

THE GREENWOOD OF SHAKSPEARE.

(READ 19TH JANUARY, 1865.)

I NOW come to the second part of my subject, the merry greenwood and its inhabitants, and Shakspeare's intense love of the beauties of the country and wonderful power in describing them,—a power so great that the Puritan poet of the next generation speaks of him as—

Sweetest Shakspeare, Fancy's child,
Warbling his native wood notes wild.

In the forest in that most poetical of plays, *the Midsummer-Night's Dream*, the two bands of lovers meet with their extraordinary adventures; thither the rustics resort for their rehearsal, choosing a green plot for their stage, and a hawthorn brake for their tyring-house; there the Queen of the Amazons is led by her lover to hear the music of the hounds. Again, in *As You Like It*, the various characters find refuge in sylvan fastnesses from the tyranny of an usurping Duke, and there—

Exempt from public haunt,
Found tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.*

To a similar scene Sir Valentine fled, having forfeited the favour of the Duke of Milan—there he became the leader of a band of outlaws, and found consolation for the disappointment of his hopes, as he says:—

This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,
I better brook, than flourishing peopled towns:
Here can I sit alone, unseen of any,
And, to the nightingale's complaining notes,
Tune my distresses, and record my woes.†

* *As You Like It*, Act ii, Scene 1.

† *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act v, Scene 4.

There, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the King of Navarre and his courtiers receive the embassy of the Princess of France and her ladies; there, beneath the spreading trees, they forswear their vows of woman hate, reading their sonnets to their lady loves, and engaging in a merry fight of words. It was beneath the avenue near Portia's house that Lorenzo and Jessica, looking upwards to the starry firmament, "thick
"inlaid with patines of bright gold," whispered the pretty words of love and joined their touches of sweet harmony to the orbs of heaven,

Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins.*

It was whilst hiding in

the pleached bower,
Where honey-suckles, ripen'd by the sun,
Forbid the sun to enter,†

that Beatrice first heard the strange tale that she was beloved by Benedick, the witty bachelor. The scene of *Cymbeline* is laid partly in the forests of South Wales. *Lear* on a heath in the south of Britain. Several of the historical or chronicle plays lead us into the woodland. And it was beneath the blasted oak of Herne the hunter, that the wicked old knight received the last punishment from the satyrs and fairies of Windsor.

Having so often laid the scene of his plays in the forest, we need not wonder that Shakspeare has many times recounted the sights and sounds of the woods.

The birds chaunt melody on every bush ;
The snake lies rolled in the cheerful sun ;
The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind,
And make a checquer'd shadow on the ground :
Under their sweet shade, Aaron, let us sit,
And—whilst the babbling echo mocks the hounds,
Replying shrilly to the well-tun'd horns,

* *Merchant of Venice*, Act v, Scene 1.

† *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act iii, Scene 1.

As if a double hunt were heard at once,—
 Let us sit down, and mark their yelling noise :
 Whiles hounds and horns, and sweet melodious birds,
 Be unto us, as is a nurse's song
 Of lullaby.*

Shakspeare is ever ready to remove his actors from the busy hum of men to the silent forest glade or open champaign, and to preserve in immortal verse the simple scenes of the English common, or the hedgerow, or the sports of the woodland. He is entitled to the place of a prince among the true lovers of nature ; but the scientific man, whose enjoyment is confined to the classification and elaboration of his subject, to cataloguing varieties and inventing formidable names, must not look to our poet for sympathy. For instance, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, he says,

These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights,
 That give a name to every fixed star,
 Have no more profit of their shining nights
 Than those that walk, and wot not what they are.†

First, a few words on the birds of Shakspeare. His poetry shows that he was well acquainted with them and their habits ; it is evident that,

From these wandering minstrels,
 He had learnt the art of song.

Even Bottom the weaver, when he was belated in the Fairies' wood, cannot refrain from breaking out into a chanson in praise of the feathered choristers of the grove—

The ousel cock, so black of hue,
 With orange-tawny bill,
 The throstle with his note so true,
 The wren with little quill,
 The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
 The plain-song cuckoo grey,
 Whose note full many a man doth mark,
 And dares not answer, nay.‡

* *Titus Andronicus*, Act ii, Scene 3.

† *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act i, Scene 1.

‡ *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act iii, Scene 1.

