

consideration of the idle dreams of the past. Matter-of-fact things are very good in their way, but all our life should not be given to them, and a small portion of our time and a nook in our memory may well be devoted to the ethereal fancies of our forefathers. How much poetry, it has been said, has left the earth since Oberon and Titania—

“Danced full oft in many a grene mead,”

and the cowslips were the pensioners of the fairy queen! But we may do something to recall, in a new form, that happy time. We may unite, in our own minds, the poetry of mystery and the poetry of progress. The elfin world may again open to our view as awe-inspiring as ever, and, by contrast with our own material advancement, far more wonderful.

There is one pleasant circumstance connected with the treatment of plants, that it leads us into the sweetest corners of nature, and amidst the fairest of her productions. By three famous English writers, if not by more, flowers have been called the stars of earth. It is a natural as well as a beautiful comparison. Flowers enliven the face of earth just as the stars enliven that of heaven, and I know not which are the sweeter or the more lovable. And as the stars by their movements indicated the progress of the circling year, so do the flowers by their appearances, one gaily succeeding another till winter has changed to summer, and summer back to frost and snow.

Man seems always to entertain a kindly feeling towards plants and flowers. He seems unable to divest himself of the feeling that in some strange way their life is bound up with his own. He finds himself, or at least something akin to himself, in them. He has life, so have they; but, if anything, their existence is more mysterious than his own. Their life, perhaps, even excites his envy, for they enjoy it without hurry or bustle; they have food without work, perpetual holiday, and total exemption from harassing care. The plant world he sees to be always the same—all in it is now as in the days of yore. It contains no learning, no arts to make the rising generation better than their fathers. Happy world! always standing still, yet ever beautiful and ever contented. Amongst plants, too, man discovers, or fancies that he discovers, an approach to human expression. He credits them with the possession of pride, modesty, boldness, delicacy, joy, sorrow, ambition, and a thousand other attributes of a like nature. Can we wonder, then, that, taking this view of the vegetable creation, man should, in time, have come to possess a folk-lore of plants as extensive as it is interesting?

My object in the series of articles of which this forms the first, is to go over the whole field of the folk-lore of British plants in a more thorough manner than has ever yet been attempted. The idea of grouping together all the superstitions connected with the vegetable kingdom is not a new one, however; it seems to have