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# THE TWELVE MONTHS

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# THE TWELVE MONTHS

BY  
LLEWELYN POWYS

with engravings by  
ROBERT GIBBINGS



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**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED**  
TO MY FRIEND AND NEIGHBOUR  
**JAMES COBB**  
OF WEST CHALDON  
WHO POSSESSES SO CLOSE A  
KNOWLEDGE OF THE TWELVE  
MONTHS OF THE DORSET YEAR

*'His outside is an ancient Yeoman of England, though his inside may give arms (with the best gentleman) and ne'er see the herald. There is no truer servant in the house than himself Though he be master, he says not to his servants, "Go to field," but, "Let us go;" and with his own eye doth both fatten his flock and set forward all manner of husbandry. . . . He is ne'er known to go to law; understanding to be law-bound among men is like to be hide-bound among his beasts; they thrive not under it: and that such men sleep as unquietly as if their pillows were stuffed with Lawyer's penknives. . . . He allows of honest pastime, and thinks not the bones of the dead anything bruised, or the worse for it, though the country lasses dance in the church-yard after evensong.' From Sir Thomas Overbury's description of an English Yeoman*  
**(1581-1613)**

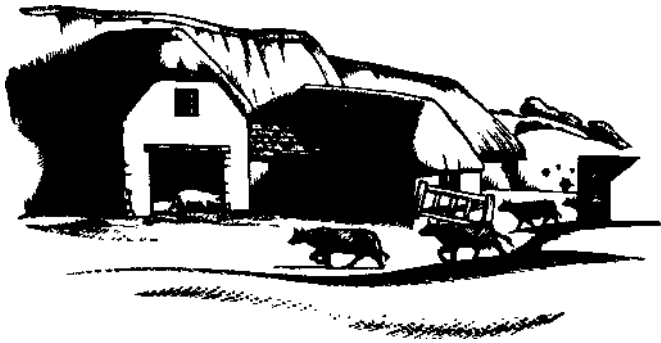


I WISH to express my thanks to the Editors of the *Daily Herald* for their courtesy in allowing these essays to be again published. I would wish also to acknowledge my debt to Robert Chambers, the author and compiler of that monumental and justly celebrated work of the last century, *Chambers's Book of Days*.



# THE TWELVE MONTHS





## ON THE TWELVE MONTHS

FIRST, January ushers in the year,  
With gloomy days, with nights both long and drear;  
Then February conies with snow and rain,  
To clothe the whiten'd fields, or drench the plain;  
Till March arrives with winds that loudly sound,  
And equal day and night the globe surround.  
Next, April brings her soft and fruitful showers,  
And genial heat to raise the herbs and flowers:  
She quits the scene, and soon prolific May  
Appears enrobed in nature's bright array;  
Awhile she beams in blushing beauty's vest,  
Till June arrives with full blown roses drest;  
Soon fade his flowers beneath the fervid ray  
Of hot July and summer's sultry day;  
Then scorching August russets wide the plain,  
And for the sickle fits the precious grain;  
September next with various plenty crown'd,  
And hills and plains with joy and gladness sound:  
Then comes October with his chilling breeze,  
The grass to wither, and to strip the trees:  
Next, dark November with his sullen sheds,  
Wide o'er the scene a dreary aspect spreads:

December last, that chilling frosts attend,  
Proclaiming soon the fleeting year to end;  
And as the changing seasons come and go,  
Th' Almighty's pow'r and providence they show.  
Fair spring's sweet blush, hot summer's ardent glow,  
Rich autumn's plenty, winter's frost and snow;  
And these successive, as they meet the view,  
A picture of man's chequer'd life they show;  
His youthful spring, his manhood's summer's day,  
His autumn's ripeness, winter's fast decay;  
When age and care, and sorrow him attend,  
And health, and life, in death soon meet their end.

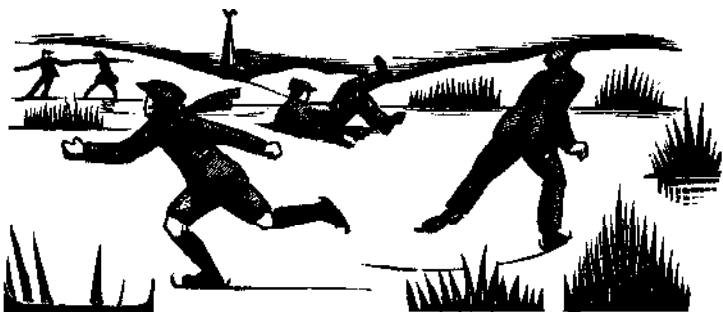
*By THOMAS SHOEL, a poet and a composer, who was born at Montacute in Somerset, and lived and died in that village, working first as a weaver and later as a farm labourer, (1759-1823)*

# JANUARY

*When icicles hang by the wall,  
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,  
And Tom bears logs into the hall,  
And milk comes frozen home in pail,  
When blood is nipp'd, and ways befoul,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
    To-whit!  
To-who!—a merry note,  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE





THE MONTH OF JANUARY TAKES ITS name from Janus, the Roman deity who presided over doors and over war. He was often shown as carrying a key and a rod. In religious ceremonies his name used to be invoked first so that through his intervention, as the janitor of all avenues, the prayers of the faithful might be allowed direct passage to the seats of the immortals. He could as easily look into the future as into the past and for this reason was portrayed with two faces. It was our country custom at Montacute to call Odcombe Clock after any over-suave village diplomatist for the reason that the steeple timepiece of that neighbouring hamlet had an affable face to present to more than one quarter of the compass. January is the world's Odcombe Clock because of its habit of looking backward with a doleful expression and forward with smiles a little too ingratiating. So well soused and stuffed are we at that time of the year 'with mistletoe still in our caps', that there is scarce one of us who does not respond to these blandishments, anticipating with over-sanguine confidence better treatment than ever we have hitherto experienced.

*The blackest month of all the year  
Is the month of Janiveer.*

The Saxons used to call January Wulf-monath because

## JANUARY

during its weeks these hungry hounds of Woden, with every rib showing, would become dangerous, harassing the village settlements, as they still do to this day in central Europe when the winter is particularly hard. It was just such inclement weather that we always longed for as boys during the Christmas holidays. How we would look up at the church weather-vane hoping against hope to see its brass cock swing round to the north-east. Day after day, with a soft breeze blowing up from Devonshire, we would take off soaking boots covered with mud from the garden and the lanes. On such occasions we would appeal to the weather lore of Ellen, our old cook, as she stirred the pot in the nearby kitchen. 'Wait till the new moon shows itself, she would say. It is true enough that the young January moon, so lightly carried in the winter twilight, often heralds the approach of a cold spell.

*As the days lengthen  
So the cold strengthens.*

What pastime could possibly be more exciting to a boy than skating—all the mysteries of a familiar pond, its islands, its rushy moorhen retreats, in the space of three days miraculously accessible to exploration, the muddy water suddenly changed to a fairyland substance so transparent that it is often possible to look down upon the green back of a roach whose ill fate has led it to be innocently preserved in the matrix of a floor of glass, every circular link in its shining surcoat clearly visible, together with its red fins, once so quick and flashing, but now rigid, immobile, and exact to a child's scrutiny?

The sudden clamour of church bells ringing in the New Year is one of the most moving of earth sounds. This airy music seems to carry in its fitful cadence the very burden of man's destiny, the meetings of true loves happy at last, the

separations of death desolate beyond the utterance of words—happy, sad, sad, happy goes this simple accompaniment to earth-life ringing out 'changes' over fields and towns whose nature it is never to remain in one stay. I myself did not learn the noble art of 'bell-ringing'. As in so much else my younger brother Willie outdid me in this. When at home I do not suppose he ever missed taking his place in the belfry loft, and even now, diough for many years he has been living in Africa, how well he can revive in a letter the old scenes: 'I can hear the very sound of the side gate under the tower "clanging to" of a wet New Year's night as each ringer came through it, all in the rain, with the light from the Cross lamp making the puddles shine. It used to make old Bambury sweat to come up those steep tower steps. And what a thrill, what a wonderful thrill would go through me from head to finger-tips to hear those great bells ring out through the wet windy night, with the knowledge that the foxes were moving about in Hedgecock, that the pheasants were swaying in the larch trees of Pitt Wood, and that everywhere in snug warm stalls cows were chewing last year's hay full of dry fragments of meadow-sweet.'

In his celebrated essay on the New Year Charles Lamb writes: 'Of all sounds of all bells—(bells, the music nighest bordering upon heaven)—most solemn and touching is the peal which rings out the Old Year——No one ever regarded the First of January with indifference. It is that from which all date their time, and count upon what is left.' Yet so frivolous are the minds of most of us that we accept the rich boon of life as a circumstance scarce worthy of remark. Day after day death provides us with object lessons as to the insecurity of our tenure, but even so we remain too sulky or too besotted to understand. *As long as a man can put bread into his mouth life*

## JANUARY

*is to be prized.* How many rich men lying on bare aitch bones in dismal churchyard vaults would not at this very moment rise from the grave with the utmost alacrity were they to be offered the most menial position in the land of the living! Weary of their diet of dust and darkness they would be glad enough to exchange their lot for that of the meanest Abyssinian slave, who on an average of once a month receives, like the apostle, 'forty strokes save one'—in such a case they would at least feel the sunshine on their shoulders, would hear the hoarse living voices of tragic bearded goats, and, with a fortunate throw, might once more experience the sublime tremors of love under the jackal stars of Addis Ababa! It is the ranging mind that can liberate us from the prison of the commonplace. We grovel under the domination of conventional illusions. As foolish as codheads we gape after empty values, for ever dazzled by what spins and glitters, for ever unmindful that our best refreshment lies always at the bottom.