Perhaps Shakspeare is rarely more successful in any of his illustrations than in those taken from the habits of birds. For instance, in *Titus Andronicus*, the wicked Queen of the Goths declares—

The eagle suffers little birds to sing,
And is not careful what they mean thereby;
Knowing that with the shadow of his wings,
He can at pleasure stint their melody.*

Again, in *Macbeth*, where Lady Macduff speaks of the flight of her husband, she says—

He loves us not;
He wants the natural touch: for the poor wren,
The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.†

In *Richard III*, when the spiteful hump-backed Gloster denounces his enemies, he says—

The world is grown so bad,
That wrens may prey where eagles dare not perch.‡

In *Henry IV*, where Westmoreland brings the king intelligence of the utter defeat of his enemies, the latter replies—

O Westmoreland, thou art a summer-bird,
Which ever in the haunch of winter sings
The lifting up of day.§

In the closing scene of the life of the gentle monarch *Henry VI*, he turns on the murderer of his son, with bolder words than were his wont:

The bird, that hath been limed in a bush,
With trembling wings misdoubteth every bush:
And I, the hapless male to one sweet bird,
Have now the fatal object in my eye,
Where my poor young was lim'd, was caught, and kill'd.

As the altercation becomes warmer, he upbraids Gloster with all the evil omens which attended his birth:

* *Titus Andronicus*, Act iv, Scene 4. † *Macbeth*, Act iv, Scene 2.
‡ *Richard III*, Act i, Scene 3. § 2 *Henry IV*, Act iv, Scene 4.

The owl shriek'd at thy birth, an evil sign ;
 The night-crow cried, aboding luckless time ;
 Dogs howl'd, and hideous tempests shook down trees ;
 The raven rook'd her on the chimney's top,
 And chattering pies in dismal discords sung.*

One of the most beautiful passages relating to birds is in *Macbeth*, a play which contains more allusions to the feathered fowl than any other ; it is where Banquo speaks of Macbeth's castle :

This guest of summer,
 The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
 By his lov'd mansionry, that the heaven's breath,
 Smells wooingly here : no jutting, frieze, buttress,
 Nor coigne of vantage, but this bird hath made
 His pendent bed, and procreant cradle : Where they
 Most breed and haunt, I have observ'd, the air
 Is delicate.†

But Shakspeare's illustrations are not confined to the beautiful songsters of the grove, the harbingers of spring, the sign to man that he must soar upwards to another and a purer world. The crawling things of the ground, the insects flitting through the air, find a place in his verses. Thus he mentions "the tender horns of cockled snails," "the poor harmless fly with his pretty buzzing melody," "the red-hipp'd humble-bee on the top of a thistle," "the gilded butterflies," "the shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums," "the snake and her enamell'd skin," "the adder's fork and blind-worm's sting." The band of fairies in their chorus warn the hosts of insects from the haunt of their sylvan queen ; the two bands seem to be brought together for the sake of comparison, and they seem in some respects to dispute the rule of the night.

Perhaps the finest passage on any branch of the insect world is Shakspeare's account of the social policy of the bees. Many poets ancient and modern have described their order and industry and economy and regal form of government,

* 3 *Henry VI*, Act v, Scene 6.

† *Macbeth*, Act i, Scene 6.

but they have none of them produced anything more beautiful than the following. It occurs in the scene in *Henry V*, where the young King and his council discuss the foreign policy of the kingdom; the Archbishop speaks of the order and obedience of the body politic, and thus compares it—

For so work the honey bees;
 Creatures, that, by a rule in nature, teach
 The act of order to a peopled kingdom.
 They have a king, and officers of sorts:
 Where some, like magistrates, correct at home;
 Others, like merchants, venture trade abroad;
 Others, like soldiers, armed in their stings,
 Make boot upon the summer's velvet buds;
 Which pillage they with merry march bring home
 To the tent-royal of their emperor:
 Who, busied in his majesty, surveys
 The singing masons building roofs of gold;
 The civil citizens kneading up the honey;
 The poor mechanick porters crowding in
 Their heavy burdens at his narrow gate;
 The sad-ey'd justice, with his surly hum,
 Delivering o'er to éxecutors pale
 The lazy yawning drone.*

Flowers are so often introduced in Shakspeare's plays, that it has been suggested that his original calling was that of a gardener. I think, however, that he as frequently brings in the wild flowers of the fields and the woods, the village maiden's wreaths and posies, as those of the highly cultivated garden. Wherever they appear, they give proof that they are more the offspring of nature than of art. For instance, in the *Winter's Tale*, at the sheep shearing feast, where Perdita receives the guests and gives them flowers, she says—

Here's flowers for you;
 Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram;
 The marigold, that goes to bed with the sun,
 And with him rises weeping; these are flowers
 Of middle summer, and I think, they are given
 To men of middle age.

* *Henry V*, Act i, Scene 2.

. daffodils,
 That come before the swallow dares, and take
 The winds of March with beauty; violets dim
 But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
 Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
 That die unmarried, ere they can behold
 Bright Phœbus in his strength; bold oxlips, and
 The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
 The flower-de-luce being one! O, these, I lack,
 To make you garlands of.*

Poor Ophelia, the sometime rose of May, her mind overpowered by her father's death, her head fantastically crowned with flowers, presents us with a scene which Shakspeare evidently painted from the life. "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray you, love, remember; and there is pansies, that's for thoughts. There's fennel for you, and columbines:—there's rue for you; and here's some for me:—we may call it, herb of grace o' Sundays:—you may wear your rue with a difference.—There's a daisy:—I would give you some violets; but they withered all, when my father died."†

Again, in the lines describing Ophelia's death, we have a very pretty piece of floral scenery, which has probably been suggested to Shakspeare by some actual scene.

