, and darts off to her companions, quite regardless of the storm of scolding with which the mother follows her runaway steps.

So the world wags till ten; then the little damsel

gets admission to the charity school, and trips mincingly thither every morning, dressed in the old-fashioned blue gown, and white cap and tippet, and bib and apron of that primitive institution, looking as demure as a nun, and as tidy; her thoughts fixed on button-holes and spelling-books—those ensigns of promotion; despising dirt and baseballs, and all their joys.

Then at twelve the little lass comes home again, uncapped, untippeted, unschooled; brown as a berry, wild as a colt, busy as a bee—working in the fields, digging in the garden, frying rashers, boiling potatoes, shelling beans, darning stockings, nursing children, feeding pigs;—all these employments varied by occasional fits of romping and flirting, and idle play, according as the nascent coquetry or the lurking love of sport happens to preponderate; merry, and pretty, and good with all her little faults. It would be well if a country girl could stand at thirteen. Then she is charming. But the clock will move forward, and at fourteen she gets a service in a neighbouring town; and her next appearance is in the perfection of the butterfly state, fluttering, glittering, inconstant, vain,—the gayest and gaudiest insect that ever skimmed over a village green. And this is the true progress of a rustic beauty, the average lot of our country girls; so they spring up, flourish, change, and disappear. Some indeed marry and fix amongst us, and then ensues another set of changes, rather more gradual perhaps, but quite as sure, till grey hairs, wrinkles, and linsey-woolsey wind up the picture.

All this is beside the purpose. If woman be a mutable creature, man is not. The wearers of smock-frocks, in spite of the sameness of the uniform, are

almost as easily distinguished by an interested eye as a flock of sheep by the shepherd, or a pack of hounds by the huntsman ; or, to come to less affronting similes, the members of the House of Commons by the Speaker, or the gentlemen of the bar by the Lord Chief Justice. There is very little change in them from early boyhood. "The child is father to the man" in more senses than one. There is a constancy about them ; they keep the same faces, however ugly ; the same habits, however strange ; the same fashions, however unfashionable ; they are in nothing new-fangled. Tom Coper, for instance, man and boy, is and has been addicted to posies, —from the first polyanthus to the last china rose, he has always a nosegay in his button-hole ; George Simmons may be known a mile off, by an eternal red waistcoat ; Jem Tanner, summer and winter, by the smartest of all smart straw hats ; and Joel Brent, from the day that he left off petticoats, has always, in every dress and every situation, looked like a study for a painter—no mistaking him. Yes ! I know every man and boy of note in the parish, with one exception—one most singular exception, which "haunts, and startles, and waylays" me at every turn. I do not know, and I begin to fear that I never shall know, Jack Hatch.

The first time I had occasion to hear of this worthy was on a most melancholy occurrence. We had lost—I do not like to talk about it, but I cannot tell my story without—we had lost a cricket match, been beaten, and soundly too, by the men of Beech-hill, a neighbouring parish. How this accident happened, I cannot very well tell ; the melancholy fact is sufficient. The men of Beech-hill, famous players, in whose families cricket is an hereditary

accomplishment, challenged and beat us. After our defeat, we began to comfort ourselves by endeavouring to discover how this misfortune could possibly have befallen. Every one that has ever had a cold must have experienced the great consolation that is derived from puzzling out the particular act of imprudence from which it sprang; and we, on the same principle, found our affliction somewhat mitigated by the endeavour to trace it to its source. One laid the catastrophe to the wind—a very common scapegoat in the catarrhal calamity—which had, as it were, played us booty, carrying our adversaries' balls right and ours wrong; another laid it to a certain catch missed by Tom Willis, by which means Farmer Thackum, the pride and glory of the Beech-hillers, had two innings; a third to the aforesaid Thackum's remarkable manner of bowling, which is circular, so to say—that is, after taking aim, he makes a sort of chassée on one side, before he delivers his ball, which pantomimic motion had a great effect on the nerves of our eleven, unused to such quadrilling; a fourth imputed our defeat to the over-civility of our umpire, George Gosseltine, a sleek, smooth, silky, soft-spoken person, who stood with his little wand under his arm, smiling through all our disasters—the very image of peace and good-humour; whilst their umpire, Bob Coxe, a roystering, roaring, bullying blade, bounced, and hectored, and blustered from his wicket, with the voice of a twelve-pounder; the fifth assented to this opinion, with some extension, asserting that the universal impudence of their side took advantage of the meekness and modesty of ours—(N.B.—It never occurred to our modesty that they

might be the best players)—which flattering persuasion appeared likely to prevail, in fault of a better, when all on a sudden the true reason of our defeat seemed to burst at once from half a dozen voices, re-echoed like a chorus by all the others—“It was entirely owing to the want of Jack Hatch! How could we think of playing without Jack Hatch!

This was the first I heard of him. My inquiries as to this great player were received with utter astonishment. “Who is Jack?” “Not know Jack Hatch!” There was no end of the wonder—“not to know him, argued myself unknown.” “Jack Hatch—the best cricketer in the parish, in the county, in the country! Jack Hatch, who had got seven notches at one hit! Jack Hatch, who had trolled and caught out a whole eleven! Jack Hatch, who, besides these marvellous gifts in cricket, was the best bowler and the best musician in the hundred,—could dance a hornpipe and a minuet, sing a whole song-book, bark like a dog, mew like a cat, crow like a cock, and go through Punch from beginning to end! Not know Jack Hatch!”

Half-ashamed of my non-acquaintance with this Admirable Crichton of rural accomplishments, I determined to find him out as soon as possible, and I have been looking for him more or less ever since.

The cricket-ground and the bowling-green were of course the first places of search; but he was always just gone, or not come, or he was there yesterday, or he is expected to-morrow—a to-morrow which, as far as I am concerned, never arrives;—the stars were

against me. Then I directed my attention to his other acquirements; and once followed a ballad-singer half a mile, who turned out to be a strapping woman in a man's great-coat; and another time pierced a whole mob of urchins to get at a capital Punch—when behold it was the genuine man of puppets, the true squeakery, the “real Simon Pure,” and Jack was as much to seek as ever.

At last I thought that I had actually caught him, and on his own peculiar field, the cricket-ground. We abound in rustic fun, and good humour, and of course in nicknames. A certain senior of fifty, or thereabout, for instance, of very juvenile habits and inclinations, who plays at ball, and marbles, and cricket with all the boys in the parish, and joins a kind merry buoyant heart to an aspect somewhat rough and careworn, has no other appellation that ever I heard but “Uncle”; I don't think, if by any strange chance he were called by it, that he would know his own name. On the other hand, a little stunted pragmatistical urchin, son and heir of Dick Jones, an absolute old man cut shorter, so slow, and stiff, and sturdy, and wordy, passes universally by the title of “Grandfather”—I have not the least notion that he would answer to Dick. Also a slim, grim-looking, white-headed lad, whose hair is bleached, and his skin browned by the sun, till he is as hideous as an Indian idol, goes, good lack! by the pastoral misnomer of the “Gentle Shepherd.” Oh, manes of Allan Ramsay! the Gentle Shepherd!

Another youth, regular at cricket, but never seen except then, of unknown parish and parentage, and singular uncouthness of person, dress, and de-

meanour, rough as a badger, ragged as a colt, and sour as verjuice, was known, far more appropriately, by the cognomen of "Oddity." Him, in my secret soul, I pitched on for Jack Hatch. In the first place, as I had in the one case a man without a name, and in the other a name without a man, to have found these component parts of individuality meet in the same person, to have made the man to fit the name, and the name fit the man, would have been as pretty a way of solving two enigmas at once as hath been heard of since *Œdipus* his day. But besides the obvious convenience and suitability of this belief, I had divers other corroborating reasons. Oddity was young, so was Jack;—Oddity came up the hill from leeward, so must Jack;—Oddity was a capital cricketer, so was Jack;—Oddity did not play in our unlucky Beech-hill match, neither did Jack;—and last of all, Oddity's name was Jack, a fact I was fortunate enough to ascertain from a pretty damsel who walked up with him to the ground one evening, and who, on seeing him bowl out Tom Coper, could not help exclaiming in soliloquy, as she stood a few yards behind us, looking on with all her heart, "Well done, Jack!" That moment built up all my hopes; the next knocked them down. I thought I had clutched him, but willing to make assurance doubly sure, I turned to my pretty neighbour (Jack Hatch too had a sweetheart), and said in a tone half affirmative, half interrogatory, "That young man who plays so well is Jack Hatch?"—"No, ma'am, Jack Bolton!" and Jack Hatch remained still a sound, a name, a mockery.