With the month of January men become aware that the unvanquished sun has once more turned upon his golden heel. Lucky indeed are we to belong to the generation that is even now, very now, alive; alive to welcome the procession, so hoar, so fair, of the twelve months! Again the fluted daffodil trumpets, yellow as sunshine, will be seen at the street corners taking the winds of March with beauty. Again we shall hear the cuckoo calling to us from the great elm-tree on the high road. Once more with entranced senses we shall loiter with our loves through the paradise meadows of June, by the bright cornlands of August; and surely such thoughts put us in a mood to appreciate Thomas Shoel's simple poem of exultation:

*Welcome spring's returning day,  
Welcome sun, thy cheering ray,*

JANUARY

*Welcome to the fruitful showers,  
Welcome blossoms, birds and flowers.*

*Welcome to the orchard's bloom,  
Welcome bees, your charming hum,  
Welcome insects buzzing round,  
Welcome purling brooks, your sound.*

*Welcome hours of soft repose,  
Welcome sleep, respite from woes;  
Welcome rest to bless the night,  
Welcome to the morning's light.*





**I**T IS SAID THAT AUGUSTUS CAESAR, WHEN IT was proposed that a month should be named after him, stipulated, for the sake of his personal dignity, that it should contain as many days as the longest. In order to effect this for the month of August, February, as usual, was robbed. February, a modest unobtrusive month, was already poorer in its allowance of days than the other eleven; indeed, it seems to have been a recognized tradition to treat this month shabbily.

The word February is derived from the Latin word, *februare*—to expiate, its name seeming to suggest a consciousness of sin. The Saxons, in their matter-of-fact way, originally called the month Sprout-kale, because the growth of cabbages increased in February. Afterwards, however, they gave it the prouder name of Sol-M5nath for the good reason that the strengthening of the sunshine is first appreciated during its weeks. Surely February deserved the more honourable title, for it is a sensitive month and possesses tentative qualities that cannot be matched by any of the other eleven.

The most dense of us are liable to experience unexpected sensations during the short weeks of February. **It** may be **that** we are hurrying along a city pavement deep sunk in the

## FEBRUARY

illusions of the hour, brooding over some mundane transaction, harassed by domestic responsibility, or distracted by poverty; when, suddenly, something in the air will bring us an entire release, an entire purification of the spirit, and we shall be children again playing our games on those lovely evenings when it first began to be light after tea. Was it the coltsfoot we noticed in flower on some piece of land lying waste for building purposes, or the woman at the kerb selling the first daifodils from the Channel Islands, or a particular luminous glow in the sky such as we never saw in the evenings of old 'Janiveer freeze the pot upon the fire'?

If you live in the country it is always as if some one—the one whose voice you wish most to hear—were calling to you to come to them from the other side of the hedge. Life is already tingling with the irresistible urge of a new season, tingling in every tiny jointed thorn twig, tingling through the air-filled quills of the cock chaffinches, whose feathers each day grow brighter and brighter.

Let the frost return, let the snow fly past our windows and pile itself in drifts against the hedges, we remain unintimidated. It is February, and to-morrow or the next day the sun will be shining again upon the sprouting leaves of the lords and ladies, and upon the first shining gold of the earliest celandines.

*I know that I shall die  
Love so my heart bewitches  
It makes me howl and cry—  
Oh how my elbow itches!*

We are alive still on the earth, and the rich plenty of another year lies before us. The pussy willows are out in the withy-bed already, with their buds of silver fur soft as the fur on the abdomen of baby rabbits. If you take a few steps along

the oozing ground by the stream's edge you will see your first king-cups out in flower, the very same that Shakespeare knew as Mary buds, observing their special beauty as they opened their round shining petals in early mornings in Warwickshire.

In England we pick the pussy willows in place of fan-shaped palm leaves to commemorate the strawing of the way for the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. These elfin silver-tipped wands would have served such a purpose well. It is easy to imagine how the ass's quick feet would have moved effortless over them. When 'the palms' are out in our hedges we know that Easter is not far off-Easter time with its hot-cross-buns and moss and primroses, and its promise of a rich summer with the rising again of Adonis.

On the Dorset downs February is marked in the natural world by two happenings. In this month the ravens begin to build their nests on a well selected ledge far up the dizzy sea cliffs. Backwards and forwards over the wide downland valleys the black ominous lovers go, creatures with undeviating flight resolutely absorbed in their own occupations, creatures with eyes and ears and nostrils flying free through the levels of the unmeasured sky. The young of their first clutch of eggs will be hatched before even the guillemots have returned to the nesting crevices on the perpendicular side of Bats Head.

The second happening which especially tells us it is February belongs to the night. During these weeks the foxes are mating, and the dog foxes that raise their prick ears under the starlight, or feel the brambles snatch the hair out of their red jackets, no longer give utterance to their wearish mid-winter bark, harsh and husky, but instead utter calls of love, sounds that might come through a hollow fluted reed, as if

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the ancient hills had truly been invaded by the children of Dionysos, calling, calling to each other to come to play.

*We leap and we dance,  
We call and we worship  
All life front the womb.*

The vixen's love-call has nothing classical about it. There is no yearning, no melody in her answer. It is the cry of a soul in fear, of a tortured soul utterly abandoned to a rending desire.

The movements of life are strange. When I meditate upon the fearful outcry of one of these roaming vixens, think of her sniffing her way distractedly through the hazel-wood copse, and then remember the lambs'-tails—those innocent child-like tokens of the vernal equinox, that are swaying above her in the night wind, swaying in the white moonlight—I experience a sensation of the deepest awe before the wild contrasting poetry of nature.

In country places the weather conditions on the second day of February are still carefully observed. It is an old rumour that if the weather is seen to be fair at Candlemas a cold and bitter spring may be expected, but if Candlemas is foul the winter is over and we have nothing but sunshine before us. The notion is embodied in the country persuasion that on this day the badger looks out of his set, and if he finds snow on the ground walks abroad, but if he sees the sun shining draws back in disgust, taking it for a sure sign that the winter is not yet over.

The belief that Candlemas is a day almost as weatherwise as St. Swithun's must be very ancient, for our kinsmen, the Germans, have similar sayings, such as 'The shepherd would rather see the wolf enter his stable on Candlemas Day than

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the sun\*. Indeed, everywhere in the north of Europe men are suspicious of too early a spring. February in the old pictures is always associated with the watery signs of the Zodiac—Pisces and Aquarius—and though our town populations may hope for fine weather in February this is not at all the wish of those who till the soil that they may eat.

To please the farming population the sky must be heavy with clouds during the month, and if possible with the dense dark clouds that presage a heavy fall of sleet or snow.

*February fill dyke  
Either black (mud) or white (snow);  
If it be white  
Its the better to like.*

And again it is reported that

*The Welshman would rather see his Dam on her bier  
Than a fair Februeer.*



# MARCH

*The Ploughboy is whooping—anon—anon;  
There 's joy in the mountains;  
There's life in the fountains;  
Small clouds are sailing,  
Blue sky prevailing;  
The rain is over and gone!*

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH



**T** WAS THE ROMANS WHO GAVE MARCH its name, calling it Martius after their favourite god Mars. For centuries March had the honour of being the first month of the Roman calendar, the month which, owing to the breaking up of the winter, appeared to these men of war to offer a fresh opportunity of prosecuting their military campaigns. The Saxons, a people less occupied with thoughts of bloodshed, called the month Lencten-Monath, a Length-month, because they observed that it was during its four weeks that the day became longer than the night. The word Lent is an abbreviation of this word Lencten. Our fathers were fond of alluding to the month as 'March, many weathers', and there is no doubt that it was the variable character of this transitional period of the year that gave rise to the old saying 'March comes in like a Hon but goes out like a lamb'. As a matter of fact, the bitter winds of which the ailing and the aged complain have a very important part to play in the husbandry of the seasons. The arable

lands have grown sodden after the cold winter slets, and these brisk, drying winds rouse the dull clods out of their hibernating inertia preparing them for the spring sowing.

From John o' Groats to Land's End you will not persuade a single farmer to abuse the winds of March. They appreciate their value too well, and their opinion is confirmed by a score of proverbs they have had pat from the lips of their fathers: 'A peck of March dust is worth a King's ransom.' 'A dry March never begs his bread.'

*Upon St. David's Day  
Put oats and barley in the day.*

Men of peace delight to associate the month of March with St. David rather than with the Roman God of war. St. David was uncle to Arthur, the fairy king. His birth was prophesied for thirty years before the event took place, though strange to say even this long foreknowledge in no way prevented the saint from entering the world a little crookedly, for, though eighteendi in honourable descent from the Blessed Virgin, St. David made his appearance upon earth as the bastard child of a Welsh princess. Before the Reformation the following collect referring to this miraculous prediction was regularly read on St. David's Day in the old church of Sarum: 'O God, who by thy angel did foretell thy blessed Confessor St. David, thirty years before he was born, grant unto us we beseech thee, that celebrating his memory we may, by his intercession, attain to joys everlasting.'

