

THE MONTHS—MAY.

May is the very month of mirth !
 And if there be a time on earth
 When things below in part may vie
 For beauty with the things on high,—
 As some have thought earth's beauties given
 For counterparts of those in heaven,—
 'Tis in that balmy vernal time,
 When Nature revels in her prime,
 And all is fresh and fair and gay,
 Resplendent with the smiles of May.

MAY'S MONTHS.

The month of May has always been a peculiar favourite with the poets and the lovers of nature, and high praises have been sung of its beauty and attractiveness. It should be remembered, however, that many of the most charming characteristics of this month have been drawn from more southern climates than that of this country or the British Isles; and the change of reckoning from the Old Style to the New, causing a difference of twelve days, will, in some degree, account for the discrepancy which too often appears between the weather and natural appearances of the beginning of the month as experienced by us, and the glowing descriptions frequently given by poetical writers. Notwithstanding the sickleness so common to the early part of the month, yet this is pre-eminently the season of hope and joyous excitement, and Nature is prodigal of her vernal gifts. She scatters flowers, and revels in dews; for, though we moderns may abandon the customs of our forefathers, and even deny to May those joyous attributes with which they delighted to invest her; though we complain of cold winds, and sometimes dull days, and frosty nights, cutting down flower and leaf, yet is May a gladsome month withal. The profusion of flowers, so delightful to both sight and smell; the leafing and blossoming of shrubs and trees; cool and refreshing showers, often in connection with warm sunshine and an atmosphere most delicious and invigorating to inhale;—each and all combine to foster feelings and sentiments of the highest rational enjoyment. It is the season of rural labour and activity, and equally that of rural gratification and expectancy.

The modern name of this month is derived from the goddess *Maia*, a divinity who was worshipped under many names by the Romans, but whose chief title was *Bona Dea*, or the "Good Goddess," as representing the earth. By our Saxon ancestors May was called *Tri-milki*, "because (as an old writer observes) in that month they began to milke their kine three times in the day."

The first of May, or, as it is commonly called, *May-day*, was in the olden times a day of universal relaxation and social enjoyment. The origin of several of the May games and pastimes of our ancestors must, no doubt, be looked for in still remoter

ages, and in an Eastern direction. The following extract from Stow will give the reader some idea of the habits of the English two or three centuries ago:—"In the month of May, namely, on May-day in the morning, every man, except impediment, would walk into the sweete meadows and green woods, there to rejoice their spirites with the beauty and savour of sweete flowers, and with the harmony of birds praying God in their kind; and for example hereof, Edward Hall hath noted that K. Henry the Eight, as in the 3 of his reigne, and divers other years, so namely on the seventh of his reigne, on May-day in the morning, with Queene Katheren his wife, accompanied with many lords and ladies, rode a May-ing from Greenwich to the high ground of Shooter's Hill, where, as they passed by the way, they espied a companie of tall yeomen clothed all in greene, with greene whoodes, and with bowes and arrowes, to the number of 100. One being their chieftaine, was called Robin Hood, who required the king and his companie to stay and see his men shoote, whereunto the king granting, Robin Hood whistled, and all the 200 archers shot off, losing all at once; and when he whistled againe, they likewise shot againe; their arrowes whistled by craft of the head, so that the noyse was strange and loude, which greatly delighted the king, queene, and their companie."

The *Morris-dance* is a May-day festival still retained in some parts of the North of England. A rush-cart, drawn by horses, precedes the procession of the dancers, who are attired in comic and holiday costume, Robin Hood and his companions being frequently the principal characters. This custom is thought to be of Moorish origin, and to be derived from Spain.

Dancing round the May-pole, on May-day, is a practice that still partially survives in England; and seems peculiarly appropriate to this vernal season. The late learned Dr. Parr evinced great interest in perpetuating this ancient custom, and erected a May-pole on his parsonage grounds, around which the young men and maidens of his parish were wont to dance, accompanied by the good doctor himself. Aubrey informs us that at Oxford, "the boys doe blow cowshorns and hollow canes all night; and on May-day the young maids of every parish carry about their parish garlands of flowers, which afterwards they hang up in their churches."

The rural gaities and festivities of this enchanting season formerly observed in "merrie England," have of late years almost become obsolete. Still nature continues the same,—always beautiful, inspiring, and instructive. She still scatters her lovely flowers over verdant fields and woods; the wild songsters of the grove continue to charm us with their sweet music, and the whole face of creation wears an aspect of