

THE MONTHS--FEBRUARY.

This month among the ancient Romans was the last of the year, in which they were accustomed to offer to the Gods expiatory sacrifices as an atonement for their year's transgressions. These oblations were called *Februalia*, from which was probably derived the present name of the month. The Saxons called it *Sprout-Kale*, from the circumstance of the cabbage tribe in the moderate climate of the British Islands, beginning to sprout during this month. It was afterwards changed to *Sol-Monath*, or *Sun-Month*; indicating the increasing influence of that luminary in awakening from the slumbers of winter both animals and plants.

This month has been variously represented by the painter, as a man habited in a dark or sky colored garment, holding in his hand the astronomical sign of *Pisces*, or the fishes. Among the Saxons it was pictured as a vine-dresser, engaged in the important act of pruning, as this needful operation is usually performed on the grape and fruit trees generally, at this season. In other pictures February is represented as a man clad in a white robe, with a wreath of snow drops around his head; indicating the continuance of stern winter's reign, with the cheering signs of approaching Spring.

Candlemas occurs at the commencement of this month, and is an ancient feast of the Church, in commemoration of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin. In England, this festival is still regarded by many of the older inhabitants, as a sort of seasonal epoch, by which they regulate some of their agricultural and domestic operations. This is only one of many instances which might be adduced, showing how our ancestors were guided in their rural pursuits by the ecclesiastical, as well as the natural year. At this festival a multitude of candles was used in the churches, during the celebration of public worship; (hence the name,) and the mode-t, delicate snowdrop, often peeping through the snow at this early season was designated, in the language of poetry and hope, as "our lady, or fair maid of February," and "Purification Flower." Mrs. Barbauld thus graphically describes this early messenger of Spring:—

Already now the snow-drop dares appear,
The first, pale blossom of the untimely year;
As Flora's breath by some transforming power,
Had changed an icicle into a flower,
Its name and hue the scantless plant retains,
And winter lingers in its icy veins.

St. Valentine's day bids fair to go down the stream of time with unabated popularity, and few young people need to be reminded of the precise period when it occurs. In England, the belief is still common that the pairing of birds takes place on this day; and how many amorous associations are connected with its observances! Birds in that climate begin to build and sing; several flowers and shrubs are opening their tender and modest petals, and the heart is thrilled with delight at these evidences of the welcome advent of spring. How few there are, who, after many years tossing on the waves of this troublesome world, can recall their early associations of the phenomena and observances of this season of hope, but with mingled feelings of pleasure and regret!

Shrove Tuesday quickly follows, and amidst the wreck of change, still maintains in the popular mind some of its ancient characteristics. It is said to have derived its name from the old Saxon word, *shrive*, signifying confession; in reference to an ancient and long abiding practice of the Church, as preparatory to a profitable observance of the season of Lent. A bell was rung in the Parish church on the morning of Shrove Tuesday to summon the people to their religious duties; a custom yet observed in a few of the quiet, rural places of old England, where the progress of modern changes in the feelings and habits of the people, is comparatively slow. After confession they were permitted to participate in recreations and festive amusements; but as meat was forbidden, pan-cakes or fritters were made and allowed as a substitute; hence the name of "pan-cake bell," and "pan-cake Tuesday," of which many of our readers, even in this "new world," continue to preserve some cherished memories and gratifying associations.

Our forefathers lived in a ruder age and exercised a larger faith than seems compatible with the spirit and tendencies of the present. Yet it fairly admits of a question, whether some of the characteristics of a simpler form of civilization were not better adapted to the promotion of social happiness and good neighbourly feeling; to health of body and real peace of mind; than the unceasing, feverish pursuit of wealth, and the undivided worship of mammon, which so painfully distinguish our own advanced times. The holidays and social gatherings, so common to "merrie England" in the olden times, were, it should be remembered, to a large extent, regulated by the ecclesiastical