St. David had for his diet bread, vegetables, milk, and water, and it was perhaps on this account that he lived to a great age. He built Glastonbury Abbey and caused the waters of Bath to become hot. Often when he preached the very ground upon which he stood would heap itself into a kind of

## MARCH

natural pulpit, and always a white dove would settle itself upon his shoulder, St. Kentigern is said to have seen his soul being borne to heaven on the wings of angels. We are told that St. David, while on earth, loved to listen to the birds' sweet voices 'among the untrodden grass'. Long after his death a boy had his hand miraculously riveted to the branch of a tree for having dared to trouble a wood-pigeon that was building her careless nest of sticks near where the bones of the Saint lay buried.

There is an old saying which declares 'Davyd of Wales loveth well Lekes', and although the Saxons have never been tired of making sport of this national badge—"Tell him, I'll knock his leek about his pate upon St. Davie's Day"—there is good evidence to show that the historic emblem had its origin in no insignificant back kitchen brawl, but was rather a Druidic symbol derived from the Phoenician priesthood who at Byblos were accustomed to exhibit leeks in pots as sure tokens of the approach of the spring, calling these pots in their ritual 'gardens of Adonis'. It is clear the Welshman must never expect understanding from 'creeping Saxons'. There remains always the 'pathos of difference' between the two races. In the seventeenth century the hostility of the English was still so strong that Pepys in his Diary records seeing on St. David's Day a Welshman in effigy hung by the neck and left to dangle outside a London shop window. How beautiful, how tragic, and how true sound the words of Merlin's prophecy: 'Their Lord they will praise, their speech they shall keep, their land they shall lose—except wild Wales.'

It would be well, indeed, if the example of St. David with regard to the care of birds was remembered by every little boy in the spring, so that throughout England and Wales never

## MARCH

more than one egg would be taken from a nest. For it is in March that the birds first begin to lay their eggs. In every shire of England the hedgerows give shelter to nurseries, firm and round as porridge bowls, of nesting thrushes. I can never look at the purple buds of the elder-trees breaking into leaf without their rank smell recalling to me the happy days of my childhood, as if the very breath of those far-off celandine mornings was again upon the air. For there are sights to be seen in our wayside ditches at that time that might well bring tears to the eyes of a dying man. How fresh everywhere is the green of the lords and ladies, and how feathery fair the hedge parsley—the dog violets and the white violets, and the wild blue violets—'sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes!' This is the month when the meadows first begin to be powdered with daisies, as yet not growing thick enough for a hobnailed boot to cover nine of them together; indeed scarce thick enough for the indoor slipper of a little girl, running out on the lawn before breakfast, to press a quincunx. Chaucer tells us that he often lay upon the grass so that he might watch the white corona of the daisies' dainty petals fold up in the vernal twilight. It was a pastime worthy of so great a poet, for to an imaginative and understanding mind the mystery of life finds a revelation in such a sensitive response from the common grass we tread upon:

*To see this flower, how it will go to rest,  
For fear of night, so hateth it the darkness.*

All last year I fed a pair of blue tits, and then suddenly they disappeared from the garden. Evidently the notion had already got into their little heads that a treeless down was no good place for bringing up a family. Many a fortunate life's partnership has had its beginning during the weeks of this

## MARCH

month. There is romance in the air. The petals of the early fruit-trees carry it with their delicate white hands.

*She is walking in the meadow,  
And the woodland echo rings;  
In a moment we shall meet.*



# APRIL

*When April blows his horn  
It is lucky to be born.*





**M**ANY PEOPLE HAVE SUPPOSED THAT THE month of April derives its name from the Latin word *aperio*, I open, because it is during its short weeks that so many leaves and buds and flowers unfold. Wiser heads, however, have been convinced that the beautiful word April, so suggestive of the joy of life, should correctly be associated with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of Love.

At Rome the great festival of Venus was held during April and it is believed that the word Aphrodite may easily have been abbreviated to Aphrilis by a set of care-free youths in a holiday mood. It was the custom to make the feast of Floralia an occasion of the most riotous celebrations, and we are told that the austere Senator Cato on one occasion acquired great popularity by deliberately absenting himself from the carnival lest the deference paid to his dignified presence might interfere with its customary abandonment.

The Saxons called April Oster-monath, Oster being in all

## A P R I L

countryman—is the chiff-chaff. How does so little, so light a creature (a shrew mouse would outweigh it on a pair of kitchen scales) manage to navigate itself across the high seas and find again its familiar nesting haunts in the quiet of an English wood floored with uncrumpling ferns? Chiff-chaff! chiff-chaff! what reassurance there is in the sound, unvariable as a timepiece set amongst the leaves to register each day-time-minute of the enchanted summer! The solitary workman cutting hazel wands for hurdles hears it from dawn to dusk. Even Sunday afternoon lovers will spare a few moments outside their Merlin's circle to listen to the tick-tock of so happy a clock of the green woods.

There was an Elizabethan ballad maker who used to write for the populace of London, for the honest sweaty caps who always have had a taste for loitering on bridges and in market-squares. This Thomas Deloney often catches for us the feeling of April as clear as a golden-billed blackbird whistling from a pear-tree's white branch. In one story he describes how his hero, Tom Drum, a cobbler's man, takes leave of his master on a fine spring morning. Suddenly without one word spoken he puts down his last and seizes his pike-staff.

His master seeing his man prepared to be 'prauncing abroad', demanded what the matter was that he followed not his business.

'O Master (quo<sup>d</sup>- he) see you not how sweetly the Sun shines, and how trimly the trees are deckt with green leaues ?

Well and how then (quoth his Master) ?

Marry Sir (quoth he) having a great mind to hear the small birds sing, and seeing the weather fitter to walk then to work, I called you forth . . . to bid you farewell.'

Once out on the highway Tom Drum steps so lightly he

scarce feels the ground he treads upon, and away he  
down the King's Road with this song upon his lips:

*The Primrose in the greene Forrest,  
The Violets they he gay;  
The Double Dazies and the rest,  
That trimly decks the way  
Doth move the spirits with brave delights,  
Whose beauties Darlings be:  
With hey tricksie, trim goe tricksie,  
Under the greenwood tree.*





# MAY

*For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over  
and gone; the flowers appear on the earth;  
the time of the singing of birds is come, and  
the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.*

THE SONG OF SOLOMON





**V**ARIOUS EXPLANATIONS HAVE BEEN offered as to the origin of the name of the month of May. The one generally accepted is that it was given in honour of the more influential section of the Roman Senate known as the Majores. This has always seemed to me a dull etymology. I prefer to believe that its derivation is from the nymph Maia whose charms were so ardently sought by the Father of Gods and of men that she became the happy mother of Hermes. This would seem more appropriate, for, if the truth is to be told, correct domesticity has never been overprized in this month. Orthodox marriages during its silvan weeks have from time out of mind been regarded with disfavour. We have, for example, the testimony of the old saying: 'To a wedding in May, never say yea.' The fact is

## MAY

that this period of the year, so light, so debonair, is especially dedicated, not to marrying or being given in marriage, but to the less responsible pastime of falling in love. This has been so from the very earliest ages, even from those remote unrecorded epochs when Dawn Men, responding to the persuasive whispers of nature, experienced new emotions at once ferocious and tender at the sight of a woman's beauty. How could it have been otherwise with the whole of creation passionately absorbed in the wild dance which has preserved life, exultant and mysterious, from century to century? For birds and reptiles, for insects and animals, it is the supreme season of love.

*Thou hast thy mighty herds,  
Tame and free-livers;  
Doubt not, thy music too  
In the deep rivers.*

Now more than at any time the flowers, the undergrowth, the huge trees of the forest expand and burgeon under the strong benediction of the sun.

In the Middle Ages the quality of this month was eagerly appreciated. Provocative worshipful girls smelling of unwashed sumptuous garments responded with illicit intentions to the bedecked beauty of the wide-pavilioned fields of chivalry. The song of the nightingale audible to these girls all through the night in their high-turreted truckle-bed chambers prompted them to idolize their husband's love, while in the day-time the wanton cuckoo shouted from oak-tree to oak-tree a contrary message. Their knights-errant, as they rode across the sun-splashed, stag-haunted, pink campion glades of the green forest, were also troubled by the resdess influence of the wayward season. In May the mere memory of Iseult's

## MAY

long hair, dark as a crow's wing, would cause Sir Tristram to fall once again under the curse of his ruinous imaginations. Few passages of English prose are finer than is Malory's celebration of this opulent month of promise: 'For lyke as herbes and trees bryngen forth fruyte and florysshen in May, in lyke wyse every lusty herte that is in ony maner a lover spryngeth and floryssheth in lusty dedes. For it gyveth unto al lovers courage, that lusty moneth of May, . . . And lyke wyse lovers callen ageyne to their mynde old gentilnes and old servyse,... Righte soo fareth love now adayes: sone hote, soone cold. This is noo stabylite! But the old love was not so. Men and wymmen coude live togyders seven yeres, and no lycours lustes were bitwene them, and thenne was love trouthe and feythfulness. . . Therefore alle ye that be lovers calle unto your remembraunce the moneth of May, lyke as dyd quene Guenever. For whome I make here a lytel mencyon, that whyle she lyved she was a true lover, and therefor she had a good ende.'