Well! at last I ceased to look for him, and

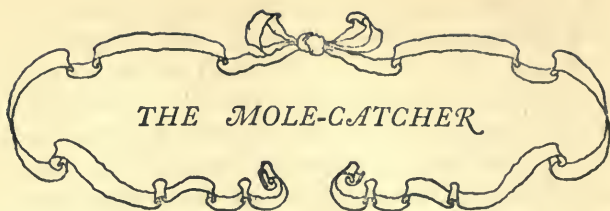
might possibly have forgotten my curiosity, had not every week produced some circumstance to relumine that active female passion.

I seemed beset by his name, and his presence, invisibly as it were. Will-o'-the-wisp is nothing to him; Puck, in that famous *Midsummer Dream*, was a quiet goblin compared to Jack Hatch. He haunts one in dark places. The fiddler, whose merry tones come ringing across the orchard in a winter's night from Farmer White's barn, setting the whole village a-dancing, is Jack Hatch. The whistler, who trudges homeward at dusk up Kibe's lane, out-piping the nightingale, in her own month of May, is Jack Hatch. And the indefatigable learner of the bassoon, whose drone, all last harvest, might be heard in the twilight, issuing from the sexton's dwelling on the Little Lea, "making night hideous," that iniquitous practiser is Jack Hatch.

The name meets me all manner of ways. I have seen it in the newspaper for a prize of pinks; and on the back of a warrant on the charge of poaching;—*N.B.* the constable had my luck, and could not find the culprit, otherwise I might have had some chance of seeing him on that occasion. Things the most remote and discrepant issue in Jack Hatch. He caught Dame Wheeler's squirrel; the Magpie at the Rose owes to him the half-dozen phrases with which he astounds and delights the passers-by; the very dog Tero—an animal of singular habits, who sojourns occasionally at half the houses in the village, making each his home till he is affronted—Tero himself, best and ugliest of finders—a mongrel compounded of terrier, cur, and spaniel—Tero, most remarkable of

ugly dogs, inasmuch as he constantly squints, and commonly goes on three legs, holding up first one, and then the other, out of a sort of quadrupedal economy to ease those useful members—Tero himself is said to belong of right and origin to Jack Hatch.

Everywhere that name meets me. 'Twas but a few weeks ago that I heard him asked in church, and a day or two afterwards I saw the tail of the wedding procession, the little lame clerk handing the bridesmaid, and a girl from the Rose running after them with pipes, passing by our house. Nay, this very morning, some one was speaking—Dead! what dead? Jack Hatch dead?—a name, a shadow, a Jack-o'-Lantern! Can Jack Hatch die? Hath he the property of mortality? Can the bell toll for him? Yes! there is the coffin and the pall—all that I shall ever see of him is there!—There are his comrades following in decent sorrow—and the poor pretty bride, leaning on the little clerk.—My search is over—Jack Hatch is dead!



THERE are no more delightful or unfailing associations than those afforded by the various operations of the husbandman, and the changes on the fair face of nature. We all know that busy troops of reapers come with the yellow corn; whilst the yellow leaf brings a no less busy train of ploughmen and seedsmen preparing the ground for fresh harvests; that woodbines and wild roses, flaunting in the blossomy hedge-rows, give token of the gay bands of haymakers which enliven the meadows; and that the primroses, which begin to unfold their pale stars by the side of the green lanes, bear marks of the slow and weary female processions, the gangs of tired yet talkative bean-setters, who defile twice a day through the intricate mazes of our cross-country roads. These are general associations, as well known and as universally recognised as the union of mince-pies and Christmas. I have one, more private and peculiar, one, perhaps, the more strongly impressed on my mind, because the impression may be almost confined to myself. The full flush of violets which, about the middle of March, seldom fails to perfume the whole earth, always brings to my recollection one solitary and silent coadjutor of the husbandman's

labours, as unlike a violet as possible—Isaac Bint, the mole-catcher.

I used to meet him every spring, when we lived at our old house, whose park-like paddock, with its finely-clumped oaks and elms, and its richly-timbered hedge-rows, edging into wild, rude, and solemn fir plantations, dark, and rough, and hoary, formed for so many years my constant and favourite walk. Here, especially under the great horse-chestnut, and where the bank rose high and naked above the lane, crowned only with a tuft of golden broom; here the sweetest and prettiest of wild flowers, whose very name hath a charm, grew like a carpet under one's feet, enamelling the young green grass with their white and purple blossoms, and loading the air with their delicious fragrance; here I used to come almost every morning, during the violet-tide; and here, almost every morning, I was sure to meet Isaac Bint.

I think that he fixed himself the more firmly in my memory by his singular discrepancy with the beauty and cheerfulness of the scenery and the season. Isaac is a tall, lean, gloomy personage, with whom the clock of life seems to stand still. He has looked sixty-five for these last twenty years, although his dark hair and beard, and firm manly stride, almost contradict the evidence of his sunken cheeks and deeply-lined forehead. The stride is awful: he hath the stalk of a ghost. His whole air and demeanour savour of one that comes from underground. His appearance is "of the earth, earthy." His clothes, hands, and face are of the colour of the mould in which he delves. The little round traps which hang

behind him over one shoulder, as well as the strings of dead moles which embellish the other, are encrusted with dirt like a tombstone; and the staff which he plunges into the little hillocks, by which he traces the course of his small quarry, returns a hollow sound, as if tapping on the lid of a coffin. Images of the churchyard come, one does not know how, with his presence. Indeed he does officiate as assistant to the sexton in his capacity of grave-digger, chosen, as it should seem, from a natural fitness; a fine sense of congruity in good Joseph Reed, the functionary in question, who felt, without knowing why, that, of all men in the parish, Isaac Bint was best fitted to that solemn office.

His remarkable gift of silence adds much to the impression produced by his remarkable figure. I don't think that I ever heard him speak three words in my life. An approach of that bony hand to that earthy leather cap was the greatest effort of courtesy that my daily salutations could extort from him. For this silence, Isaac has reasons good. He hath a reputation to support. His words are too precious to be wasted. Our mole-catcher, ragged as he looks, is the wise man of the village, the oracle of the village inn, foresees the weather, charms away agues, tells fortunes by the stars, and writes notes upon the almanack—turning and twisting about the predictions after a fashion so ingenious, that it's a moot point which is oftenest wrong—Isaac Bint, or Francis Moore. In one eminent instance, our friend was, however, eminently right. He had the good luck to prophesy, before sundry witnesses—some of them sober—in the tap-room of the Bell—he then sitting,

pipe in mouth, on the settle at the right-hand side of the fire, whilst Jacob Frost occupied the left—he had the good fortune to foretell, on New Year's Day, 1812, the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte—a piece of soothsayership which has established his reputation, and dumfounded all doubters and cavillers ever since; but which would certainly have been more striking if he had not annually uttered the same prediction, from the same place, from the time that the aforesaid Napoleon became First Consul. But this small circumstance is entirely overlooked by Isaac and his admirers, and they believe in him, and he believes in the stars, more firmly than ever.

Our mole-catcher is, as might be conjectured, an old bachelor. Your married man hath more of this world about him—is less, so to say, planet-struck. A thorough old bachelor is Isaac, a contemner and maligner of the sex, a complete and decided woman-hater. Female frailty is the only subject on which he hath ever been known to dilate; he will not even charm away their agues, or tell their fortunes, and, indeed, holds them to be unworthy the notice of the stars.