There is a willow grows ascaunt the brook,
 That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
 There with fantastick garlands did she make
 Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
 And on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds,
 Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
 When down her weedy trophies, and herself,
 Fell in the weeping brook.‡

Lear, his poor brain cracked by his elder daughters' unkindness and by the bodily sufferings he had undergone, replaces the royal crown he had lost by one of another kind.

* *Winter's Tale*, Act iv, Scene 3.

+ *Hamlet*, Act iv, Scene 5.

‡ *Hamlet*, Act iv, Scene 7.

As mad as the vex'd sea : singing aloud ;
 Crown'd with rank fumiter, and furrow weeds,
 With harlocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
 Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
 In our sustaining corn.*

When the sons of Cymbeline find Imogen, as they suppose, dead, they lament her loss, and, to show their grief, propose to scatter flowers over her tomb.

With fairest flowers,
 Whilst summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele,
 I'll sweeten thy sad grave : Thou shalt not lack
 The flower, that's like thy face, pale primrose ; nor
 The azur'd hare-bell, like thy veins ; no, nor
 The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander,
 Out-sweeten'd not thy breath : the rudduck would
 With charitable bill, bring thee all this ;
 Yea, and furr'd moss besides, when flowers are none,
 To winter-ground thy corse.†

From these passages it is curious to see how much Shakspeare has associated flowers with sorrow : he has brought them in to give a tone and colouring to some picture of human melancholy, quite as often as to deck some festive scene or occasion for rejoicing.

He seems to have been really fond of employing figures taken from the common weeds of the field. For instance, when the angry Hotspur broods over the rebellion he is plotting, he exclaims, "but I tell you, my lord fool, out of "this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety."‡ Again, in *Henry V*, when the grave bishops discuss the character of their new king and his previous riotous career, Ely says—

The strawberry grows underneath the nettle ;
 And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best,
 Neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality.§

I will now quote two or three of the most beautiful passages

* *Lear*, Act iv, Scene 4.

† *Cymbeline*, Act iv, Scene 2.

‡ *Henry IV*, Act ii, Scene 3.

§ *Henry V*, Act i, Scene 1.

in which Shakspeare makes use of flowers. One certainly is in the *Twelfth Night*, where the love-sick Duke speaks of music :

That strain again ;
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet south,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing, and giving odour.*

Another in *Henry VIII*, when Queen Katherine retorts on the two legates who come to offer her their insidious aid :

Like the lily,
That once was mistress of the field, and flourish'd,
I'll hang my head and perish.†

There is a beautiful simile in *Antony and Cleopatra* which I cannot help quoting. It is where the ambassador from Antony says—

I was of late as petty to his ends,
As is the morn-dew on the myrtle leaf
To his grand sea.‡

So much for our poet's love of nature ; now let us regard the sports of the greenwood.. Shakspeare chiefly makes use of the woodland from its connexion with the chase. It was before the period when the fowling-piece and the rifle were ordinarily used for field sports; the cloth yard shaft and the bolt of the cross-bow were still employed in hunting and *venerie*. Nor was the chase confined to the stronger sex, and to

The bold outlaw
Whose cheer was the deer
And his only friend the bow.§

The ladies of that age took pleasure in the sport and killed their stags without compunction. There are several records

* *Twelfth Night*, Act i, Scene 1. † *Henry VIII*, Act iii, Scene 1.

‡ *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act iii, Scene 10.

§ *Bow Meeting Song* by Bishop Heber.

of the kind in the life of Queen Elizabeth; whilst in the time of her successor, a most remarkable accident is recorded. Archbishop Abbott, a man of strong Puritan tendencies, whilst hunting with Lord Zouch, shot one of the keepers instead of the deer, for which he was for a time suspended from his spiritual office. From the scene in *Love's Labour's Lost*, where the Princess kills a deer, and the schoolmaster and the curate discuss what they term the "very reverent sport," in most pedantic terms—

The praiseful princess pierc'd and prick'd a pretty pleasing pricket—*

it is evident that Shakspeare was well acquainted with everything connected with the sport. Washington Irving's Master Simon in *Bracebridge Hall* would have been charmed with the learning of their discourse.

The scene in *Henry VI*, where the King was taken captive by the keepers in the forest, shows how the deer was often shot with the cross-bow and that the sport much resembled Highland deer-stalking.

First Keeper.—Under this thick-grown brake we'll shroud ourselves;
For through this laund anon the deer will come;
And in this covert will we make our stand,
Culling the principal of all the deer.