May has always been the month of romance. How many of our old country ballads of fireside and tavern begin with the words

*As I went out one May morning,  
One May morning early.*

May was called by our Saxon ancestors Tri-Milchi-Monath, or the month when it was possible to milk a cow three times between sunrise and sunset, for, during each hour of its thirty-one days, the meadow grass, the sweet vernal grass, grows thicker and richer, and the rough cocksfoot, cat's-tail, and crested dog's-tail grasses, taller. Buttercups have now taken the place of celandines and towards the end of the month we lucky mortals work and quarrel and jest and make love upon

## MAY

a golden earth. The sap of the vegetable world, true blood of the God Dionysos, flows irresistibly along each branch and crooked twig. The most obscure blackberry bramble behind cow Crumbock's stall is all at once converted into a grape-vine trailer fit to be placed upon the childish forehead of the idle God. Each hedgerow is populated with new-born rabbits, their little jackets, dove soft, almost completely hidden in fields 'put up for hay', as they race to their familiar burrows. Beech-trees in avenue and copse are bright with fresh foliage, and if the edges of their tingling leaves are carefully examined they are shown to be fringed with tiny hairs as delicate as the down on the cheek of a child.

Men employed faggoting in woods and copses get their housewife-darned socks dripping wet before ever they have started work, so impossible is it to avoid the bluebell heads which are tall enough to scatter water down over the tops of their working boots.

The air in May is heavy with scents. Francis Bacon used to pleasure himself by treading on the purple stalks of the common watermint, and certainly at this time of the year the margin of every trout stream and ox pond is redolent of its odour. The poet Coleridge is said to have prized most the scent from a bean field. In the leisurely days of horse traffic, of high dog-carts and Broughams, the aroma of the bean flowers, so white, so jet black, would hang about an old turnpike road like a heady pagan incense all through the long summer-damp twilights.

*Be it weal or be it woe;  
Beans blow before May doth go.*

But it is not only in the country that this month reveals her beauty. During these jocund weeks every little suburban

street is redeemed out of all recognition. Each carefully tended garden, with its green mowing machine and diminutive roller, becomes a veritable garden of Adonis. The heart of the punctual milkman is gladdened by the fragrance of the lilac bushes; while the gold of the laburnum causes the morning postman to know himself more wealthy than any turtle-soup alderman. In Dorset little girls are taught to improve their: complexions by washing in dew shaken from the close-set flowers of a red May. Even in cities artificial cosmetics seem out of place during this floral month. In the winter, when all is drab and chill, it is not an unwelcome sight to have young girls appear in theatre and street painted bright as butterflies, but this is not the case on a sunshine May morning when all should be fresh and natural.

Long millenniums ago the Celtic tribes of Europe used to celebrate the beginning of summer by lighting a Beltane fire on the crest of a prominent hill. Chaucer tells us that in his time the city magnates of London never failed to go 'a' may-ing on the other side of their great wall, through Ludgate or through Aldersgate. During the sixteenth century there was scarce a village that had not its dancing-pole on the green, tall as the mast of a ship.

What excuse can we have for being lack-lustre during this buxom month, when merely to be above ground is a privilege every dead man would covet? In a beautiful poem the late Sir William Watson represents the awakening earth as the sun's darling:

*What is so sweet and dear  
As a prosperous morn in May,  
The confident prime of the day,  
And the dauntless youth of the year,*

MAY

*When nothing that asks for bliss,  
Asking aright, is denied,  
And half of the world a bridegroom is,  
And half of the world a bride?*

# JUNE

*Many a merry meeting  
My love and I have had;  
She was my only sweetings  
She made my heart full glad.*





**T**HE MONTH OF JUNE MAY BE CONSIDERED as the queen of all the months of the year, Ovid declared that it derives its name from Juno, the Queen of Heaven, and this derivation is more in keeping with the proud beauty of these weeks of midsummer than is the commonplace one now generally accepted. It was named the 'Dry month' by the Saxons, but the word dry is not a very apposite epithet for describing June in England which is a month remarkable for the abundance of its fresh foliage. It may be regarded as the month of consummation. The sap that stirred in April and ran riot in May, by midsummer has created out of the air, out of nothing, millions upon millions of new outspreading leaves. All through the winter the sun shone upon bare twigs, bare branches, bare boughs, but these are now shaded by delicate upheld hands of palest green, by living hands of marvellous fabrication, by hands that breathe and bask through the bland day-time hours, and remain during the short summer nights cool and dedicated under the dreaming stars.

*Barnaby Bright*  
*All day and no night*

## JUNE

I can remember the very occasion when I first heard that happy-sounding rhyme as it came from the lips of my mother in her efforts to explain why it was that I should be sent to bed before even the sparrows had begun the clattering of their roosting hour in the massed jasmine outside my night-nursery window. In these times when we delude ourselves with altered clocks, the June nights seem short indeed. There is a particular transparent whiteness, like a reflection from the crystal floor of heaven, that belongs to the nights on each side of the longest day, and which never seems quite to fade out of the sky during the solstice period. We, the living lusty populations of England, go about actively preoccupied with our social frivolities, showing little conscious realization of the terms of our existence, fast imprisoned as we are in the importunate illusions of our experience.

England in the small hours of a midsummer night is held under a glamour. What a new immaterial buoyancy is in the cosmic atmosphere lingering so lightly in the Western horizon, present so early in the East! We are not forgetting how the frowardness and greed of man has drenched the earth with blood; we are not forgetting how the cries and groans of tortured animals and exploited labourers have for generations reached to the pitiless clouds and 'nothing said', but even in the face of such knowledge it would be impossible in June not to recognize that the earth we live upon is a paradise lost. The air we breathe at this time is no common ozone. It is an air fresh as the breath of a thistle-eating donkey. It is an air dulcet and cool as the dew upon a mushroom's white globe. Every one who is alive and in England in June is alive in a faery land.

In all the shires hay-making takes place during this month. In mornings of dazzling heat men may be seen tossing the

tanned fodder into aromatic heaps: 'Wi' their ears in white sleeves, left an' right.' Little emerald hip-frogs leap out of the way of blind crushing boots as with spotted bellies and triangular legs they are at pains to preserve the miracle of their singular existence.

*The business of the day is done,  
The last-left haymaker is gone.  
And from the thyme upon the height,  
And from the elder-blossom white  
And pale dog-roses in the hedge,  
And from the mint-plant in the sedge,  
In puffs of balm the night-air blows  
The perfume which the day forgoes.*

The night falls, and over the hushed meadow, over the hedge-rows garlanded with twisted honeysuckle tods, hungry owls float silently by intent to surprise any over-bold mouse that has had the temerity to forage for a harmless diet in the damp inch-high jungles of the close-cut open field.

Cabbage-roses are out in midnight gardens by water-lily fish pools, at the ends of wide terraces, and by red-brick kitchen garden walls. In covert and wood brown seeds may already be seen fringing the undersides of hidden ferns. How soft the moss is in such places! How still the pink campions in the white light of the small hours fanned by the damask wings and woolly abdomens of night-wandering moths! The whiteness of the night gives place at last to the whiteness of the dawn. The partridge is heard calling to her newly hatched brood that still carry on tender chicken feathers fragments of their natal shells! The wood-pigeons have begun the murmur of their content. Fortunate indeed are the boys

## JUNE

and girls, summer lovers, who are out and abroad together in these hours of enchantment.

The month of June has always been recognized as the most favourable month for marriages. How many dead bones would gladly gather themselves to life could they once again be wed to their sweethearts in June! The word 'wed' in Anglo-Saxon meant a pledge. One pledge or wed took the form of a ring that as soon as a lover had gained the consent of his lady would be placed on the third finger of her right hand, until put, on her wedding-day, upon her left-hand 'Betty Bodkin' finger, there being rumoured some close association between this finger and the heart of a girl in love. Then on bended knee the man would take the woman, as the old words said, 'For fairer, for fouler, for better, for worse', she on her part vowing that she would always be 'buxom and bonny' to her chosen lord. The luckiest wedding-day of all the year is on the day of the full moon in June, but even on this day it must be remembered as the church is approached that it is ill luck to have a monk, or a hare, or a cat cross your path. Should the bride, on the other hand, happen to catch sight of a spider or a toad it may be taken as a fortunate sign.

When Jesus said 'God is Love' he was giving expression to an utterance of profound wisdom. The way of a man with a maid is close to the core of life's mystery. Such love is deeper than all racial or national differences. It can cancel all rancour and transform the aggressive, self-absorbed isolation of the individual. To love and be loved is the only thing that really matters in life, and it is to this supreme emotion that the month of June is especially dedicated.

# JULY

*The Sun, most like a speedy post  
With ardent course ascends;  
The beauty of the heavenly host  
Up to our zenith tends.*

*The burning beams down from his face  
So fervently can beat,  
That man and beast now seek a place  
To save them from the heat*

*With gilded eyes and open wings  
The cock his courage shows;  
With claps of joy his breast he dings,  
And twenty times he crows.*

ALEXANDER HUME





**J**ULY WAS THE BIRTHDAY MONTH OF JULIUS Caesar. To the old Republicans it had been known as Quintilis, but Mark Anthony, in order to commemorate for all time the family name of his friend, enacted that from the year of Caesar's murder it should be called after him. The Saxons had three separate titles for the month—Hay-M5nath, because of the hay-making, Maed-M5nath, because the meadows are all in bloom, and the Second-Mild-Month, because the clemency of the weather which begins in June is maintained in July. The fact that July was not known as the third mild month proves that even in those remote years the month of May, so praised by the poets, was under suspicion: 'Cast not a clout till May be out.' It would be natural to imagine that the steady decline of the sun after the summer solstice would cause an appreciable cooling-off of the temperature during July and August. Apparently, however, the accumulated heat of summer has so warmed the planet's atmosphere that in spite of the fact that the sun is steadily declining its heat is felt more strongly.