No woman contaminates his household. He lives on the edge of a pretty bit of woodland scenery, called the Penge, in a snug cottage of two rooms, of his own building, surrounded by a garden cribbed from the waste, well fenced with quick-set, and well stocked with fruit trees, herbs, and flowers. One large apple tree extends over the roof—a pretty bit of colour when in blossom, contrasted with the thatch of the little dwelling, and relieved by the dark wood behind. Although the owner be solitary, his

demesne is sufficiently populous. A long row of bee-hives extends along the warmest side of the garden—for Isaac's honey is celebrated far and near; a pig occupies a commodious sty at one corner; and large flocks of ducks and geese (for which the Penge, whose glades are intersected by water, is famous) are generally waiting round a back gate leading to a spacious shed, far larger than Isaac's own cottage, which serves for their feeding and roosting-place. The great tameness of all these creatures—for the ducks and geese flutter round him the moment he approaches, and the very pig follows him like a dog—gives no equivocal testimony of the kindness of our mole-catcher's nature. A circumstance of recent occurrence puts his humanity beyond doubt.

Amongst the probable causes of Isaac's dislike to women may be reckoned the fact of his living in a female neighbourhood (for the Penge is almost peopled with duck-rearers and goose-crammers of the duck and goose gender) and being himself exceedingly unpopular amongst the fair poultry-feeders of that watery vicinity. He beat them at their own weapons; produced at Midsummer geese fit for Michaelmas; and raised ducks so precocious, that the gardeners complained of them as fore-running their vegetable accompaniments; and "panting *peas* toiled after them in vain." In short, the Naiads of the Penge had the mortification to find themselves driven out of B—— market by an interloper, and that interloper a man, who had no manner of right to possess any skill in an accomplishment so exclusively feminine as duck-rearing; and being no ways inferior in another female accomplishment, called

scolding, to their sister-nymphs of Billingsgate, they set up a clamour and a cackle which might rival the din of their own gooseries at feeding-time, and would inevitably have frightened from the field any competitor less impenetrable than our hero. But Isaac is not a man to shrink from so small an evil as female oburgation. He stalked through it all in mute disdain—looking now at his mole-traps, and now at the stars—pretending not to hear, and very probably not hearing. At first this scorn, more provoking than any retort, only excited his enemies to fresh attacks; but one cannot be always answering another person's silence. The flame which had blazed so fiercely at last burnt itself out, and peace reigned once more in the green alleys of Penge-wood.

One, however, of his adversaries—his nearest neighbour—still remained unsilenced.

Margery Grover was a very old and poor woman, whom age and disease had bent almost to the earth; shaken by palsy, pinched by penury, and soured by misfortune—a moving bundle of misery and rags. Two centuries ago she would have been burnt for a witch; now she starved and grumbled on the parish allowance; trying to eke out a scanty subsistence by the dubious profits gained from the produce of two geese and a lame gander, once the unmolested tenants of a greenish pool, situate right between her dwelling and Isaac's, but whose watery dominion had been invaded by his flourishing colony.

This was the cause of feud; and although Isaac would willingly, from a mingled sense of justice and of pity, have yielded the point to the poor old creature,

especially as ponds are there almost as plentiful as blackberries, yet it was not so easy to control the habits and inclinations of their feathered subjects, who all perversely fancied that particular pool; and various accidents and skirmishes occurred, in which the ill-fed and weak birds of Margery had generally the worst of the fray. One of her early goslings was drowned—an accident which may happen even to water-fowl; and her lame gander, a sort of pet with the poor old woman, injured in his well leg; and Margery vented curses as bitter as those of Sycorax; and Isaac, certainly the most superstitious personage in the parish—the most thorough believer in his own gifts and predictions—was fain to nail a horse-shoe on his door for the defence of his property, and to wear one of his own ague charms about his neck for his personal protection.

Poor old Margery! A hard winter came; and the feeble, tottering creature shook in the frosty air like an aspen-leaf; and the hovel in which she dwelt—for nothing could prevail on her to try the shelter of the workhouse—shook, like herself, at every blast. She was not quite alone either in the world or in her poor hut: husband, children, and grandchildren had passed away; but one young and innocent being, a great-grandson, the last of her descendants, remained, a helpless dependant on one almost as helpless as himself.

Little Harry Grover was a shrunken, stunted boy, of five years old; tattered and squalid, like his grandame, and, at first sight, presented almost as miserable a specimen of childhood as Margery herself did of age. There was even a likeness

between them; although the fierce blue eye of Margery had, in the boy, a mild appealing look, which entirely changed the whole expression of the countenance. A gentle and a peaceful boy was Harry, and, above all, a useful. It was wonderful how many ears of corn in the autumn, and sticks in the winter, his little hands could pick up! how well he could make a fire, and boil the kettle, and sweep the hearth, and cram the goslings! Never was a handier boy or a trustier; and when the united effects of cold, and age, and rheumatism, confined poor Margery to her poor bed, the child continued to perform his accustomed offices; fetching the money from the vestry, buying the loaf at the baker's, keeping house, and nursing the sick woman, with a kindness and thoughtfulness, which none but those who know the careful ways to which necessity trains cottage children, would deem credible; and Margery, a woman of strong passions, strong prejudices, and strong affections, who had lived in and for the desolate boy, felt the approach of death embittered by the certainty that the workhouse, always the scene of her dread and loathing, would be the only refuge for the poor orphan.

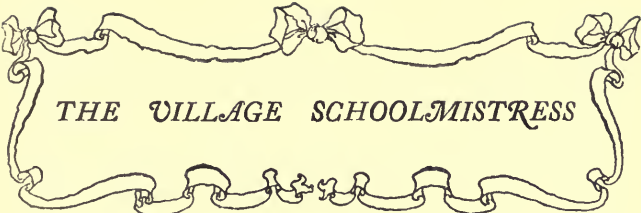
Death, however, came on visibly and rapidly; and she sent for the overseer to beseech him to put Harry to board in some decent cottage; she could not die in peace until he had promised; the fear of the innocent child's being contaminated by wicked boys and godless women preyed upon her soul; she implored, she conjured. The overseer, a kind but timid man, hesitated, and was beginning a puzzled speech about

the bench and the vestry, when another voice was heard from the door of the cottage.

“Margery,” said our friend Isaac, “will you trust Harry to me? I am a poor man, to be sure; but, between earning and saving, there’ll be enough for me and little Harry. ’Tis as good a boy as ever lived, and I’ll try to keep him so. Trust him to me, and I’ll be a father to him. I can’t say more.”

“God bless thee, Isaac Bint! God bless thee!” was all poor Margery could reply.

They were the last words she ever spoke. And little Harry is living with our good mole-catcher, and is growing plump and rosy; and Margery’s other pet, the lame gander, lives and thrives with them too.



THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMISTRESS

WOMEN, fortunately perhaps for their happiness and their virtue, have, as compared with men, so few opportunities of acquiring permanent distinction, that it is rare to find a female unconnected with literature or with history, whose name is remembered after her monument is defaced, and the brass on her coffin-lid corroded. Such, however, was the case with Dame Eleanor, the widow of Sir Richard Lacy, whose name, at the end of three centuries, continued to be as freshly and as frequently spoken, as “familiar” a “household word” in the little village of Aberleigh, as if she had flourished there yesterday. Her memory was embalmed by a deed of charity and of goodness. She had founded and endowed a girls’ school for “the instruction” (to use the words of the deed) “of twenty poor children, and the maintenance of one discreet and godly matron”; and the school still continued to be called after its foundress, and the very spot on which the schoolhouse stood, to be known by the name of Lady Lacy’s Green.