Second Keeper.—I'll stay above the hill, so both may shoot.

First Keeper.—That cannot be; the noise of thy cross-bow
Will scare the herd, and so my shoot is lost.†

Deer were more frequently hunted with dogs; and the chase has furnished the substance of the last speech made by Talbot, when the French army were pressing him and his gallant band to the death:

How are we park'd, and bounded in a pale;
A little herd of England's timorous deer,
Maz'd with a yelping kennel of French curs!
If we be English deer, be then in blood:

* *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act i, Scene 2.

† *Henry VI*, Act iii, Scene 1.

Not rascal-like, to fall down with a pinch ;
 But rather moody-mad, and desperate stags,
 Turn on the bloody hounds with heads of steel,
 And make the cowards stand aloof at bay :
 Sell every man his life as dear as mine,
 And they shall find dear deer of us, my friends.—
 God, and Saint George ! Talbot, and England's right !*

But it is in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, in the wood near Athens, where so many English scenes and legends have found a permanent abode, that we find the most beautiful description of the chase.

Theseus.—My love shall hear the musick of my hounds.—
 Uncouple in the western valley ;
 We will, fair queen, up to the mountain's top,
 And mark the musical confusion
 Of hounds and echo in conjunction.

Hippolyta.—I was with Hercules, and Cadmus, once,
 When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear
 With hounds of Sparta: never did I hear
 Such gallant chiding; for, besides the groves,
 The skies, the fountains, every region near
 Seem'd all one mutual cry: I never heard
 So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

Theseus.—My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
 So flew'd, so sanded; and their heads are hung
 With ears that sweep away the morning dew;
 Crook-knee'd, and dew-lap'd like Thessalian bulls;
 Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells,
 Each under each. A cry more tuneable
 Was never holla'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,
 In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly.†

The dog here described is larger and more powerful, but slower than the fox-hound, "the dappled darling" of the present day; it is supposed to refer to the Talbot hound, a race now extinct, or nearly so. In this passage Shakspeare has mixed up in a most curious manner the mythical heroes of ancient Greece, and the sports of an English midland county in the days of our great Queen Elizabeth. I cannot help contrasting this passage with one from that poem in

* 1 *Henry VI*, Act iv, Scene 2.

† *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act iv, Scene 1.

which our Laureate has so exquisitely sketched the tendencies of the present age. The Princess and her train of lady students sally forth

to take
The dip of certain strata to the North ;

and when the place was reached, our poet says—

Many a little hand
Glanced like a touch of sunshine on the rocks,
Many a light foot shone like a jewel set
In the dark crag : and then we turn'd, we wound
About the cliffs, the copses, out and in,
Hammering and clinking, chattering stony names
Of shale and hornblende, rag and trap and tuff,
Amygdaloid and trachyte.*

Where Shakspeare brings in a hunting scene and the woodland, Tennyson describes a band of ladies bent on upholding the equality of woman, and forming a geological party. I will give one quotation more to prove Shakspeare's acquaintance with the greenwood and its inhabitants, an acquaintance so intimate that it seems to confirm the tradition that he had to fly from Warwickshire for having broken the lodge and killed the deer of Master Shallow. It is the scene in *As You Like It*, where the Duke and the other fugitive lords discuss their way of life in the forest of Arden. The Duke, after praising the "sweet uses of adversity," allows that he feels compunction at one part of their life.

Yet it irks me, the poor dappled fools,—
Being native burghers of this desert city,—
Should in their own confines, with forked heads
Have their round haunches gor'd.

Then follows that touching account of the death of the stag, which could only have been written by one who had felt both the excitement of the chase, and also compunction at its results. It is as follows :—

* Tennyson's *Princess*.

To the which place a poor sequester'd stag,
 That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,
 Did come to languish; and indeed, my lord,
 The wretched animal heav'd forth such groans,
 That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat
 Almost to bursting; and the big round tears
 Cours'd one another down his innocent nose
 In piteous chase: and thus the hairy fool,
 Much marked of the melancholy Jaques,
 Stood on the extremest verge of the swift brook,
 Augmenting it with tears.

*Poor deer, quoth he, thou mak'st a testament
 As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more
 To that which had too much: Then, being alone,
 Left and abandon'd of his velvet friends;
 'Tis right, quoth he; thus misery doth part
 The flux of company: Anon, a careless herd,
 Full of the pasture, jumps along by him,
 And never stays to greet him; Ay, quoth Jaques,
 Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens;
 'Tis just the fashion; Wherefore do you look
 Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there?**

There is far more in Shakspeare's plays about the deer, than about any of the domestic animals, including the horse and the dog; it is clear which animal engrossed the largest portion of his thoughts. Compared with hunting, we find but little about hawking; noble companies rode forth with hawk in hand and hound in leash, but the sport was not for the multitude; and the birds of the moor-land were not equal to the stags of the forest. I do not think there is any scene in Shakspeare which brings it in very prominently, but there are several allusions to it. Hamlet, for instance, quotes the well known proverb, "I am but mad north-north west; when the wind "is southerly, *I know a hawk from a hand-saw*,"† (heronshaw.) Again, in the scene where Romeo has just left his lady love, Juliet calls him back.