The month of July is distinguished by two examples of ancient seasonal lore—the superstition of St. Swithun's day, and the rumoured recurrence of hot weather with the rising of the dog-star Sirius.

*St. Swithun's Day, if thou dost rain,  
For forty days it will remain:*

## JULY

*St. Swithun's Day, if thou be fair,  
For forty days 'twill soak nae-mair.*

Many antiquaries hold the opinion that the weather lore crediting July fifteenth with critical meteorological influences is far older than any tradition it is possible to associate with the 'drunken Bishop of Winchester'. As a matter of fact there exists no evidence to show that St. Swithun was ever the worse for drink. He seems to have been a most practical and pious prelate. He built a stone bridge over the Itchen, and it is believed that he conducted Alfred the Great, 'England's Darlyng', to Rome when that prince was a child. He is also reputed to have introduced strict discipline into the monastic orders, inaugurating a system for provisioning the clergy which under the name of the tithe system is even now far from popular amongst the laity. On his death-bed he surprised his chapter by expressing a wish to be buried on the north side of Winchester Cathedral 'in a vile place under the eaves-droppings'. His wish was duly carried out. More than one hundred years later, however, his bones, for reasons of ecclesiastical policy, were enshrined within the Cathedral, rumours with regard to their miraculous power having been previously circulated. The ceremony of the translation took place on the anniversary of the saint's birthday, July fifteenth. It has been maintained that the celebration was marked by a torrential July thunderstorm, and that the broken weather continued for forty days, amply testifying to St. Swithun's disapprobation. A seventeenth-century writer comments thus upon the claims of the day:

*Better it is to rise betime,  
And to make hay while sun doth shine,  
Than to believe in tales and lies,  
Which idle monks and friars devise.*

When I was a child I was always considerably perturbed by hearing my father make reference to the dog-days. Immediately those familiar old-fashioned royal Somersetshire roads of Queen Victoria, powdered thick with white dust, would become sinister avenues along which a frothing slow-trotting mad dog might at any moment be met.

How wonderful those torrid days in the heart of the summer can be! The tender freshness of the spring foliage is long since over, but the hedges and woods have not yet acquired that used customary look characteristic of the later months. These are the days when in every English shire the gardens of manor-houses, vicarages, and cottages appear with their 'summer pomps' blandly prospering under a succession of cloudless skies. July is the one month when we in England seem to have time to take full unhurried pleasure in the summer, our thoughts untroubled by misgivings, for as yet the early-morning garden air, smelling of roses and gold-dusted snapdragons, has no hint in it of the breath of autumn. It is the month when young girls enter the house, their arms full of dew-fresh flowers. The soft incense-bearing breeze comes into the airy room through the wide-open windows, and as the spilt water is washed from the mahogany table a visitor pauses before such a vision of youth and opulent summer petals.

I have been told that the dazzling dance of the sun's rays upon the surface of the sea is the happiest sight that can meet the eye. A high value could also be put upon the spectacle of a ripening strawberry bed on a bright July morning, with the common whites fluttering this way and that above the parallel rows, and disturbed blackbirds rising suddenly from their feastings, too indolent to fly farther than the nearest patch of currant bushes, uttering as they go their taunting cries of simulated panic.

## JUL Y

The ancients used to declare that there existed a mountain honey so delectable that if put upon the lips of a dead man he would straightway rise from his sepulchre. It has often seemed to me that many an old churchyard resident could be won back to life by the smell of raspberries. There is a freshness, a peculiar vital tang that belongs to this fruit as to none other. The aroma that a warm wasp-eaten September pear, ripe but not yet 'sleepy', gives out does not rival the fragrance that rises from a plate of nursery raspberries; no, nor does a golden apricot either, freshly gathered from a kitchen garden wall, its crumbling bricks hot to the touch.

I do not wonder that Matthew Arnold valued so highly the long July evenings of the English summer, with jasmine-muffled windows opening out upon groups of happy people under garden trees. The silent summer lawn can provide mysterious sounds. The air vibrates with the shrill haunting cries of the bats which in the semblance of diminutive devils search the huge firmament with pigmy mouths agape for their victuals. The beetle with his 'small but sullen horn', so loved by the poet Collins, is abroad also; blundering he wheels his droning flight through the damp darkness. When the last folded-up chair has been carried in perhaps a hungry chill-nosed hedgehog will venture out of his favourite flower-bed jungle, his criss-cross prickles shining under the July moon.

# AUGUST

*Now let us sport us while we may,  
And now, like amorous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our time devour  
Than languish in his slow-chapt power.  
Let us roll all our strength and all  
Our sweetness up into one ball,  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Thorough the iron gates of life:  
Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.*

ANDREW MARVELL





**S**EXTILIS, AS THE OLD ROMANS USED TO call August, was not the birth month of Augustus Caesar; he held it, however, to be his lucky month, and it was for this reason that he selected it to perpetuate his name, and for his honour's sake made up the complement of its days to thirty-one.

The emperor was correct in judging August to be a more fortunate month than his own birth month of September. For centuries during its weeks more happy hours have been snatched by Europeans out of the hands of the envious fates than during the weeks of any of the other eleven months.

The great Flemish artist, Breughel the elder, is believed to have painted a series of pictures representing each month of the year. His picture of the month of August, now in the New York Metropolitan Museum, treats of a harvest landscape with the corn standing ready for the sickle, as it were a solid substance of golden bread! It is the noon hour, and the sixteenth-century reapers lie sprawling under the shadow of a tree. Evidently the genial opulence of the month of August had deeply stirred the artist's imagination. Everything included in his picture seems to be praising the earth, whose procreant urge has given birth to so much sweltering life. The relaxed labourers bless the simple sensualities of existence; each leaf of the tree above them is suspended in the sultry

## AUGUST

air; each several spearhead of bearded corn stands grateful in the sunshine.

August has always been the principal month of the English harvest. Lammas-tide (loaf-tide), as it came to be known in medieval times, was one of the four pagan festivals, and was closely associated with the cutting of the corn.

This happy holiday month is truly an august month for us in England. It is during its days of sunshine that people who have been labouring at uncongenial tasks all the year long are able to enjoy a few days, or perhaps even a few weeks, of leisure!

'The devil soon finds work for idle hands to do.' Few proverbs are more slyly mendacious. Worldly minded people have always been adroit at coining such ethical apophthegms. Anxiously we await the weather signs for August Bank Holiday.

*If the cock goes crowing to his bed  
He is sure to wake with a watery head.*

When the sun rises, behold, there is not a cloud to be seen. In London the indolent hours slowly pass, and the ever-increasing murmur that can be heard rising from each tap-room might deceive a planetary visitor into taking taverns to be sorts of enormous beehives. Behind the counter stands the publican, constrained on the occasion of so full a house to come to the help of his over-worked barmaid. He is a sober, practical man, who pulls down the polished handles with a competent fist, his eye vigilant for the last farthing. The door into the street is propped open with a rusty kitchen weight, always used for this purpose in hot weather. This soiled and shining swing door will remain open until long after darkness has fallen.

Then it is that fresh puffs of wind from the Thames's channel

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touch the foreheads of the tipplers with the benediction of a summer's night. These cool gusts mingled with the smell of tobacco, with the smell of stout, with the smell of human sweat, refresh the toss-pots, who, already well whittled, sit elbow to elbow in holiday shirt-sleeves as jolly as pyes. In the far-distant early morning their sons and daughters have left for the seaside in crowded excursion trains, testing the patience of long-suffering ticket-collectors with their irrepressible high spirits, and eventually streaming out of the railway station, a throng of strayed sun worshippers.

Holiday makers! That is a title that we should all strive to merit on this day. From the first crowing of the backyard rooster, with scarlet comb frolic and dry, our mood should be that of good fellowship. Fastidious reactions should not be indulged. We should cultivate an attitude that is broad enough to accept life's loosest humour. Our reciprocity with the light-hearted mood of the day should be strong to transform discarded newspapers into a litter left behind by the dancing feet of a riotous troop of dedicated Bacchantes. It is the aplomb of Walt Whitman that should be our inspiration:

*Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road.*

*Healthy, free, the world before me,*

*Here the profound lesson of reception nor preference nor denial,  
The black with his woolly head, the felon, the diseas'd, the  
illiterate person, are not denied.*

*They pass, I also pass, anything passes, none can be interdicted.  
None but are accepted, none but shall be dear to me.*

To the countryman the approach of the imperial month has been indicated by unfailing signs. The yellow, oddly scented, button-like flower called flea-bane begins to be seen.

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All butterflies are attracted to this late-blossoming herb, and, as its name suggests, it offers a sovereign remedy against fleas, Nicholas Culpeper writes:

"The said leaves gathered, when the morning dew is on them, and brought into a chamber troubled with fleas, will gather them thereunto, which being suddenly cast out will rid the chamber of those troublesome bedfellows."

By every river bank the purple loosestrife shows at its finest now, waving its phallic splendour over the shining river levels where trout, slow to rise and as gross as chub, lag under the shadows of emerald water-weeds with backs and spotted flanks plump from the plentiful dietary of an endless succession of warm summer evenings.

William Shakespeare makes mention of purple loosestrife in *Hamlet*, alluding to the plant as a man who loved it and had observed its habit narrowly.

*Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,  
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,  
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.*

Often it is a wise thing to spend a bank holiday in a boat on a river; especially is this plan to be commended to a boy and girl happy in their first love. To moor their skiff under the shade of some dark-leaf 'd alder, and to watch the moon come up as they lie among shocks of newly cut corn—who could devise a better way of spending their few hours of sweet freedom?

Already the twilight swallows are seeking their roosting places on the penthouse beams of old outlying catde-barns. From the distant hillside comes the sound of a bugle. The boys have returned to camp after their day of explorations. They are gathered about their fires, listening to the hearty

talk of their sun-burned monitors, all of them happy save one who sits shyly apart and wishes he were in the garden of his home watching in undisciplined freedom for puss-moths at the end of the lawn where the evening primroses flourish, calling like a true child of Dorset after the dusty nocturnal millers:

*Millery, millery, dusty pole!  
How many zacks hast thee a-stole  
Vour and twenty in a peck  
Hang a miller up by's neck.*

With unbewitched eyes he watches the moon behind a hedgerow elm. It is the same moon that is transforming the harvest acres that hold the lovers.

This is the hour when cold dew gathers on leaf and grass blade. All is stillness except where the plover's plaintive cry sounds from a distant meadow. This is the hour when may be heard the sound of dutiful farm horses munching provender in the hollow vaults of uneven-floored stables whose racks and mangers have been sweetened and polished by this same strong animal of health and labour for generation after generation. Occasionally for the easement of a tired limb a heavy hoof is rested, the caulkins of its lucky shoe suddenly glimmering as the worn metal catches the shroud-white light that leaks in through a derelict window dim with curry-combs and cobweb dust. This is the hour when the otter may be seen conducting her offspring across the river, her weasel's head of blackest velvet silently dividing the water's smooth surface into rippling lines edged with moonlight.

Imperceptibly the poetry of the summer's night takes possession of the boy and girl. Never again will they be able to accept without suspicion the common view of the Monday

## AUGUST

morning world. The love they have for each other has initiated them into a new mystery. They have been permitted to look through the thin stage-scenery of accepted reality. In foul and in fair weather, in sickness, in old age, and in the hour of death they will have at their command a clue to the justification of life in the shared memory of a perfect August holiday.



# SEPTEMBER

*She will bring thee, all together,  
All delights of summer weather;*

*All the heaped Autumn's wealth,  
With a still, mysterious stealth:*

JOHN KEATS





**W**HEN THE YEAR BEGAN WITH THE month of March, September was the seventh month, and its name still records the old usage. The Saxons gave September the name of Barley-MSnath, the harvesting of this primitive symbolic grain being a matter of gravest consequence to such hearty beer drinkers. The heavy beverage has never found favour with the Southern races who are wed to the lighter fruit of the grape. Beer is essentially the drink of the cold-blooded Northerners whose spirits never fail to respond to the sight of a hogshead of good 'October' at the cellar's end.

September is a month with a distinctive quality of its own. In its first weeks the summer is with us still, but presently there may be observed unmistakable signs that she is preparing for her departure. The sun-flowers, the most privileged of all her liegemen, begin to cast their seeds, until it would seem that their unintellectual, sun-worshipping faces were mourning with the shedding of hard tears the near approach of the winter's desolation. Everywhere the dahlias are prospering, their round cool blooms looking out upon the gossamer mists of countless early-morning September gardens. The bees are still at work. With scrupulous and indefatigable zeal they examine and re-examine each purple flower-head

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of the Michaelmas daisies lest any drop of precious nectar should be lost. A mild melancholy already envelops the fields and lanes as the sap begins to withdraw from all that is green. Old-man's-beard hangs hoar and thick on the hedge-rows.

This is the month when children wake to find a familiar field all dotted with button mushrooms grown up overnight, each smooth new-created globe decorated with round pearldrops of purest dew. What smell is more redolent of earth-secrets than that of a freshly picked mushroom, its under frills coloured with the primal flush of the rose-tinted dawn! This is the month when old men pull down blackberries for their grandchildren, using for this purpose old-fashioned triangular blackberrying crooks identical in shape with those they had been taught to cut from the hedges seventy years ago. The toddling infant in her white pinafore stands a little way back in the lane marvelling to see the preoccupied figure of her grand-dad bring down from a common hedge such perfect fruit.

In the great industrial cities the populations unconsciously fortify their spirits as best they may against the winter. Over the roofs and chimneys of the pottery towns the sun shines clear, though with declining strength. Men and women gathering towards factory and pit-heads envisage the months to come. These months will not be months of unmitigated dreariness. Many happy winter evenings can be remembered spent before a kitchen fire after a hard day's work, and their minds revive at the thought of cinemas and all the gaudy stir of city life with its harsh glare vigorous against hopeless odds—amoral, happy-go-lucky, tough. With a feeling of elation the men anticipate those irresponsible diversions by means of which hard-pressed workers enliven their days—good-natured

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solacing, generous-hearted girl friends, football matches, betting tips, jolly evenings with mates in the snug tap-rooms of the 'pub' at the corner of the street!

Another working man, returning from his day's labour with the tools of his trade over his shoulder, derives inspiration from the beauty of the autumn skies. He observes how rapidly the evenings begin now to close in and how in the early mornings when he takes in the milk the air smells at one moment of summer and at the next of a Jack Frost! Punctually each day he goes up the well-known staircase carrying a cup of early-morning tea, strong and with plenty of sugar, to his wife, careful not to stumble over the frayed linoleum, for if he finds she has dozed off again he will lay the tray down on the bed table as noiselessly as he possibly can, so tender is he of his companion, the mother of the children they are bringing up with so much pride.

Nothing is less exclusive than the pleasure to be derived from the changing of the seasons. This is a reward that comes as readily to a beggar as to a king. It is, in fact, the natural prerogative of all animals. It is like the blessing of air, of rain, of sunshine upon fur and skin, and it can never be stolen away by the ingenuity of avarice or the selfishness of pride. I have observed a tramp set out from a workhouse in high feather at the mere prospect of facing once more the open road. He had learned well the most important lesson that philosophy can teach—happiness does not depend upon material possessions but is present in the heart as suddenly, mysteriously, as a dancing May Day child upon a village green. Give a man bread to eat and water to drink and a clout to cover his back and sides and he has it in his power to be more at peace than those ambitious ones who fatten and vex themselves in king's houses.

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If the month of September is fine, day may follow day when the country-side of England forgets her melancholy and seems to remain in a mood of dreamy relaxation.

*Carter for Mister Manley  
He worked at Wullum's Mill  
And up by barton and down by mead  
He sang to the maidens upon his reed.  
'Apples be ripe<sup>9</sup> he sang to them;  
'And nuts be brown they answered him.*

The fever heat of the dog-days is long past and every morning the cattle, wreathed from ambling heels to horned head in the sweet breath of autumn, move across aftermath-meadows. In enclosed gardens, hidden close behind the huge leaves of the old tree that sprawls against the wall, green figs swell and ripen till their voluptuous skins burst asunder. In Africa I have watched baboons hauling themselves up precipitous escarpments by the white elongated elbows of just such trees, but the rope-ladders of these gruff-voiced men of antiquity never burgeoned with fruit as delectable as is provided by the damp heat of an English September.

Every thorn hedge is now brushed with scarlet, so densely do the haws congregate. Holly berries that will be carried home bright as cocks' combs to adorn Christmas plum puddings are, though fully formed, as yet grass green. The matted ivy that hangs from the grange is in flower and the unbelievable number of peacock butterflies settled upon it suggest a damask pattern upon medieval tapestry. All day long there is a murmur of flies and gnats, their thin ephemeral trumpet voices giving place to an unnatural silence that falls upon wood and orchard as soon as the sun has gone down. This silence is deeper and more impressive than was ever

experienced during the tremulous white nights of mid-summer,

*Lo! in the middle of the wood,  
The folded leaf is woo' d from out the bud  
With winds upon the branch, and there  
Grows green and broad, and takes no care,  
Sun-steep'd at noon, and in the moon  
Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow  
Falls, and floats adown the air.  
Lo! sweeten' d with the summer light,  
The full-juiced apple, waxing over mellow,  
Drops in a silent autumn night.*





# OCTOBER

*The thirsty earth soaks up the rain,  
And drinks and gapes for drink again;  
The plants suck in the earth, and are  
With constant drinking fresh and fair;*

*Nothing in Nature's sober found,  
But an eternal health goes round.  
Fill up the bowl, then, fill it high,  
Fill all the glasses there—for why  
Should every creature drink but I?  
Why, man of morals, tell me why?*

ABRAHAM COWLEY





**T**HE SAXON NAME FOR OCTOBER WAS Win-M5nath, but it is by no means certain that these hearty beer-drinking ancestors of ours ever whiffed up the fruit of any vine of their own growing even in their original German home. One old writer gets over the difficulty by saying 'albeit they had not anciently wines made in Germany yet in this season had they them from diverse countries'. Perhaps the Saxons were referring to elderberry wine, a fragrant drink still wisely relished by cottage people, a drink crushed out from these beggarman's grapes at that particular period in October when through a pretty greed the bills of cock blackbirds have changed their colour from gold to purple! The very dross of birds and beasts at this season tells the same tale of excess, though in the case of the badger it is blackberries that are most responsible for the conspicuous seeds and tell-tale hue.

