

had in our small way dealt longest, and whom we liked best, was old Matthew, the matseller. As surely as February came, would Matthew present his bent person and withered though still ruddy face at our door, with the three rush mats which he knew that our cottage required; and as surely did he receive fifteen shillings of lawful money of Great Britain, in return for his commodity, notwithstanding an occasional remonstrance from some flippant housemaid or domineering cook, who would endeavour to send him off with an assurance that his price was double that usually given, and no mat ever made with rushes was or could be worth five shillings. "His honor always deals with me," was Matthew's mild response, and an appeal to the parlour never failed to settle matters to his entire satisfaction. In point of fact, Matthew's mats were honestly worth the money; and we enjoyed in this case the triple satisfaction of making a fair bargain, dealing with an old acquaintance, and relieving in the best way—that of employment—the wants of age and of poverty: for although Matthew's apparel was accurately clean and tidy, and his thin wrinkled cheeks as hale and ruddy as a summer apple, yet the countless patches on his various garments, and the spare, trembling figure, bent almost double and crippled with rheumatism, told a too legible story of infirmity and penury. Except on his annual visit with his merchandize, we never saw the good old matmaker; nor did I even know where he resided, until the want of an additional mat for my greenhouse, towards the end of last April, induced me to make inquiry concerning his habitation.

I had no difficulty in obtaining a direction to his dwelling; and found that, for a poor old matmaker, Matthew was a person of more consideration and note in our little world than I could have expected, being, in a word, one of the honestest, soberest, and most industrious men in the neighbourhood.

He lived, I found, in Barkham Dingle, a deep woodland dell, communicating with a large tract of unenclosed moors and commons in the next parish, convenient doubtless to Matthew, as affording the rushes of which his mats were constructed, as well as heath for brooms, of

which he was said to have lately established a manufacture, and which were almost equally celebrated for durability and excellence with the articles he had made for so many years. In Barkham Dingle lived old Matthew, with a granddaughter, who was, I found also renowned for industry and good-humor; and, on one fine afternoon in the end of April, I set forth in my little pony-phaeton, driven by the model of all youthful serving-men, our boy John, to make my purchase.

Our road lay through a labyrinth of cross-country lanes, intermingled with tiny patches of village greens, where every here and there a score or two of sheep, the small flock of some petty farmer, were nestled with their young lambs among the golden gorse and the feathery broom, and which started up bleating at the sound of our wheels and at the sight of Dash (far too well-bred a dog to dream of molesting them), as if our peaceful procession had really been something to be frightened at. Rooks were wheeling above our heads, wood-pigeons flying across the fields; the shrill cry of the plover, mixed with the sweet song of the nightingale and the monotonous call of the cuckoo; whilst every hedge echoed with the thousand notes of the black-bird, the linnet, the thrush, and "all the finches of the grove." Geese, and duck, with their train of callow younglings, were dabbling in every pool; little bands of straggling children were wandering through the lanes; everything, in short, gave tokens of the loveliest of the season, the fresh and joyous spring. Vegetation was, however, usually backward. The blossom of the sloe, called by the country people "the blackthorn winter," still lingered in the hedges, mingling its snowy garlands with the deep, rich brown of the budding oak and the tender green of the elm; the primroses of March still mingled with the cowslips, pansies, orchises and wild hyacinths of April; and the flower of the turnip was only just beginning to diffuse its honeyed odours (equal in fragrance to the balmy tassels of the lime) in the most sheltered nooks or the sunniest exposures. The "blessed sun" himself seemed rather bright than warm; the season was, in short, full three weeks backward than it should have been