O, for a falconer's voice,
 To lure this tassel-gentle back again.†

* *As You Like It*, Act ii, Scene 1.

† *Hamlet*, Act ii, Scene 2.

‡ *Romeo and Juliet*, Act ii, Scene 2.

Whilst Petruchio, when he is engaged in taming the shrewish Katharina, compares the task he has undertaken to that of the falconer bringing the wild bird into subjection.

My falcon now is sharp, and passing empty;
 And, till she stoop, she must not be full-gorg'd,
 For then she never looks upon her lure.
 Another way I have to man my haggard,
 To make her come, and know her keeper's call,
 That is,—to watch her, as we watch these kites,
 That bate, and beat, and will not be obedient.*

In the Second Part of *Henry VI*, the nobles who have been out hawking, “flying at the brook,” coming back quarrelling with each other for their ambitious aims, and the soaring flight of the falcons, and the soaring designs of these proud chieftains are compared together.†

The greenwood was resorted to by others besides the huntsmen and the village maids, and by outlaws in search of shelter; it was there the Athenian lovers oft times went, as Hermia says—

And in the wood, where often you and I
 Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie,
 Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet;
 There my Lysander and myself shall meet.‡

There too was enacted the quarrel between the two Athenian maids, the handsome dwarfish Hermia, sharp and witty with her tongue, and the blooming, graceful, amiable Helena, “a right maid for her cowardice,” whose only safety was in flight, whose early friendship has been so beautifully described by Shakspeare. 'Tis thus Helena reproaches her companion:—

Is all the counsel that we two have shar'd,
 The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,
 When we have chid the hasty-footed time
 For parting us,—O, and is all forgot?

* *Taming of the Shrew*, Act iv, Scene 1.

† *Henry VI*, Act ii, Scene 1.

‡ *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act i, Scene 1.

All school-days' friendship, childhood innocence ?
 We, Hernia, like two artificial gods,
 Have with our needls created both one flower,
 Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
 Both warbling of one song, both in one key ;
 As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds,
 Had been incorporate.—So we grew together,
 Like to a double cherry, seeming parted ;
 But yet a union in partition,
 Two lovely berries moulded on one stem :
 So with two seeming bodies, but one heart.*

But Shakspeare's forest had other more permanent denizens than any I have so far named,—than the mere casual visitors during the gladsome day. As soon as the sun had sunk below the horizon, and the gloom of night had settled over the glades of the woodland, the spirits of the unseen world come forth, some to add to the beauties of the sylvan realm, some to engage in acts of beneficence to man, some in tasks of mirth and merriment, and a few in those of ill-will and spite. Here I come to Shakspeare's fairy land. Out of the legends floating around the greenwood of Warwickshire, he has produced a creation so beautiful, so airy, that I doubt whether anything equal is to be found in the poetry of any other nation. One cannot but compare the beings he has described to a collection of jewels, from their purity, their diminutive size, and their graceful—one might almost say sparkling—movements. If we examine the mythology of Greece and Rome, we shall find nothing at all worthy of being compared with them ; without it be " that small infantry " warr'd on by cranes." Indeed, the poet tells us, but he tells us as if it were an after-thought, that the pigmy race, after their destruction by the cranes, were turned into the little people of our woods :

Or if belief to matron tales be due,
 Full oft, in the belated shepherd's view,
 Their frisking forms, in gentle green array'd,
 Gambol secure amid the moonlight glade.

* *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act iii, Scene 2.

Secure, for no alarming cranes molest,
 And all their woes in long oblivion rest :
 Down the deep vale, and narrow winding way,
 They foot it featly, ranged in ringlets gay :
 'Tis joy and frolic all, where'er they rove,
 And fairy-people is the name they love.*

The wood-nymphs and the water-nymphs, Pan, Silenus, and their tribe, are often gross and corporeal—sometimes indeed, utterly disgusting beings.