October is the month when the brew-houses and the cider-presses are as hard at work in the north as are the wine vats in southern countries. At the time of the year when the burst berries of the spindle tree are showing orange and pink in the hedges it would not be possible to walk five miles through the lanes of Somerset without becoming aware that it is the cider-making season. In dim, wasp-drunken orchards the poetical fruit, responsible for the Trojan war, lies piled up in

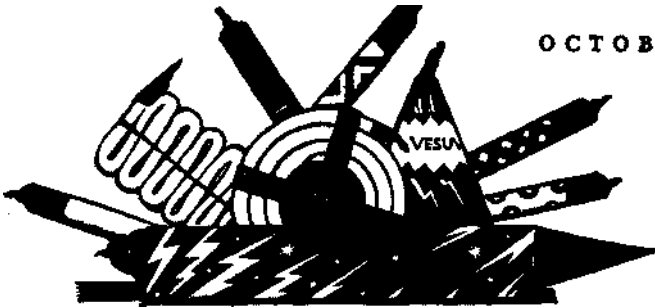
## OCTOBER

massed heaps under great trees so old that they might very well have **been** saplings during the spring months of the Duke of Monmouth's adventure, so leaned down do their grey trunks look and so drooping with the years their crooked boughs. I have seen cider-presses in remote farms that must have been squeezing out the delicious juices of famous Somersetshire apples such as Trasks, Taunton Blacks, and Jack Homers, season after season since the eighteenth century. The crushing process is assisted by laying the apples on straw, and, after the last drop of brown syrup has been strained off, the residue of pulp, a cider-cake, is tossed on the ground for the cattle to nuzzle at. Often as a child I have been called into a farmyard to sample the first unfermented cask—the sultry air of these quiet back quarters, sheltered by mossy walls, being thick with the sweet-smelling haze characteristic of indolent afternoons in the late autumn, of afternoons of dila-tory humming honey bees and slant sunshine!

It was while walking by the side of the clear Winchester river that John Keats composed his famous Ode in which he represents Autumn as 'sitting careless on a granary floor', or by a cider-press with patient gaze, watching the last oozings hour by hour. Edmund Spenser also appreciated this time of year, when, in every county, walnut trees are thrashed with long poles and men carry indoors for winter storage vegetable marrows and pumpkins of incredibly prodigious girth.

*Then came October full of merry glee;  
For yet his noule was totty of the must,  
Which he was treading in the wine-fat's see,  
And of the joyous oyle, whose gentle gust  
Made him so frolic and so full of lust.*

Even in the towns summer can linger on and on all



through October. On fine Sundays the girls' ironed frocks still prettily exhibit naked arms. In the country the fields and ditches are decorated with succory and goat's-beard, and the cat-cradle heads of the wild carrot, fragrant as a candlemas pomander; while in the window-boxes of the city nasturtiums continue to bud and flower amid their round cobweb-veined leaves as though there would be no end to the warm days of a sunny back street.

It is only during the last weeks, with the near approach of All-Hallow Eve, that men and women returning from shop and office begin to experience the true feeling of autumn. Perhaps this strange nostalgic sensation comes to them with the tang of bonfire smoke wafted from a nearby park, where taciturn, well-paid gardeners, with slow deliberation, are beginning to burn up fallen leaves, russet and splotched. No wonder mothers and nursemaids are put to it to keep their charges from approaching too close to the miniature conflagration, for the great fire-worshipping festival is at hand and the small newspaper-selling grocer shops at the end of each street already display stores of fire-works—evangelical-minded old ladies engaging themselves in a profitable traffic wherein the satanic power of gunpowder has been cunningly and successfully manipulated for the harmless entertainment of children!

This is the time of year when flocks of starlings flushed in

## OCTOBER

far-off Surrey stubble fields fly off to their familiar roosting place on the higher ledges of the British Museum. In very mild years swallows are sometimes seen in England in November, but as a rule they are gone before October is out. It exasperated Jeremiah, that formidable prophet of disaster, to think that the Jews could remain so obstinate before the will of Almighty God when even the fowls of the air showed themselves scrupulous to obey Him. 'Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; . . . and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord.'

Down here in Dorset it is no rare thing for us to watch swans go over on their way to the Weymouth Backwater or the Fleet at Abbotsbury, but I have never seen the geometrical figure of a gaggle of geese in the morning or evening sky as is so common a sight in Norfolk and Lincolnshire.

The precise wedge-shaped formation that a flight of cranes will often fall into must have been observed by Homer, for he likens the martial advance of the Trojans to the symmetrical order that these birds take as they cross from horizon to horizon. In every age poets have been moved by the migration of the birds in the autumn.

*The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,  
Ya-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation*



# NOVEMBER

*Winter may come: he brings but nigher  
His circle (yearly narrowing) to the fire  
Where old friends meet  
Let him; now heaven is overcast,  
And spring and summer both are past,  
And all things sweet*

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR





**N**OVEMBER, THE MOST DOLOROUS MONTH of the year, still retains its old-style title of the ninth month. The Saxons had two names for it. They called it Blot-M5nath, or blood month, because during its weeks men were occupied in slaughtering cattle, sheep, hogs, and goats, in order that they might have a good store of salted flesh for their winter larders. They called it the Wind-M5nath because during its weeks rushing gales hurled themselves across Europe from the south-west. Indeed the Saxons were fond of believing that the autumn storms that went shrieking by over their roof-trees were nothing less than the terrible runaway horses of Woden, led by Sleipner, the god's own furious stallion, eight-hoofed and white of colour, who would come stampeding across the night sky causing the many tall wolves under the wind-lashed pines to leave off hunting and to cower in terror with drooping tails.

The gloom of December is redeemed by the festival of

## NOVEMBER

Christmas. The gloom of January is dispelled by the heartening knowledge that the sun is every day growing stronger:

*After New Years tide  
The sun lengthens a Cock's stride.*

But the gloom of November—what can possibly be said to qualify its dark despair?

The French, congregating in Paris like quails under the golden net of Aphrodite, cast this chitter across the Channel. 'November', they say, 'is the month when the English hang themselves.' As a matter of fact they also are in a sorry enough case with their sunny vineyards all soused and sodden, and have small reason to pleasure themselves with quips at our London fogs.

*No sun—no moon!  
No morn—no noon—  
No dawn—no dusk—no proper time of day—  
No sky—no earthly view—  
No distance looking blue—  
No road—no street—no 't'other side the way.*

I have heard it said that the year dies in November and not in December, and that an observing person can easily identify the day, if not the very hour, when this awe-inspiring event takes place. A dull preternatural stillness falls suddenly upon the fields and copses; not a leaf stirs in the damp muddy ditches; the very rooks hold their peace as, with experienced eye, they search for worms along the furrows of the upland ploughlands.

It was when she was a young girl that Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote the following verses to her mother,

*I cannot hut remember  
When the year grows old—*

*October—November-  
How she disliked the cold!*

*She used to watch the swallows  
Go down across the sky,  
And turn from the window  
With a little sharp cry.*

*Oh, beautiful at nightfall  
The soft spitting snow!  
And beautiful the bare boughs  
Rubbing to and fro!*

*But the roaring of the fire  
And the warmth of fur,  
And the boiling of the kettle  
Were beautiful to her.*

In this haunting poem she has given expression to a very widespread human feeling. November is the first of the three months when it is wise for a man to make the best of his chimney corner. A prudent housewife will always choose to scant food rather than fuel. The forest sunshine that has so miraculously been stored away in coal should now be let loose in our grates at no ungenerous rate, so that our poor bones, creaking with rheumatics, may be warmed to the very marrow. Let the rain drive against the patient window panes, let the foul fogs gather upon the pavements, let it be pitch dark at five in the afternoon, it matters not a jot. In our great cities November is the month for eating and drinking, for taking from the trivet broad slices of warming haddock that have been filling the whole room with their hungry smell as they wait for the toast to be ready, before being laid upon a workman's plate by the hands of a laughing daughter whose

## NOVEMBER

pretty head is full of love matters and her own plans for spoiling the evening.

In the country even more than in the town it is best to be a hug-thce-hearth during November. Except for a few rough-coated young stock the cattle and cart-horses have long ago been brought into stall and stable! All wild living things have sought shelter, many are already in a hibernating torpor.

The badger, with eyelids fast shut, is snugly asleep in his set under the green hill dreaming of succulent pig-nut roots; the hedgehog, rolled up in his leafy den, is in his fancy eagerly afoot after slugs and beetles in phantom lettuce plantations; the dormouse, with his tail curled to touch his cold nose, sees in his quaint imagination hazel nuts more in number than he, with nimble forepaws, could have piled up in a lifetime of day-time reality. These are the weeks when even the poorest of us should be allowed a little something on the hob—a drop, perhaps, of hot West Indian rum, well sweetened with sugar—a sovereign remedy against the Frenchmen's slander.

*Then go we smoking  
Silent and snug;  
Naught passes between us,  
Save a brown jug—  
Sometimes!*

By the last week in November practically all the leaves are down. In the woods it is scarcely possible to believe that the summer will ever return with the forest floor thick-carpeted with dog-mercury where now 'the leaves, thin dancers upon air go eddying round'.

