

Winter.*

The general aspect of winter is forbidding. It is the night of the year; the period when, under a mitigated light, nature reposes, after the active exertions of spring and summer have been crowned with the rich stores of autumn. We now no longer survey with admiration and awe those wonders of creative power which arrested our attention in that youthful season, when herbs, plants and trees awoke from their long sleep, and started into new life, under the kindly influences of warm er suns and gentler breezes; and when the feathered tribes made the fresh-clothed woods and lawns, and the blue sky itself, vocal with the music of love and joy. Nor do we now expatiate in the maturer beauties of summer, when light and heat flushed the glowing heavens and smiling earth, and when the clouds distilled their grateful showers, or tempered the intense radiance by their slitting shade. And mellow autumn, too, has passed away, along with the merry song of the reapers, and the hum of busy men gathering their stores from the teeming fields.

Instead of these genial influences of a propitious heaven, our lengthening nights, and our days becoming perpetually darker and shorter, shed their gloom over the face of nature; the earth grows niggardly of her supplies of nourishment and shelter, and no longer spreads beneath the tenants of the field the soft green carpet on which they were accustomed to repose; man seeks his artificial comforts and his hoarded food; the wind whistles ominously through the naked trees; the dark clouds lower, the chilling rain descends in torrents; and, as the season advances, the earth becomes rigid, as if struck by the wand of an enchanter; the waters, spell-bound, lie motionless in crystal chains; the north pours forth its blast, and nature is entombed in a vast cemetery, whiter and colder than Parian marble.

Yet, even in this apparently frightful and inhospitable season, there are means of pleasure and improvement, which render it scarcely inferior to any other period of the revolving year; while proofs of the power, wisdom and goodness of the great Creator are not less abundantly displayed to the mind of the pious inquirer. With reference to the angry passions of the human race, it is said that God "causes the wrath of man to praise him, and restrains the remainder of wrath;" and a similar remark applies with a truth equally striking to the troubled elements. The Almighty sets bounds to the raging ocean, saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." He regulates by his wisdom the intensity of the tempest, "staying the rough wind in the day of the east wind." All the active powers of nature are his messengers: "fire and hail, snow and vapour," as well as "stormy winds, fulfil his word." Nothing, indeed, can be more worthy of admiration and gratitude than the manner in which the rigours of winter are tempered and modified, so as to contribute to the subsistence and comfort of living beings.

It is true, that even in the ordinary occurrences of life, there are, in winter, probably more distressing and fatal incidents than during the other quarters of the year. A snow-storm may sometimes overwhelm a shepherd and his flock; a tempest may cause a gallant vessel and its crew to perish; a fire may lay

a village in ashes; disease, attendant on exposure to a rigorous climate, may invade the unwholesome and comfortless huts of the poor; or, in a season when the wages of agricultural labour cease along with the power of working in the open air, famine may emanate and destroy whole families; but such events, as these, melancholy as they are, must be ranked among the common evils of life, and belong to a class, marking a peculiar feature in the government of this fallen world, to which I have previously adverted, and which can never be far from the mind of the accurate observer of nature. At present let us take a rapid glance at the other side of the picture, and we shall see enough to prove that even in these gloomy months the paternal care of an all-wise and beneficent Governor is not less conspicuous than in other periods of the changing year.

If we look at the lower animals, how wonderful are the kind provisions of Providence! Among the numerous tribes of insects, reptiles, birds and quadrupeds, there appears to be a general presentiment of the coming desolation. Some, impelled by a wonderful instinct, provide for themselves comfortable retreats, each tribe adapting its accommodation to its peculiar circumstances,—burrowing in the earth, or boring beneath the bark of trees and shrubs, or penetrating into their natural hollows, or lodging in crevices of walls and rocks, or diving beneath the surface of the water, and lying unmovable at the bottom of ponds, lakes, or marshy streams. Here they are preserved during this barren period, either by feeding on the stores which, with a foresight not their own, they had collected in the bountiful weeks of harvest, or by falling into a deep sleep, during which they become unsailable either by the attacks of cold or of hunger, or by issuing daily or nightly from their resting-places, and gathering the food which a providential care has reserved for them, and taught them how to seek. Others, chiefly belonging to the winged tribes, are taught to migrate, as the rigours of winter approach, to more genial climates, where abundant food and enjoyment are provided for them, and where they are thus permitted to expatiate in all the advantages of a perpetual yet varied summer; while these, again, have their places supplied by hardier species of the feathered family, which the gathering storms of more northern regions had warned to leave their summer haunts.

If from the inferior animal creation we turn to man, the same traces of a paternal hand are seen in providing against or compensating for the privations of winter. If our natural instincts and defences are not so numerous as those of the brutes, reason and foresight amply supply their place. Influenced by these, we build comfortable houses, of materials which are everywhere to be found, and collect supplies of fuel from bogs and forests, or dig them out of the bowels of the earth, where they are laid up as in storehouses; and we rear flocks and herds to furnish us with the means of food and clothing. Meanwhile, necessary industry occupies and cheers the dreary season; and books or social intercourse improve and exhilarate the mind.

All these proofs of paternal care deserve and will obtain a separate consideration; but the simple mention of them is calculated to call forth sentiments of pious admiration and gratitude. "Who knoweth not in all these, that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?"

The winter landscape has been accused of monotony; and certainly all nature has at this

season a less animated and varied aspect than at any other. Unless when sprinkled over with hoar-frost, or covered with a cold mantle of snow, the surface of the earth is of a bleak and faded hue. The woods have long lost the variegated foliage that had previously ceased to be their ornament: and the branches of the trees, with their "naked shoots, barren as lances," present one uniform appearance of death and decay. The howling of the long continued storm, and the few faint bird-notes heard at intervals in the thickets or hedges, are monotonously mournful. The devastation of the earth, and the sounds that seem to bewail it, are general and unvaried. A few hardy plants and flowers, indeed, begin to swell their buds and expand their petals; but the thick cerements which envelope the one class, and the pale and sombre hue of the other, equally proclaim to the querulous mind the ungenial climate.

(To be concluded.)

MISCELLANEOUS EXTRACTS.

A Voyage to the West Indies.

Have you ever crossed the Atlantic? I daresay you have, as in these days of steam we are more adventurous and locomotive than our fathers. I have crossed it more than once; and as I am very well, and very idle, as every one on shipboard usually is, I sit down, as the vessel is toiling away, to give your readers, if any such care for such things, an account of some of the doings which belong to a trip over the Atlantic.

And now I shall suppose that we have arrived in Southampton—that all partings with one's friends are over—that one has succeeded in keeping his temper during his short intercourse with the official pettiness of the people in Moorgate street—that all his luggage, including the boxes and parcels with which friends encumber him, has arrived with him to its full totality—that his pocketful of change, which he thought would defray all intermediate expenses in getting from the train to the ship, is quite exhausted, from the repeated and exorbitant demands made on him during a transit of about ten minutes—and that at last he has really got on board. I shall spare you a minute chronicle of all that, and at once ask you before embarking, to look on that noble ship, which is to carry him and his fortunes to the West Indies. From stem to stern she is a noble thing. Look away from one extremity to another, and you will see, so indistinct from the distance do the faces appear, that you would not recognise the appearance or features of your father. And no wonder. I am in no mood just now, and indeed never was, for dry statistics. I shall, therefore, give you no minute measurement as to her length or width, but ask you, or any one who will take the trouble, the first time you walk some quiet lane or green field, to step off 118 yards—real veritable yards—and then you will have the length of this vessel. There she is,

* From "Sacred Philosophy of the Seasons," by the Rev. H. Duncan, D. D.