It was a spot worthy of its destination, a spot of remarkable cheerfulness and beauty. The Green was small, of irregular shape, and situated at a confluence of shady lanes. Half the roads and paths of the

parish meet there, probably for the convenience of crossing, in that place by a stone bridge of one arch covered with ivy, the winding rivulet which intersected the whole village, and which, sweeping in a narrow channel round the school garden, widened into a stream of some consequence, in the richly wooded meadows beyond. The banks of the brook, as it wound its glittering course over the green, were set, here and there, with clumps of forest trees, chiefly bright green elms, and aspens with their quivering leaves and their pale shining bark; whilst a magnificent beech stood alone near the gate leading to the school, partly overshadowing the little court in which the house was placed. The building itself was a beautiful small structure, in the ornamented style of Elizabeth's day, with pointed roofs and pinnacles, and clustered chimneys, and casement windows; the whole house enwreathed and garlanded by a most luxuriant vine. The date of the erection, 1563, was cut in a stone inserted in the brick-work above the porch; but the foundress had, with an unostentatious modesty, withheld her name, leaving it, as she safely might, to the grateful recollection of the successive generations who profited by her benevolence. Altogether it was a most gratifying scene to the eye and to the heart. No one ever saw Lady Lacy's schoolhouse without admiration, especially in the play hour at noon, when the children, freed from "restraint that sweetens liberty," were clustered under the old beech tree, revelling in their innocent freedom, running, jumping, shouting, and laughing with all their might, the only sort of riot which it is pleasant to witness. The painter and the philan-

thropist might contemplate that scene with equal delight.

The right of appointing both the mistress and the scholars had been originally vested in the Lacy family, to whom nearly the whole of the parish had at one time belonged. But the estates, the manor, the hall-house had long passed into other hands and other names, and this privilege of charity was now the only possession which the heirs of Lady Lacy retained in Aberleigh. Reserving to themselves the right of nominating the matron, her descendants had therefore delegated to the vicar and the parish officers the selection of the children, and the general regulation of the school—a sort of council of regency, which, for as simple and as peaceful as the government seems, a disputatious churchwarden or a sturdy overseer would sometimes contrive to render sufficiently stormy. I have known as much canvassing and almost as much ill-will in a contested election for one of Lady Lacy's scholarships, as for a scholarship in grander places, or even for an M.P.-ship in the next borough; and the great schism between the late Farmer Brookes and all his coadjutors, as to whether the original uniform of little green stuff gowns, with white bibs and aprons, tippetts and mob, should be commuted for modern cotton frocks and cottage bonnets, fairly set the parish by the ears. Owing to the good farmer's glorious obstinacy (which I suppose he called firmness), the green gownians lost the day. I believe that, as a matter of calculation, the man might be right, and that his costume was cheaper and more convenient; but I am sure that I should have been against him, right or wrong; the other

dress was so pretty, so primitive, so neat, so becoming ; the little lasses looked like rose-buds in the midst of their leaves : besides, it was the old traditional dress—the dress contrived and approved by Lady Lacy. Oh ! it should never have been changed, never !

Since there was so much contention in the election of pupils, it was perhaps lucky for the vestry that the exercise of the more splendid piece of patronage, the appointment of a mistress, did not enter into its duties. Mr Lacy, a representative of the foundress, a man of fortune in a distant county, generally bestowed the situation on some old dependant of his family. During the churchwardenship of Farmer Brookes, no less than three village *gouvernantes* arrived at Aberleigh—a quick succession ! It made more than half the business of our zealous and bustling man of office, an amateur in such matters, to instruct and overlook them. The first importation was Dame Whitaker, a person of no small importance, who had presided as head nurse over two generations of the Lacys, and was now, on the dispersion of the last set of her nurslings to their different schools, and an unlucky quarrel with a favourite lady's-maid, promoted and banished to this distant government. Nobody could well be more unfit for her new station, or better suited to her old. She was a nurse from top to toe. Round, portly, smiling, with a coaxing voice and an indolent manner ; much addicted to snuff and green tea, to sitting still, to telling long stories, and to humouring children. She spoiled every brat she came near, just as she had been used to spoil the little Master Edwards and

Miss Julias of her ancient dominions. She could not have scolded if she would—the gift was not in her. Under her misrule the school grew into sad disorder; the girls not only learnt nothing, but unlearnt what they knew before; work was lost—even the new shifts of the Vicar's lady; books were torn; and, for the climax of evil, no sampler was prepared to carry round at Christmas, from house to house—the first time such an omission had occurred within the memory of man. Farmer Brookes was at his wits' end. He visited the school six days in the week, to admonish and reprove; he even went nigh to threaten that he would work a sampler himself; and finally bestowed on the unfortunate ex-nurse the nickname of Queen Log, a piece of disrespect, which, together with other grievances, proved so annoying to poor Dame Whitaker, that she found the air of Aberleigh disagree with her, patched up a peace with her old enemy, the lady's-maid, abdicated that unruly and rebellious principality, the school, and retired with great delight to her quiet home in the deserted nursery, where, as far as I know, she still remains.

The grief of the children on losing this most indulgent non-instructress was not mitigated by the appearance or demeanour of her successor, who at first seemed a preceptress after Farmer Brookes's own heart, a perfect Queen Stork. Dame Banks was the widow of Mr Lacy's gamekeeper, a little thin woman, with a hooked nose, a sharp voice, and a prodigious activity of tongue. She scolded all day long, and, for the first week, passed for a great teacher. After that time it began to be discovered, that, in spite of

her lessons, the children did not learn; notwithstanding her rating they did not mind, and in the midst of a continual bustle nothing was ever done. Dame Banks was in fact a well-intentioned, worthy woman, with a restless irritable temper, a strong desire to do her duty, and a woeful ignorance how to set about it. She was rather too old to be taught either; at least she required a gentler instructor than the good churchwarden; and so much ill-will was springing up between them, that he had even been heard to regret the loss of Dame Whitaker's quietness, when very suddenly poor Dame Banks fell ill and died. The sword had worn the scabbard; but she was better than she seemed; a thoroughly well-meaning woman—grateful, pious, and charitable; even our man of office admitted this.

The next in succession was one with whom my trifling pen, dearly as that light and fluttering instrument loves to dally and disport over the surfaces of things, must take no saucy freedom; one of whom we all felt it impossible to speak or think without respect; one who made Farmer Brookes's office of adviser a sinecure, by putting the whole school, himself included, into its proper place, setting everybody in order, and keeping them so. I don't know how she managed, unless by good sense and good humour, and that happy art of government, which seems no art at all, because it is so perfect; but the children were busy and happy, the vestry pleased, and the churchwarden contented. All went well under Mrs Allen.

She was an elderly woman, nearer perhaps to seventy than to sixty, and of an exceedingly vener-

able and prepossessing appearance. Delicacy was her chief characteristic, a delicacy so complete that it pervaded her whole person, from her tall, slender figure, her fair, faded complexion, and her silver hair, to the exquisite nicety of dress by which, at all hours and seasons, from Sunday morning to Saturday night, she was invariably distinguished. The soil of the day was never seen on her apparel; dust would not cling to her snowy caps and handkerchiefs: such was the art magic of her neatness. Her very pins did their office in a different manner from those belonging to other people. Her manner was gentle, cheerful, and courteous, with a simplicity and propriety of expression that perplexed all listeners; it seemed so exactly what belongs to the highest birth and the highest breeding. She was humble, very humble; but her humility was evidently the result of a truly Christian spirit, and would equally have distinguished her in any station. The poor people, always nice judges of behaviour, felt, they did not know why, that she was their superior; the gentry of the neighbourhood suspected her to be their equal—some clergyman's or officer's widow, reduced in circumstances, and would have treated her as such, had she not, on discovering their mistake, eagerly undeceived them. She had been, she said, all her life a servant, the personal attendant of one dear mistress, on whose decease she had been recommended to Mr Lacy, and to his kindness, under Providence, was indebted for a home and a provision for her helpless age, and the still more helpless youth of a poor orphan, far dearer to her than herself. This avowal, although it changed the character of the respect paid

to Mrs Allen, was certainly not calculated to diminish its amount; and the new mistress of Lady Lacy's school, and the beautiful order of her house and garden, continued to be the pride and admiration of Aberleigh.

