

EXTRACTS

FROM "THE ENGLISH FIRESIDE."

WOODLAND ROOKERY.

WOODLAND ROOKERY, as the Hall was generally called, was an old house, a very old house, indeed. Overhanging stories bulged out and exhibited countless gable ends, patched here and there with moss, and blackened with age. Its small, but innumerable, stone-set casements, consisted of diamond-paned lattices; and over a massive oak door, thickly studded with stubborn nails, and cracking upon two grotesquely-wrought and giant hinges, was a stone porch, quaintly carved and yellowed by time. The chimneys, rearing themselves out of the sloping eaves, had huge buttresses; and many a zig-zag curve and twining figure wound about their gaping and ponderous jaws. In sheltered nooks and crannies, made by the winter's wind in the grim old walls, colonies of noisy jackdaws had been reared; and in the lingering shades of the autumn sun-set, crowds of fleet-winged, chattering swallows skimmed round and round the faded sun-dial over the door-way. The angular index was rusted and snapped from the face, and hung dangling in the air by a piece of clasping ivy; and the motto, "Time and tide wait for no man," was so faintly legible, that had not the intricately flourished characters been cut deeply in the stone, the warning monitor would long since have been expunged in the storms and showers of ages.

In disused chimneys, in rotten crumbling water-spouts, and beneath projecting tiles, jutting from the roof, progenies of sparrows domiciled themselves, and twitted and chirped on and nigh the time-worn walls the livelong year. A grove—no, not a grove—a forest of sturdy oaks reared themselves and stretched their thick and stately limbs around, about, above the frowning, gray old house: and scarcely a branch but bore a nest of some noisy, loquacious rook. Here and there a sombre and hollow tree cast its gloomy shade upon the ground; and all looked the wear and tear of times long since passed away.

Whir-r-r!—it was the flap of a pigeon's wing from that dark fir; and although the tinge of the early dawn scarcely marks the east, away she speeds to glean her scanty, wintry meal. Proudly that antlered stag rises from beside his timid mate, crouched beneath the sheltering thorn, and after stretching his pliant limbs, secs, with episcurean eye, a bunch of berries hanging temptingly some three yards above his head. . . . The heavy door under the porch squeaked—nav.

almost screeched—upon its rusty hinges, as it was thrown, or rather wheeled back; for such was its weight that, notwithstanding rivets were clenched to the trunk of an oak which occupied centuries to rear, its iron clasps would have been torn from their fastening, but for a supporting roller fixed under its massive pressure.

With a playful gambol a large, red bloodhound bounded into the porch, followed by his mistress, Blanch Sinclair. And where was there one more beautiful and blessed than she? The lady Blanch, as the country folk were wont to call her, had more admirers, surely, than fell to the lot of any, however good and sweetly fair. The rustics vied with each other in evincing their regard for her charms and excellence; and, although no "pleasings of a lute," or serenade were heard within the precincts of her chamber, "times and often" did the village bells ring right merrily, by reason of its being known how well she loved to hear, at eventide, their tinkling tongues swelling and sinking in the breeze. Squires, knights of the shire, old, young, rich and poor, were candidates, all for her smiles and friendly greetings.

THE VICARAGE.

Where was there a prettier little cozy spot than this said vicarage? Deep in a dell the house stood about a mile from the church, its walls covered with woodbine and creeping plants, and the trees spreading their branches over its roof protected it from many a rough angry blast of the winter's wind. On a small but pretty lawn before its portal, flower-beds were dotted, and the order of their arrangement showed the taste and care bestowed upon them. In the orchard adjoining there was a dove-cot, in which many a pigeon was reared to spread its wing and cleave the air without the chance of ever being required to exhibit its heels beneath a pasty cruet. A stable, or, more properly, a loose box, in the immediate vicinity, contained the fattest pony eyes ever beheld walking before a four-wheel chaise occasionally; for it was seldom that Bob was required, and when he was, up-hill and down-hill and level were all the same to him; he never altered his pace, and that was a walk, remarkable for his perfect ease and leisure. In a warm sunny nook, close to Bob's domain, a row of hives stood, and the vicar has been known to stand many an hour of a summer's evening to assist the weak, exhausted, and overloaded bees, as they fell to the ground, and lift them into their homes.