*The soaking branches drip,  
And all night through  
The dripping will not cease  
In the avenue.*

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Though score upon score of bats are hanging by the heels in our barns and church steeples, dusty and dark, and though owls, mottled and white, fly silent under the low-lying rain clouds, there are even now more hopeful movements taking place in nature. Great muscular salmon, in surcoats of shining mail close-fitting and bright as silver, are making their way up-stream to their selected spawning grounds. With wide open planetary eyes, under an arbitrary compulsion, these strong fish of noble aspect will make innumerable attempts to leap the rocky waterfall, the ceaseless downpour of which has been audible through the night in the melancholy rain-drenched meadows. Meanwhile, as soon as ever the belated dawn breaks, another sound is heard, a November music most comforting—a thrashing-machine at work in a stack-yard! The engine driver was up early to light the furnace in the iron body of the black monster's rotund abdomen, and in the half light, before the church clock has struck seven, it has begun its drone-like humming—a humming which tells how the grain of last summer's harvest is being made ready for grinding into flour that will be eaten as crisp loaves from the oven in the spring and summer months of a lucky New Year.

*To the grave with the dead  
And the living to the bread.*



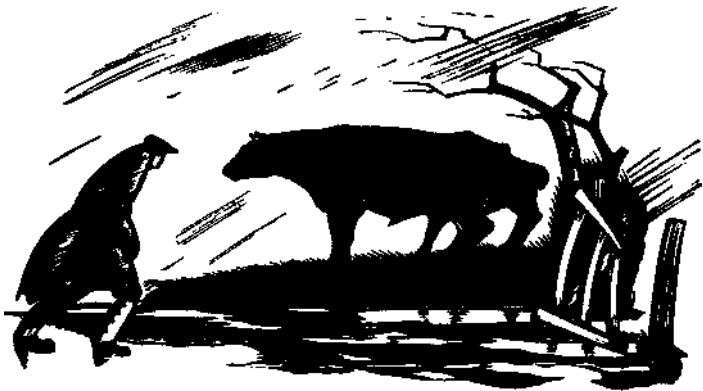


# DECEMBER

*The bitter frostes with the sleet and reyn,  
Destroyed hath the green in every yerd.  
Janus sits by the fyre, with double berd,  
And drinketh of his bugle-horn the wyne;  
Before his stant the braun of tusked swyne,  
And 'Nowel' cryeth every lusty man.*

GEOFFREY CHAUCER





**T**HE MONTH OF DECEMBER USED TO BE called by the Saxons Winter-Monath. Etymologists suggest that the words, wet and water, derive ultimately from the same root as the word winter. In England, at any rate, during the first weeks of this month it often rains: so it frequently happens that the week before Christmas is the darkest of the twelve months. The lives of city dwellers are hardly affected by the natural darkness of the night; their fogs are an artificial phenomenon produced by too great a concentration of chimney stacks. They never experience the sensation of long lonely walks on rain-drenching, pitch-dark nights, nor the satisfaction of coming in out of the blinding storm safe home at last. This is the time when the white railings of river bridges become obliterated from sight, and, below a wayfarer's boots and above a wayfarer's head, there is nothing but water and winter. A true countryman knows how to make the most of such an untoward adventure and takes a kind of satisfaction in hearing the wind whistle past his ears, in feeling the driving scuds lash against his chin, and in obstinately beating his way forward through the whistling gale blowing across England from sea to sea. Under such conditions, in spite of oozing boots and streaming overcoat,

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he recovers his unsophisticated animal senses, and, because there has been super-added to these a human intelligence, is aware of being alive in a way that the young steers over the leafless hedge are never aware, sheltering together in their rough winter hides as best they may, their back-quarters to the weather.

If it falls out that the December New Moon makes its appearance around Christmas, it is not strong enough to make its influence felt for several days, so that our Christmas-tree windows shine out on laurustinus gardens and mud-slippery village greens held in a darkness that may be very nearly complete. Of course if the weather should happen to be frosty the star-shine will be sufficient for our vision, for under a clear sky the rime on each blade of grass can be seen by the light of Orion and the other glittering constellations of the silent winter heavens. By some fortunate dispensation the last weeks before Christmas are apt to pass with more stealth than any others in the year. While we sulkily trudge to our work under the miasmas of November, deep wrapped in gabardines of dole, we suddenly hear it said 'Christmas will be with us in four weeks', and immediately our depression is gone, for we know that Christmas is a feast that not only celebrates the fairy changeling of Christian mythology, but also the turning back of the unvanquished sun. Christmas has always been a season especially dedicated to unlicensed human revelry. The dumb vegetable world sends us ambassadors of joy—mistletoe from the apple-tree's bare bough, the scarlet hollyberry from the hedge! On this day there is scarce a man, woman, or child in all England who does not somehow or another manage to come by a bellyful. The stalled ox, the sheep, the pig, turkeys, geese, gleaming pheasants, bright oleaginous herrings, and dark brown mud-fat eels

—all sacrificed wholesale to human appetites; while, for those whose tastes are no longer for carnivorous dietaries, pine-apples, pomegranates, dates from Arabia, raisins from Greece, oranges from Spain, and ginger, hot out of China, contribute to a sense of the privileged good fare of these weeks. Meanwhile the poor, as their ancestors did before them, continue to console themselves with a brew from John Barleycorn, leaving to more indulged palates the fruit of the grape. Dancing, laughter, and love-making are in every fashionable gallery; laughter, dancing, and love-making in every hall and tavern. On this day wealth and worldly success count for little. We do not wish riches for our friends, we wish them TO BE MERRY, and, often enough, a hedge-beggar on this night acquires more of this imponderable commodity than a proud city councillor for all his paunch and pomposity. Christmas is no good time for remembering our coffers or our coffins. It is enough if we know we are still alive and that the immortal sun has turned back upon his course and will soon reawaken the dreaming earth to impregnate her with the children of spring and summer.

In December it is often possible to find primroses in woods and spinneys that are well sheltered to the north and east, though when we do see them we have scarce the heart to praise their pathetic fairness, so apprehensive are we of the rude usage they are like to experience if 'Old January' in a violent and pitiless mood happens to fall upon them.

I suppose there is scarcely one of us who does not long to see the fields and the town roofs of England mantled and ridged with snow as they used to be in old-fashioned Christmases.

For pure poetry the story of the Nativity of Jesus takes a high place in sacred legend. The Church Fathers showed great

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wisdom in emphasizing its association with simple country matters—with straw and hay, with stars and with snow, with oxen and with shepherds' crooks! The medieval mystery plays of England, so honest and homespun, are wonderful in the way they bring out this sense of pastoral romance, this sense of the divine movemems full of eternal implication, enacted against a background as simple as a pail of milk. The Play of the Shepherds acted by the 'Paynters and Glasiers' in Chester in the fourteenth century illustrates exactly the quality I am trying to indicate: Sitting in rustic row, 'these shepherds are suddenly startled by the appearance of the Angel Gabriel.' At first they take him to be a sheep-stealer come after their fine tuppung rams which carry their tar marks so bravely above their tails.

Presently, however, as they see him miraculously rise from the ground into the wintry sky they dismiss from their minds so easy an explanation.

*And after of pax or of peace  
Up as pye (magpie) he piped.*

Over-awed they now follow the star of Bethlehem to the manger.

*Sym, sym sickerlye  
Here I see Marye  
And Jesus Christe fastly  
Lapped in hay.*

Before presenting their rude offerings they stand for a moment contemplating the stable interior, and with the shameless directness of men of the fields comment upon the venerable appearance of Saint Joseph:

*His bearde is like a bushe of briars  
With a pound of haire about his mouth and more.*

## DECEMBER

Each shepherd now shows his particular gift to the baby God. These gifts are highly valued out-of-door objects—a sheep bell, a bowl with a spoon, a bottle for holding water from the well (though this lacks a stopper), a flute that could make all the woods 'ringe and quiver as it were', and a hook for bringing down fruit and hazel nuts.

*Loe, sonne, I bringe thee a flagette,  
Thereby hanges a spoune,  
To eat thy pottage with all at noune.*

*Nowe childe, all though thou be coming from God  
And be God thyselfe in thy manhoode,  
Yet I know that in thy childehoode  
Thou wil't for sweet meats look.  
To pull down aples, pears, and plumes  
Ould Joseph shall not need to hurte his thoombes  
Because thou has not plenty of crumbes  
I give thee here my nutthoocke.*

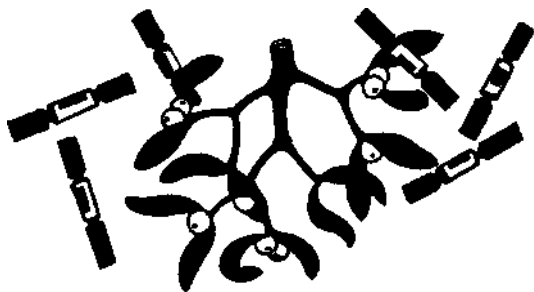
How often do those of us who could not with much assurance be described as 'regular church goers' long for a deliverance to come to the earth strong to break asunder the hooped bands of human misery. In the poor quarters of New York City it was at one time common to hear the voices of disillusioned Jewish emigrant women crying out from their tenement windows the significant words, 'Woe to Columbus!' 'Woe to Columbus!' and wise they were to put the blame of their predicament upon a man.

It is abundantly clear that we could support the natural sorrows of life—God's sorrows—lightly enough if ever we could be rid of our own stupidity, of our own fear, of our own greed, of our own cruelty; if ever with the free hearts

DECEMBER

of these blunt shepherds we could go singing down life's  
turnpike road with a sure prospect of happiness and peace  
upon earth, even though such a state of happiness and such a  
state of peace might have little enough to do with the innocent  
faith that would wish to persuade us

*That Christe is borne this nighte  
To ken all mankinde.*



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