The orphan of whom she spoke was a little girl about eleven years old, who lived with her, and whose black frock bespoke the recent death of some relative. She had lately, Mrs Allen said, lost her grandmother, her only remaining parent, and had now no friend but herself on earth; but there was one above who was a Father to the fatherless, and He would protect poor Jane! And as she said this, there was a touch of emotion, a break of the voice, a tremor on the lip, very unlike the usual cheerfulness and self-command of her manner. The child was evidently very dear to her. Jane was, indeed, a most interesting creature: not pretty—a girl of that age seldom is; the beauty of childhood is outgrown, that of youth not come; and Jane could scarcely ever have had any other pretensions to prettiness than the fine expression of her dark grey eyes, and the general sweetness of her countenance. She was pale, thin, and delicate; serious and thoughtful far beyond her years; averse from play, and shrinking from notice. Her fondness for Mrs Allen, and her constant and unremitting attention to her health and comforts, were peculiarly remarkable. Every part of their small housewifery that her height and strength and skill would enable her to perform, she insisted on doing, and many things far beyond her power she attempted. Never was so industrious or so handy a little maiden. Old Nelly Chun, the charwoman, who went once a

week to the house, to wash and bake and scour, declared that Jane did more than herself; and to all who knew Nelly's opinion of her own doings, this praise appeared superlative.

In the schoolroom she was equally assiduous, not as a learner, but as a teacher. None so clever as Jane in superintending the different exercises of the needle, the spelling-book, and the slate. From the little work-woman's first attempt to insert thread into a pocket-handkerchief, that digging and ploughing of cambric, miscalled hemming, up to the nice and delicate mysteries of stitching and button-holing; from the easy junction of $a b$, ab and $b a$, ba , to that tremendous sesquipedalian word *irrefragibility*, at which even I tremble as I write; from the Numeration Table to Practice, nothing came amiss to her. In figures she was particularly quick. Generally speaking, her patience with the other children, however dull or tiresome or giddy they might be, was exemplary; but a false accomptant, a stupid arithmetician, would put her out of humour. The only time I ever heard her sweet, gentle voice raised a note above its natural key, was in reprimanding Susan Wheeler, a sturdy, square-made, rosy-cheeked lass, as big again as herself, the dunce and beauty of the school, who had three times cast up a sum of three figures, and three times made the total wrong. Jane ought to have admired the ingenuity evinced by such a variety of error; but she did not; it fairly put her in a passion. She herself was not only clever in figures, but fond of them to an extraordinary degree—luxuriated in Long Division, and revelled in the Rule-of-Three. Had she been a boy, she would

probably have been a great mathematician, and have won that fickle, fleeting, shadowy wreath, that crown made of the rainbow, that vainest of all earthly pleasures, but which yet *is* a pleasure—Fame.

Happier, far happier was the good, the lowly, the pious child, in her humble duties! Grave and quiet as she seemed, she had many moments of intense and placid enjoyment, when the duties of the day were over, and she sate reading in the porch, by the side of Mrs Allen, or walked with her in the meadows on a Sunday evening after church. Jane was certainly contented and happy, and yet every one that saw her thought of her with that kind of interest which is akin to pity. There was a pale, fragile grace about her, such as we sometimes see in a rose which has blown in the shade; or rather, to change the simile, the drooping and delicate look of a tender plant removed from a hothouse to the open air. We could not help feeling sure (notwithstanding our mistake with regard to Mrs Allen) that *this* was indeed a transplanted flower, and that the village school, however excellently her habits had become inured to her situation, was not her proper atmosphere.

Several circumstances corroborated our suspicions. My lively young friend Sophia Grey, standing with me one day at the gate of the schoolhouse, where I had been talking with Mrs Allen, remarked to me, in French, the sly, demure vanity with which Susan Wheeler, whose beauty had attracted her attention, was observing and returning her glances. The playful manner in which Sophia described Susan's "regard furtif" made me smile; and looking accidentally at Jane, I saw that she was smiling too,

clearly comprehending, and enjoying the full force of the pleasantry. She must understand French; and when questioned, she confessed she did, and thankfully accepted the loan of books in that language. Another time, being sent on a message to the vicarage, and left for some minutes alone in the parlour, with a piano standing open in the room, she could not resist the temptation of touching the keys, and was discovered playing an air of Mozart, with great taste and execution. At this detection she blushed, as if caught in a crime, and hurried away in tears and without her message. It was clear that she had once learnt music. But the surest proof that Jane's original station had been higher than that which she now filled, was the mixture of respect and fondness with which Mrs Allen treated her, and the deep regret she sometimes testified at seeing her employed in any menial office.

At last, elicited by some warm praise of the charming child, our good schoolmistress disclosed her story. Jane Mowbray was the granddaughter of the lady in whose service Mrs Allen had passed her life. Her father had been a man of high family and splendid fortune; had married beneath himself, as it was called, a friendless orphan, with no portion but beauty and virtue; and, on her death, which followed shortly on the birth of her daughter, had plunged into every kind of vice and extravagance. What need to tell a tale of sin and suffering? Mr Mowbray had ruined himself, had ruined all belonging to him, and finally had joined our armies abroad as a volunteer, and had fallen undistinguished in his first battle. The news of his death was fatal to his indulgent

mother ; and when she too died, Mrs Allen blessed the Providence which, by throwing in her way a recommendation to Lady Lacy's school, had enabled her to support the dear object of her mistress's love and prayers. "Had Miss Mowbray no connections?" was the natural question. "Yes ; one very near—an aunt, the sister of her father, richly married in India. But Sir William was a proud, and a stern man, upright in his own conduct, and implacable to error. Lady Ely was a sweet, gentle creature, and doubtless would be glad to extend a mother's protection to the orphan ; but Sir William—oh ! he was so unrelenting ! He had abjured Mr Mowbray and all connected with him. She had written to inform them where the dear child was, but had no expectation of any answer from India."

Time verified this prediction. The only tidings from India, at all interesting to Jane Mowbray, were contained in the paragraph of a newspaper which announced Lady Ely's death, and put an end to all hopes of protection in that quarter. Years passed on, and found her still with Mrs Allen at Lady Lacy's Green, more and more beloved and respected from day to day. She had now attained almost to womanhood. Strangers, I believe, called her plain ; we, who knew her, thought her pretty. Her figure was tall and straight as a cypress, pliant and flexible as a willow, full of gentle grace, whether in repose or in motion. She had a profusion of light brown hair, a pale complexion, dark grey eyes, a smile of which the character was rather sweet than gay, and such a countenance ! no one could look at her without wishing her well, or without being sure that she

deserved all good wishes. Her manners were modest and elegant, and she had much of the self-taught knowledge which is, of all knowledge, the surest and the best, because acquired with most difficulty, and fixed in the memory by the repetition of effort. Every one had assisted her to the extent of his power, and of her willingness to accept assistance; for both she and Mrs Allen had a pride—call it independence—which rendered it impossible, even to the friends who were most honoured by their good opinion, to be as useful to them as they could have wished. To give Miss Mowbray time for improvement had, however, proved a powerful emollient to the pride of our dear schoolmistress; and that time had been so well employed, that her acquirements were considerable; whilst in mind and character she was truly admirable; mild, grateful, and affectionate, and imbued with a deep religious feeling, which influenced every action and pervaded every thought. So gifted, she was deemed by her constant friends, the vicar and his lady, perfectly competent to the care and education of children; it was agreed that she should enter a neighbouring family, as a successor to their then governess, early in the ensuing spring; and she, although sad at the prospect of leaving her aged protectress, acquiesced in their decision.