The mythology of the Norsemen, born amid the ice-bound coasts and stormy tempests of the northern seas, differs very widely from the spirit-world of the English woods. One part of it converts the shipwright and the smith and the hardy sailor and the savage pirate chief into so many heroes and demigods; and it celebrated their feasts, their drinking and their revelry and their fights on land and on ship-board. Another part relates to the supernatural elves who haunt desolate places and, occasionally, the abodes of man, who form a connecting link between the human race and the world of spirits. It also relates wonderful stories of trolls and monsters and goblins, who sometimes exercise tyranny over man, and who sometimes are subdued by those possessed of magical arts. The legends of Scandinavia contain many stories which may be compared with the *Tempest*, with Ariel and the other spirits who obey the commands of Prospero; but they contain none which exhibit the exquisite beauty of the fairy land of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*. Iceland,—with its marvellous physical formation, calculated to produce unearthly impressions on credulous minds, with its jagged coasts, its volcanic mountains, its plains of lava, and its plains of ice, its boiling fountains, its long night of winter and its long day of summer,—possesses a literature which is, perhaps, richer in the supernatural than that of any other country; but it is

* Beattie's *Pygmæo-Gerano-Machia*.

rude and terrible and ghostly, and cannot fairly be compared with the charming fairy land of Shakspeare's greenwood.

The legends of the Red Indian, though in some respects very different, have in other respects a certain resemblance to the tales of the spirit land of England, because they attribute a spiritual source to the operations of nature, to the winds from the mountains, to the growth of plants, and to many of the arts of life. They connect the every-day life of man with the unseen world around him. Shakspeare ingrafts the beauties of nature on his fairy realm; in a somewhat similar manner Longfellow repeats the legends of the Red Man, which were found

In the bird's-nests of the forest,
In the lodges of the beaver,
In the hoof-prints of the bison,
In the eyry of the eagle!

For instance, we have the beautiful story of the chief who

Prayed and fasted in the forest,
For the profit of the people,
For advantage of the nations;

who then, "by struggle and by labour," overcomes a youth,

Dressed in garments green and yellow,
Plumes of green bent o'er his forehead,

and for his conflict and his conquest is rewarded by the Great Spirit—the Master of Life—with the gift of maize.

Mondamin, the friend of man, Mondamin.

This story is an instance of the manner in which the half civilized man mingles the natural and the supernatural.

There is a certain weird character about the spirit world of North Britain. Warlocks and witches dancing around unearthly lights in the ruined kirk are the types of the superstitions of Scotland; even the Queen of Elfinland, who carried away Thomas the Rhymer, is one of the same ghostly character.

The imaginative, poetical sons of Erin have constructed a spirit world which, with its banshees and phoccas, and spirit horsemen, seems to combine the legends of Scotland with those of the English greenwood.

One of the spirits of Shakspeare's woodland, and one only, is of fearful form—in fact, a ghost condemned to haunt the forest; it is that of Herne the hunter—

Sometime a keeper here in Windsor forest,
Doth all the winter time, at still midnight,
Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns;
And there he blasts the tree, and takes the cattle;
And makes milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain
In a most hideous and dreadful manner.*

One characteristic of the fairy tribe is the marvellous extent of their powers, and the contrast between their ordinary pastimes and the tasks they can perform—the earth, the air, the seas, the tempests and the bolts of heaven, are all controlled by them; and they again are guided by the magician's still more potent art. Prospero thus addresses them:—

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves;
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him,
When he comes back; you demy-puppets, that
By moon-shine do the green-sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you, whose pastime
Is to make midnight-mushrooms; that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew; by whose aid
(Weak masters though you be) I have be-dimm'd
The noon-tide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt: the strong-bas'd promontory
Have I made shake; and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine, and cedar; graves, at my command,
Have wak'd their sleepers; oped, and led them forth
By my so potent art.†

The diminutive size of the fairies is always preserved—

* *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act iv, Scene 3.

† *Tempest*, Act v, Scene 1.

indeed, it is one of the chief elements of their beauty, so different from the elves, "the eighteen-inch militia" of other lands. When Bottom finds his way to the bower of Titania, the love-sick fairy queen commands her various spirits to wait on him. One of them, Cobweb (the name shows how well he was acquainted with the wiles of the enemies of the hive), was ordered to bring him a honey-bag. The weaver tells him, "Good Monsieur, have a care the honey-bag break not; I would be loath to have you overflown with a honey-bag, Signior." In the account of the quarrel between Titania and Oberon, we find

That all their elves, for fear,
Creep into acorn cups, and hide them there.*

Again, Titania tells her love—

I have a venturous fairy that shall seek
The squirrel's hoard, and fetch thee new nuts.†

It was a venturous task, evidently more than an ordinary feat for a fairy. But in every passage we shall find what tiny people they are. The first individual spirit I shall mention is Ariel, the "dainty Ariel," the delicate spirit who obeys the commands of a human master, in gratitude for his deliverance from the sorceries of the vile witch Sycorax. He has power over the winds and the breezes, even over the forked bolt of heaven and over the stormy seas, as he says—

I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flamed amazement: Sometimes, I'd divide,
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards, and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet, and join: Jove's lightnings, the precursors
O' the dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not.‡

These various tasks form a curious contrast to the song in

* *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act ii, Scene I.

+ *Ibid*, Act iv, Scene 1.

‡ *Tempest*, Act i, Scene 2.

which he describes his haunts and occupations. From the latter we should suppose he was no larger than a humming-bird.

