

THE SUNBEAM

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MAY-DAY.

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MAY-DAY is at hand. The Sunbeam sends you a picture of its May-queen.

May has long been called the merry month—the merry month of May. No wonder. It is the month in which the green grass, the opening leaves, the upspringing flowers and sunny days, invite us out of doors. Feast eyes ears, eye, and nose too, on the sights, sounds, and odors of the woods and gardens. Then, outdoor sports begin among the children. Croquet, foot-ball, base-ball, singing, walking, running, and playing, are in order. Merry indeed! Who can help being merry on May-day? The thought of it makes my old blood leap in my veins, and almost inspires a wish that I were a boy again.

May-day is a very ancient festival. Those grand old heathens, the Romans, kept it by making offerings at a shrine of the goddess Flora, who, by the way, was no goddess at all, only an image of a lovely girl like the May-queen in the picture. Those cruel old



THE MAY-QUEEN.

Druids, also taught our English forefathers to keep it, by lighting big bonfires on the hill-tops on May-day eve to welcome the coming of spring. And in the long, long ago, English young men and maidens use to rise shortly after midnight,

go into the woods, cut down branches, gather flowers for garlands, and, returning at day-break, decorate their doors and windows with their floral spoils. They made the May-day evening merry indeed with rustic roundelays and hearty laughter.

by crowning their best beloved companion with flowers, and by gathering violets, wind-flowers, primroses, and other May flowers, in the woods and gardens. It should be to them a day of gladness and a day of hope, a day of thankfulness to God

Even kings and queens, with their lord and ladies, used to keep May-day somewhat after the same fashion. Bluff old Harry the Eighth, wicked though he was in many things, with his grave queen, Catherine, and a gay retinue of knights, barons, and ladies, all armed with bows and arrows, rose at day-break and rode out into the country to shoot in the woods, to "take a little air and gather May-dew," which latter—the May-dew—the ladies thought to be a capital wash for their pretty faces. How much ladies think of their faces, don't they?

Dancing round the "May-pole" was once very common in England. The "Jack in the green"—a skeleton box covered with green leaves with a youth inside—was also a thing common on May-day, especially among the poor chimney sweeps. But these old practices are passing away, and the day is now merely a red-letter day—a pleasant remembrance of the reign of lovely spring.

Children, however, should still celebrate May-day, especially in the country,