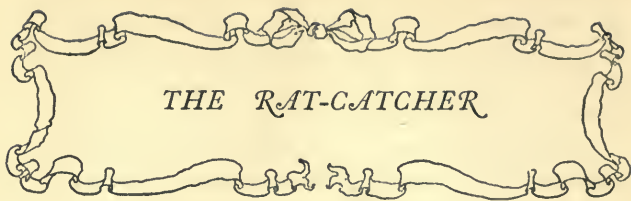
One fine Sunday in the October preceding this dreaded separation, as Miss Mowbray, with Mrs Allen leaning on her arm, was slowly following the little train of Lady Lacy's scholars from church, an elderly gentleman, sickly-looking and emaciated, accosted a pretty young woman, who was loitering

with some other girls at the churchyard gate, and asked her several questions respecting the school and its mistress. Susan Wheeler (for it happened to be our old acquaintance) was delighted to be singled out by so grand a gentleman, and being a kind-hearted creature in the main, spoke of the school-house and its inhabitants exactly as they deserved. "Mrs Allen," she said, "was the best woman in the world—the very best, except just Miss Mowbray, who was better still,—only too particular about summing, which, you know, sir," added Susan, "people can't learn if they can't. She is going to be a governess in the spring," continued the loquacious damsel, "and it's to be hoped the little ladies will take kindly to their tables, or it will be a sad grievance to Miss Jane."—"A governess! Where can I make inquiries concerning Miss Mowbray?"—"At the vicarage, sir," answered Susan, dropping her little courtesy, and turning away, well pleased with the gentleman's condescension, and with half-a-crown which he had given her in return for her intelligence. The stranger, meanwhile, walked straight to the vicarage, and in less than half an hour the vicar repaired with him to Lady Lacy's Green.

This stranger, so drooping, so sickly, so emaciated, was the proud Indian uncle, the stern Sir William Ely! Sickness and death had been busy with him and with his. He had lost his health, his wife, and his children; and, softened by affliction, was returned to England a new man, anxious to forgive and to be forgiven, and, above all, desirous to repair his neglect and injustice toward the only

remaining relative of the wife whom he had so fondly loved and so tenderly lamented. In this frame of mind, such a niece as Jane Mowbray was welcomed with no common joy. His delight in her, and his gratitude toward her protectress, were unbounded. He wished them both to accompany him home, and reside with him constantly. Jane promised to do so; but Mrs Allen, with her usual admirable feeling of propriety, clung to the spot which had been to her a "city of refuge," and refused to leave it in spite of all the entreaties of uncle and of niece. It was a happy decision for Aberleigh; for what could Aberleigh have done without its good school-mistress?

She lives there still, its ornament and its pride; and every year Jane Mowbray comes for a long visit, and makes a holiday in the school and in the whole place. Jane Mowbray, did I say? No; not Jane Mowbray now. She has changed that dear name for the only name that could be dearer: she is married—married to the eldest son of Mr Lacy, the lineal representative of Dame Eleanor Lacy, the honoured foundress of the school. It was in a voice, tremulous more from feeling than from age, that Mrs Allen welcomed the young heir, when he brought his fair bride to Aberleigh; and it was with a yet stronger and deeper emotion that the bridegroom, with his own Jane in his hand, visited the asylum which she and her venerable guardian owed to the benevolence and the piety of his ancestress, whose good deeds had thus showered down blessings on her remote posterity.



THE RAT-CATCHER

A SKETCH

BEAUTIFULLY situated on a steep knoll, overhanging a sharp angle in the turnpike road, which leads through our village of Aberleigh, stands a fantastic rustic building, with a large yew tree on one side, a superb weeping ash hanging over it on the other, a clump of elms forming a noble background behind, and all the prettinesses of porches garlanded with clematis, windows mantled with jessamine, and chimneys wreathed with luxuriant ivy, adding grace to the picture. To form a picture, most assuredly, it was originally built,—a point of view, as it is called, from Allonby Park, to which the byroad that winds round this inland cape, or headland, directly leads; and most probably it was also copied from some book of tasteful designs for lodges or ornamented cottages, since not only the building itself, but the winding path that leads up the acclivity, and the gate which gives entrance to the little garden, smack of the pencil and the graver.

For a picture certainly, and probably from a picture was that cottage erected, although its ostensible purpose was merely that of a receiving-house for letters

and parcels for the Park, to which the present inhabitant, a jolly, bustling, managing dame, of great activity and enterprise in her own peculiar line, has added the profitable occupation of a thriving and well-accustomed village-shop ; contaminating the picturesque, old-fashioned bay-window of the fancy letter-house by the vulgarities of red herrings, tobacco, onions, and salt-butter—a sight which must have made the projector of her elegant dwelling stare again—and forcing her customers to climb up and down an ascent almost as steep as the roof of a house, whenever they wanted a pennyworth of needles, or a halfpennyworth of snuff, a toil whereat some of our poor old dames groaned aloud. Sir Henry threatened to turn her out, and her customers threatened to turn her off ; but neither of these events happened. Dinah Forde appeased her landlord and managed her customers ; for Dinah Forde was a notable woman ; and it is really surprising what great things, in a small way, your notable woman will compass.

Besides Mrs Dinah Forde, and her apprentice, a girl of ten years old, the letter-house had lately acquired another occupant in the shape of Dinah's tenant or lodger—I don't know which word best expresses the nature of the arrangement—my old friend Sam Page, the rat-catcher, who, together with his implements of office, two ferrets, and four mongrels, inhabited a sort of shed or outhouse at the back of the premises—serving, “especially the curs,” as Mrs Forde was wont to express herself, “as a sort of guard and protection to a lone woman's property.”

Sam Page was, as I have said, an old acquaintance of ours, although neither as a resident of Aberleigh, nor in his capacity of rat-catcher, both of which were recent assumptions. It was, indeed, a novelty to see Sam Page as a resident anywhere. His abode seemed to be the highway. One should as soon have expected to find a gipsy within stone walls, as soon have looked for a hare in her last year's form, or a bird in her old nest, as for Sam Page in the same place a month together; so completely did he belong to that order which the lawyers call vagrants, and the common people designate by the significant name of trampers; and so entirely of all rovers did he seem the most roving, of all wanderers the most unsettled. The winds, the clouds, even our English weather, were but a type of his mutability.

Our acquaintance with him had commenced above twenty years ago, when, a lad of some fifteen or thereaway, he carried muffins and cakes about the country. The whole house was caught by his intelligence and animation, his light active figure, his keen grey eye, and the singular mixture of shrewdness and good-humour in his sharp but pleasant features. Nobody's muffins could go down but Sam Page's. We turned off our old stupid deaf cakeman, Simon Brown, and appointed Sam on the instant. (*N.B.*— This happened at the period of a general election, and Sam wore the right colour, and Simon the wrong.) Three times a week he was to call. Faithless wretch! he never called again! He took to selling election ballads, and carrying about handbills. We waited for him a fortnight, went muffinless for fourteen days, and then, our candidate being fairly elected,

and blue and yellow returned to their original non-importance, were fain to put up once more with poor old deaf Simon Brown.

Sam's next appearance was in the character of a letter-boy, when he and a donkey set up a most spirited opposition to Thomas Hearne and the post-cart. Everybody was dissatisfied with Thomas Hearne, who had committed more sins than I can remember, of forgetfulness, irregularity, and all manner of postman-like faults; and Sam, when applying for employers, made a most successful canvass, and for a week performed miracles of punctuality. At the end of that time he began to commit, with far greater vigour than his predecessor, Thomas Hearne, the several sins for which that worthy had been discarded. On Tuesday he forgot to call for the bag in the evening; on Wednesday he omitted to bring it in the morning; on Thursday he never made his appearance at all; on Friday his employers gave him warning; and on Saturday they turned him off. So ended this hopeful experiment.

Still, however, he continued to travel the country in various capacities. First, he carried a tray of casts; then a basket of Staffordshire ware; then he cried cherries; then he joined a troop of ruddle-men, and came about redder than a red Indian; then he sported a barrel-organ, a piece of mechanism of no small pretensions, having two sets of puppets on the top, one of girls waltzing, the other of soldiers at drill; then he drove a knife-grinder's wheel; then he led a bear and a very accomplished monkey; then he escorted a celebrated company of dancing dogs; and

then, for a considerable time, during which he took a trip to India and back, we lost sight of him.