Where the bee sucks, there suck I ;
 In a cowslip's bell I lie :
 There I couch when owls do cry.
 On the bat's back I do fly,
 After summer merrily :
 Merrily, merrily, shall I live now,
 Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.*

Another of Shakspeare's spirits is Queen Mab, the inspirer of dreams. The description occurs in *Romeo and Juliet* ; and it is curious that in that love tale of Verona, he brings in a creation of the woody glades of Warwickshire—an Italian courtier relating an English legend. She is said to

Gallop night by night
 Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love :
 O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees :
 O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream ;
 And sometimes comes she with a tithe-pig's tail,
 Tickling a parson's nose as 'a lies asleep,
 Then dreams he of another benefice.†

But the lines describing the equipage of this queen of dreams are by far the most beautiful part of this passage :—

She comes
 In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
 On the fore-finger of an alderman,
 Drawn with a team of little atomies
 Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep :
 Her waggon-spokes made of long spinners' legs ;
 The cover, of the wings of grasshoppers ;
 The traces, of the smallest spider's web ;
 The collars, of the moonshine's watery beams :
 Her whip, of cricket's bone : the lash, of film :
 Her waggoner, a small grey-coated gnat,
 Not half so big as a round little worm
 Prick'd from the lazy finger of a maid :
 Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,
 Made by the joiner squirrel, or old grub,
 Time out of mind the fairies' coach-makers.‡

* *Tempest*, Act v, Scene 1.

† *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 1, Scene 4.

‡ *Romeo and Juliet*, Act i, Scene 4.

But one of the most important members of the fairy world is the merry spirit Puck, Oberon's henchman, to whose mischievous pranks all the misadventures of English rustic life are attributed. I presume he has faded away before increasing population and improved agriculture, and that almost all that remains of him is to be found in Shakspeare's verses.

Fairy— You are that shrewd and knavish sprite,
 Call'd Robin Goodfellow: are you not he,
 That frights the maidens of the villagery;
 Skim milk; and sometimes labour in the quern,
 And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
 And sometimes make the drink to bear no barm;
 Misdread night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
 Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,
 You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
 Are you not he?

Puck— Thou speak'st aright;
 I am that merry wanderer of the night.
 I jest to Oberon, and make him smile,
 When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
 Neighing in likeness to a silly foal:
 And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
 In very likeness of a roasted crab;
 And, when she drinks, against her lips I bob,
 And on her wither'd dew-lap pour the ale.
 The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
 Sometimes for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
 Then slip I from her, and down topples she,
 And tailor cries, and falls into a cough;
 And then the whole quire hold their hips, and loffe;
 And waxen in their mirth, and sneeze, and swear
 A merrier hour was never wasted there.*

Milton, in *L'Allegro*, devotes a few lines to fairy land, in which he makes the goblin far more prominent than the rest of the tribe. The passage is as follows:—

With stories told of many a feat,
 How faery Mab the junkets eat;
 She was pinch'd and pull'd, she sed;
 And he, by friar's lantern led,
 Tells how the drudging Goblin swet,
 To earn his cream-bowl duly set,
 When in one night, ere glimpse of morn,

* *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act ii, Scene 1.

His shadowy flail hath thresh'd the corn,
 That ten day-labourers could not end ;
 Then lies him down the lubbar fiend,
 And stretch'd out all the chimney's length,
 Basks at the fire his hairy strength ;
 And crop-full out of doors he flings,
 Ere the first cock his matin rings.*

There is nothing said about Puck's size ; still we may infer it was much greater than that of the rest of the fairies. But Titania, the fairy queen, is the masterpiece of Shakspeare's poem ; everything around her is ethereal and graceful, except the weaver Bottom, on whom the wicked spirit Puck had played the greatest of his pranks, and who is introduced very much for sake of contrast. Nothing can be more beautiful than the account of Titania's bower—

I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,
 Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows ;
 Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,
 With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine :
 There sleeps Titania, some time of the night,
 Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight.†

A band of small elves defend their sleeping mistress, and keep away the more odious inhabitants of the forest, singing this lullaby—

You spotted snakes, with double tongue,
 Thorny hedge-fogs, be not seen ?
 Newts, and blind-worms, do no wrong ;
 Come not near our fairy queen :
 Weaving spiders, come not here ;
 Hence, you long-legg'd spinners, hence ;
 Beetles black, approach not near ;
 Worm, nor snail, do no offence.‡

The fairy dance, the fairy song, take up a portion of the night, but not the whole of it. They have certain duties to perform—slight, indeed, and adapted to their tiny form and

* Milton's *L'Allegro*. † *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act ii, Scene 2.

‡ *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act ii, Scene 3.

woodland dwelling. The fairy queen disperses her spirits on various errands of fairy economy.