He reappeared, however, at B. Fair, where one year he was showman to the Living Skeleton, and the next a performer in the tragedy of the Edinburgh Murders, as exhibited every half-hour at the price of a penny to each person. Sam showed so much talent for melodrama, that we fully expected to find him following his new profession, which offered all the advantage of the change of place and of character which his habits required; and on his being again, for several months, an absentee, had little doubt but he had been promoted from a booth to a barn, and even looked for his name amongst a party of five strollers, three men and two women, who issued play-bills at Aberleigh, and performed tragedy, comedy, opera, farce, and pantomime, with all the degrees and compounds thereof described by Polonius, in the great room at the Rose, divided for the occasion into a row of chairs called the Boxes, at a shilling per seat, and two of benches called the Pit, at sixpence. I even suspected that a Mr Theodore Fitzhugh, the genius of the company, might be Sam Page fresh christened. But I was mistaken. Sam, when I saw him again, and mentioned my suspicion, pleaded guilty to a turn for the drama; he confessed that he liked acting of all things, especially tragedy, "it was such fun." But there was a small obstacle to his pursuit of the more regular branches of the histrionic art—the written drama: our poor friend could not read. To use his own words, "he was no scholar"; and on recollecting certain small aberrations which had occurred during the three days that he carried

the letter-bag, and professed to transact errands, such as the misdelivery of notes, and the non-performance of written commissions, we were fain to conclude that, instead of having, as he expressed it, "somehow or other got rid of his learning," learning was a blessing which Sam had never possessed, and that a great luminary was lost to the stage simply from the accident of not knowing his alphabet.

Instead of being, as we had imagined, ranting in "Richard" or raving in "Lear," our unlucky hero had been amusing himself by making a voyage to the West Indies and home by the way of America, having had some thoughts of honouring the New World by making it the scene of his residence, or rather of his peregrinations; and a country where the whole population seems movable, would, probably, have suited him; but the yellow fever seized him, and pinned him fast at the very beginning of his North American travels; and, sick and weary, he returned to England, determined, as he said, "to take a room and live respectably."

The apartment on which he fixed was, as I have intimated, an outhouse belonging to Mrs Dinah Forde, in which he took up his abode the beginning of last summer with his two ferrets, harmless, foreign-looking things (no native English animal has so outlandish an appearance as the ferret, with its long limber body, its short legs, red eyes, and ermine-looking fur), of whose venom, gentle as they looked, he was wont to boast amain; four little dogs, of every variety of mongrel ugliness, whose eminence in the same quality nobody could doubt, for one had lost an eye in battle, and one an ear, the third halted in his fore-quarters,

and the fourth limped behind; and a jay of great talent and beauty, who turned his pretty head this way and that, and bent and bowed most courteously when addressed, and then responded in words equally apt and courteous to all that was said to him. Mrs Dinah Forde fell in love with that jay at first sight; borrowed him of his master, and hung him at one side of the door, where he soon became as famous all through the parish as the talking bird in the Arabian tales, or the parrot Vert-vert, immortalised by Gresset.

Sam's own appearance was as rat-catcher-like, I had almost said as venomous, as that of his retinue. His features sharper than ever, thin, and worn, and sallow, yet arch and good-humoured withal; his keen eye and knowing smile, his pliant active figure, and the whole turn of his equipment, from the shabby straw hat to the equally shabby long gaiters, told his calling almost as plainly as the sharp heads of the ferrets, which were generally protruded from the pockets of his dirty jean jacket, or the bunch of dead rats with which he was wont to parade the streets of B. on a market-day. He seemed, at last, to have found his proper vocation; and having stuck to it for four or five months, with great success and reputation, there seemed every chance of his becoming stationary at Aberleigh.

In his own profession his celebrity was, as I have said, deservedly great. The usual complaint against rat-catchers, that they take care not to ruin the stock, that they are sure to leave breeders enough, could not be applied to Sam; who, poor fellow, never was suspected of forethought in his life; and who, in this

case, had evidently too much delight in the chase himself, to dream of checking or stopping it, whilst there was a rat left unslain. On the contrary, so strong was the feeling of his sportsmanship, and that of his poor curs, that one of his grand operations, on the taking in of a wheat-rick, for instance, or the clearing out of a barn, was sure to be attended by all the idle boys and unemployed men in the village,—by all, in short, who, under the pretence of helping, could make an excuse to their wives, their consciences, or the parish officers. The grand battue, on emptying Farmer Brookes's great barn, will be long remembered in Aberleigh; there was more noise made, and more beer drunk, than on any occasion since the happy marriage of Miss Phœbe and the patten-maker; it even emulated the shouts and the tipsiness of the B. election—and that's a bold word! The rats killed were in proportion to the din—and that is a bold word too! I am really afraid to name the number, it seemed to myself, and would appear to my readers, so incredible. Sam and Farmer Brookes were so proud of the achievement, that they hung the dead game on the lower branches of the great oak outside the gate, after the fashion practised by mole-catchers, to the unspeakable consternation of a cockney cousin of the good farmer's, a very fine lady, who had never in her life before been out of the sound of Bow-bell, and who, happening to catch sight of this portentous crop of acorns in passing under the tree, caused her husband, who was driving her, to turn the gig round, and notwithstanding remonstrance and persuasion, and a most faithful promise that the boughs should be dismantled before night, could not be induced to

set foot in a place where the trees were, to use her own words, "so heathenish," and betook herself back to her own domicile at Holborn Bars, in great and evident perplexity as to the animal or vegetable quality of the oak in question.¹

Another cause of the large assemblage at Sam's rat-hunts was, besides the certainty of good sport, the eminent popularity of the leader of the chase. Sam was a universal favourite. He had good fellowship enough to conciliate the dissipated, and yet stopped short of the licence which would have disgusted the sober,—was pleasant-spoken, quick, lively, and intelligent,—sang a good song, told a good story, and had a kindness of temper, and a lightness of heart, which rendered him a most exhilarating and coveted companion to all in his own station. He was, moreover, a proficient in country games, and so eminent at cricket especially, that the men of Aberleigh were no sooner able, from his residence in the parish, to count him amongst their eleven, than they challenged their old rivals, the men of Hinton, and beat them forthwith.

Two nights before the return match, Sam, shabbier even than usual, and unusually out of spirits, made his appearance at the house of an old Aberleigh cricketer, still a patron and promoter of that noble game, and the following dialogue took place between them:—

¹ Moles are generally, and rats occasionally, strung on willows when killed; not much to the improvement of the beauty of the scenery. I don't know anything that astounds a Londoner more than the sight of a tree bearing such fruit. The plum-pudding tree, whereof mention is made in the pleasant and voracious travels of the Baron Munchausen, could not appear more completely a *lusus naturæ*.

“Well, Sam, we are to win this match.”

“I hope so, please your honour. But I’m sorry to say I shan’t be at the winning of it.”

“Not here, Sam! What, after rattling the stumps about so gloriously last time, won’t you stay to finish them now! Only think how those Hinton fellows will crow! You must stay over Wednesday.”

“I can’t, your honour. ’Tis not my fault. But here I’ve had a lawyer’s letter on the part of Mrs Forde, about the trifle of rent, and bill that I owe her; and if I’m not off to-night, Heaven knows what she’ll do with me!”

“The rent—that can’t be much. Let’s see if we can’t manage——”

“Aye, but there’s a longish bill, sir,” interrupted Sam. “Consider, we are seven in family.”

“Seven!” interrupted, in his turn, the other interlocutor.

“Aye, sir, counting the dogs and the ferrets, poor beasts! for I suppose she has not charged for the jay’s board, though ’twas that unlucky bird made the mischief.”

“The jay! What could he have to do with the matter? Dinah used to be as fond of him as if he had been her own child! and I always thought Dinah Forde a good-natured woman.”

“So she is, in the main, your honour,” replied Sam, twirling his hat, and looking half-shy and half-sly, at once knowing and ashamed. “So she is, in the main; but this, somehow, is a particular sort of an affair. You must know, sir,” continued Sam, gathering courage as he went on, “that at first the

widow and I were very good friends, and several of these articles which are charged in the bill, such as milk for the ferrets, and tea and lump-sugar, and young onions for myself, I verily thought were meant as presents; and so I do believe at the time she did mean them. But, howsoever, Jenny Dobbs, the nurserymaid at the Park (a pretty black-eyed lass—perhaps your honour may have noticed her walking with the children), she used to come out of an evening like to see us play cricket, and then she praised my bowling, and then I talked to her, and so at last we began to keep company; and the jay, owing, I suppose, to hearing me say so sometimes, began to cry out, “Pretty Jenny Dobbs!”

“Well, and this affronted the widow?”

“Past all count, your honour. You never saw a woman in such a tantrum. She declared I had taught the bird to insult her, and posted off to Lawyer Latitat. And here I have got this letter, threatening to turn me out, and put me in gaol, and what not, from the lawyer; and Jenny, a false-hearted jade, finding how badly matters are going with me, turns round and says that she never meant to have me, and is going to marry the French Mounseer (Sir Henry’s French valet), a foreigner and a papist, who may have a dozen wives before for anything she can tell. These women are enough to drive a man out of his senses!” And poor Sam gave his hat a mighty swing, and looked likely to cry from a mixture of grief, anger, and vexation. “These women are enough to drive a man mad!” reiterated Sam, with increased energy.

“So they are, Sam,” replied his host, administering a very efficient dose of consolation, in the shape

of a large glass of Cognac brandy, which, in spite of its coming from his rival's country, Sam swallowed with hearty goodwill. "So they are. But Jenny's not worth fretting about: she's a poor feckless thing after all, fitter for a Frenchman than an Englishman. If I were you, I would make up to the widow: she's a person of property, and a fine comely woman into the bargain. Make up to the widow, Sam, and drink another glass of brandy to your success!"

And Sam followed both pieces of advice. He drank the brandy and he made up to the widow, the former part of the prescription probably inspiring him with courage to attempt the latter; and the lady was propitious, and the wedding speedy: and the last that I heard of them was, the jay's publishing the banns of marriage, under a somewhat abridged form, from his cage at the door of Mrs Dinah's shop (a proceeding at which she seemed, outwardly, scandalised; but over which, it may be suspected, she chuckled inwardly, or why not have taken in the cage?), and the French valet's desertion of Jenny Dobbs, whom he, in his turn, jilted; and the dilemma of Lawyer Latitat, who found himself obliged to send in his bill for the threatening letter to the identical gentleman to whom it was addressed. For the rest, the cricket match was won triumphantly, the wedding went off with great *éclat*, and our accomplished rat-catcher is, we trust, permanently fixed in our good village of Aberleigh.



ONE of the pleasantest habitations I have ever known is an old white house, built at right angles, with the pointed roofs, and clustered chimneys of Elizabeth's day, covered with roses, vines, and passion-flowers, and parted by a green sloping meadow from a straggling, picturesque village street. In this charming abode resides a more charming family : a gentleman,

“ Polite as all his life in courts had been,
And good as he the world had never seen ” ;

two daughters full of sweetness and talent ; and Aunt Martha, the most delightful of old maids ! She has another appellation, I suppose—she must have one—but I scarcely know it : Aunt Martha is the name that belongs to her—the name of affection. Such is the universal feeling which she inspires, that all her friends, all her acquaintances, (in this case the terms are almost synonymous,) speak of her like her own family—she is everybody's Aunt Martha—and a very charming Aunt Martha she is.

First of all, she is, as all women should be if they can, remarkably handsome. She may be—it is a delicate matter to speak of a lady's age—she must be five-and-forty ; but few beauties of twenty could stand a comparison with her loveliness. It is such a fulness of bloom, so luxuriant, so satiating :

just tall enough to carry off the plumpness which at forty-five is so becoming; a brilliant complexion; curled pouting lips! long, clear, bright grey eyes—the colour for expression, that which unites the quickness of the black with the softness of the blue; a Roman regularity of feature; and a profusion of rich brown hair. Such is Aunt Martha. Add to this a very gentle and pleasant speech, always kind, and generally lively; the sweetest temper; the easiest manner; a singular rectitude and singleness of mind; a perfect open-heartedness, and a total unconsciousness of all these charms, and you will wonder a little that she is Aunt Martha still. I have heard hints of an early engagement broken by the fickleness of man; and there is about her an aversion to love in one particular direction—the love matrimonial—and an overflowing of affection in all other channels, that it seems as if the natural course of the stream had been violently dammed up. She has many lovers—admirers I should say—for there is amidst her good-humoured gaiety, a coyness that forbids their going farther; a modesty almost amounting to shyness, that checks even the laughing girls, who sometimes accuse her of stealing away their beaux. I do not think any man on earth could tempt her into wedlock: it would be a most unpardonable monopoly if any one should; an intolerable engrossing of a general blessing; a theft from the whole community.

Her usual home is the white house covered with roses; and her station in the family is rather doubtful. She is not the mistress, for her charming nieces are

old enough to take and to adorn the head of the table ; nor the housekeeper, though, as she is the only lady of the establishment who wears pockets, those ensigns of authority, the keys, will sometimes be found, with other strays, in that goodly receptacle ; nor a guest—her spirit is too active for that lazy post ; her real vocation there, and everywhere, seems to be comforting, cheering, welcoming, and spoiling everything that comes in her way ; and, above all, nursing and taking care. Of all kind employments, these are her favourites. Oh, the shawlings, the cloakings, the cloggings ! the cautions against cold, or heat, or rain, or sun ! the remedies for diseases not arrived ! colds uncaught ! incipient toothaches ! rheumatisms to come ! She loves nursing so well, that we used to accuse her of inventing maladies for other people, that she might have the pleasure of curing them ; and when they really come—as come they will sometimes, in spite of Aunt Martha—what a nurse she is ! It is worth while to be a little sick to be so attended. All the cousins, and cousins' cousins of her connection, as regularly send for her on the occasion of a lying-in, as for the midwife. I suppose she has undergone the ceremony of dandling the baby, sitting up with the new mamma, and dispensing the caudle, twenty times at least. She is equally important at weddings or funerals. Her humanity is inexhaustible. She has an intense feeling of fellowship with her kind, and grieves or rejoices in the sufferings or happiness of others with a reality as genuine as it is rare.

Her accomplishments are exactly of this sympathetic order : all calculated to administer much to the pleasure of her companions, and nothing to her

own importance or vanity. She leaves to the sirens, her nieces, the higher enchantments of the piano, the harp, and the guitar, and that noblest of instruments, the human voice; ambitious of no other musical fame than such as belongs to the playing of quadrilles and waltzes for their little dances, in which she is indefatigable; she neither caricatures the face of man nor of nature under pretence of drawing figures or landscapes; but she ornaments the reticules, bell-ropes, ottomans, and chair-covers of all her acquaintance, with flowers as rich and luxuriant as her own beauty. She draws patterns for the ignorant, and works flounces, frills, and baby-linen, for the idle; she reads aloud to the sick, plays at cards with the old, and loses at chess to the unhappy. Her gift in gossiping, too, is extraordinary; she is a gentle newsmonger, and turns her scandal on the sunny side. But she is an old maid still; and certain small peculiarities hang about her. She is a thorough hoarder; whatever fashion comes up, she is sure to have something of the sort by her, or, at least, something thereunto convertible. She is a little superstitious; sees strangers in her teacup, gifts in her finger-nails, letters and winding-sheets in the candle, and purses and coffins in the fire; would not spill the salt "for all the worlds that one ever has to give"; and looks with dismay on a crossed knife and fork. Moreover, she is orderly to fidgetiness—that is her greatest calamity!—for young ladies nowadays are not quite so tidy as they should be, and ladies'-maids are much worse; and drawers are tumbled, and drawing-rooms in a litter. Happy she to whom a disarranged drawer can be a misery! Dear and happy Aunt Martha!

*Printed by Turnbull & Spears
at Edinburgh in Great Britain*

DEC 2 1880



· OVR · VILLAGE ·

UCLA-College Library
PR 5022 093 1904



L 005 730 113 7

College
Library

PR
5022
093
1904

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 001 176 266 3

·RUSSELL·
·MITFORD·
·BORN·1787·
·DIED·
·1855·

·FIRST·EDITION·
·PUBLISHED·1843·