Come, now a roundel, and a fairy song ;
Then, for the third part of a minnte, hence ;
Some, to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds ;
Some, war with rear-mice for their leathern wings,
To make my small elves coats ; and some keep back
The clamorous owl, that nightly hoots, and wonders
At our quaint spirits.*

When Bottom, " the shallowest thick-skin of that barren " set," is transformed and led into the bower of the fairy queen, she crowns the hairy temples of her love

With coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers,
and summons all her band to minister to his wants.

Be kind and courteous to this gentleman ;
Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes ;
Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries ;
The honey bags steal from the humble-bees,
And, for night tapers, crop their waxen thighs,
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,
To have my love to bed, and to arise ;
And pluck the wings from painted butterflies,
To fan the moon-beams from his sleeping eyes.†

Here, and indeed in all the passages I shall quote, we have the fairies mingled with and decking themselves with the most beautiful gems of the natural world. Another spirit, perhaps one of the more important ones, gives this account of his moonlight labours :—

Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough briar,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire,
I do wander every where,
Swifter than the moon's sphere ;
And I serve the fairy queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green :
The cowslips tall her pensioners be ;

* *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act ii, Scene 3.

† *Ibid*, Act iii, Scene 1.

In their gold coats spots you see ;
 Those be rubies, fairy favours,
 In those freckles live their savours :
 I must go seek some dew-drops here,
 And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.*

The glittering dew-drops are not the only signs they give the human race of their existence. Like other bodies politic, the fairy world has its commotions and jealousies and petty wars ; and wars, small as well as great, will leave visible traces behind them. Thus Titania complains that Oberon has prevented her and her train from extending their benignant influences to man.

Never, since the middle summer's spring,
 Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead.
 By paved fountain, or by rushy brook,
 Or on the beached margent of the sea,
 To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
 But with all thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.
 Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
 As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
 Contagious fogs, . . . and the green corn
 Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard.
 The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud ;
 And the quaint mazes in the wanton green,
 For lack of tread, are undistinguishable :
 The human mortals want their winter here ;
 No night is now with hymn or carol blest.†

The fairies have other duties to perform besides watching over the opening flowers, contesting the rule of the night with the buzzing or crawling insects, and assisting the seasons in their course. They have sympathies with the human race. They caress and defend those who are attached to them, in the most devoted manner. Titania will not part with the little changeling boy, even at the risk of a quarrel with her lord. She protests—

The fairy land buys not the child of me,
 His mother was a votress of my order ;

* *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act ii, Scene 1.

† *Ibid*, Act ii, Scene 2.

And, in the spiced Indian air, by night,
Full often hath she gossip'd by my side.

.
And, for her sake, I do rear up her boy ;
And, for her sake, I will not part with him.*

Again, the fairies haunt the houses of their friends, scattering blessings around them. They enter the palace of Theseus, and Oberon enjoins—

Now, until the break of day,
Through this house each fairy stray,
To the best bride-bed will we,
Which by us shall blessed be.

Break of day warns the fairies to bring their task to an end. Let but the sun appear, and their kingdom will vanish into thin air. They are as unsubstantial as the spirits whom Prospero describes :—

These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air :
And, like the baseless fabrick of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve ;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind : We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.†

The dawn of the morning causes Puck to warn his master that the ghosts are trooping home to the places of their abode :

For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast.
And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger.

Oberon answers—

But we are spirits of another sort :
I with the Morning's Love have oft made sport ;
And, like a forester, the groves may tread,
Even till the eastern gate, all fiery red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt-green streams.‡

* *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act ii, Scene 2. † *Tempest*, Act iv, Scene 1.

‡ *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act iii, Scene 2.

A little longer and their tasks are done, and they have all melted away. Then Bottom the weaver finds himself awake, near a hawthorn thicket. The strange visions of the night flit through his brain; the ass's head, which so admirably fitted the wearer, and the elfin queen, who so freely offered him her love—what were they? Bottom answers the question himself, and from his muddled brain pours forth this version of the adventures of the night. “I have had a dream,—past
 “the wit of man to say what dream it was: Man is but an ass,
 “if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—
 “there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and
 “methought I had.—But man is but a patched fool, if he
 “will offer to say what methought I had.”*

And thus, in one of the most beautiful compositions man ever penned, Shakspeare has preserved the airy visions, the summer's evening dreams, about the fairy people of the woodlands of Warwickshire.

My paper has extended much longer than I at first intended; but I think I have proved what I have tried to do—our great poet's strong love for the forest, and that it was no transient feeling which inspired the words which Amiens sang:—

Under the greenwood tree,
 Who loves to lie with me,
 And tune his merry note,
 Unto the sweet bird's throat,
 Come hither, come hither, come hither;
 There shall he see
 No enemy
 But winter and rough weather.†

* *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act iv, Scene 1.

† *As You Like It*, Act ii, Scene 5.