A WALK IN OCTOBER.

"Then came October full of merry glee;
For yet his noule[1] was totty of the must,
Which he was treading in the wine-fats see,
And of the joyous oyle, whose gentle gust
Made him so frollick and so full of lust:
Upon a dreadful Scorpion he did ride,
The same which by Dianaes doom unjust
Slew great Orion, and eeke by his side
He had his plough-share and coulter ready tyde."
—*Spenser*.

The old Anglo-Saxon name for this month was Wyn Monat, or Wine Month, for, says Verstegan, "Albeit, they had not, antiently, wynes made in Germany, yet in this season they had them from divers countries adjoyning." Another name, mentioned by the Venerable Bede, is Winter-fyllith or Winter-filleth, because the full moon of this month marked the beginning of Winter.[2]

Leigh Hunt writes "Spenser, in marching his months before great nature, drew his description of them from the world and its customs in general; but turn his October wine-vats into cider-presses and brewing-tubs, and it will do as well," for "this month on account of its steady temperature, is chosen for the brewing of such malt liquor as is designed for keeping." An old adage bids us

"Dry your barley in October
Or you'll always be sober,"

[p 93]

for otherwise there will be no malt to make beer, a process which, in those days, was not confined to one particular trade, for every good Housewife brewed ale for the family, and the brew-house was a necessary part of the establishment.

In old Calendars, too,

"for 'October Month' they put
A rude illuminated cut—
Reaching ripe grapes from off the vine.
Or pressing them, or tunning wine;
Or, something to denote that there
Was vintage at this time of year."

Sometimes, however, the Calendar would display a husbandman sowing corn, or the sport of hawking, October being the last month of autumn.

In Germany

"Ist der Wein Mond warm und fein

Kommt ein scharfer Winter hinter drein,"

while on the other hand "Viel Frost und Schnee im October deutet auf milde Witterung im Winter," and "Gewitter im October lassen einem unbeständigen Winter erwarten"; but, according to the *Book of Knowledge* "Thunder in October signifieth the same year great wind, and scantiness of corn, fruits, and trees." In Luxemburg it is said that when foxes bark in October they call up a deep fall of snow. The 4th of October being dedicated to St. Francis, in France, which bestowed on him her name, corn must be sown that day, for

"Sème le jour de S. François
Ton grain aura de poids."

In Venice "He who has not sown by St. Luke's day (the 18th) tears his hair for sorrow," which corresponds to

"A la Saint Luc
Sème dru,
Ou ne sème pas du tout,"

while a practical English couplet advises us

"In October dung your field
And your land its wealth shall yield."

Again "Si le temps est clair le jour de Saint Denis (Oct. 9th) l'hiver sera rigoureux," and "Où le vent couche à la Sainte Denis il y reste les trois quarts de l'année," while various proverbs of divers countries warn us of the snow to be expected towards the end of the month.

Wondrously beautiful are the prevailing tints of October,
[p 94]
the mingling of red, gold, and brown producing the tawny look described by Richard Jefferies, "The tawniness is indistinct, it haunts the sunshine and is not to be fixed, any more than you can say where it begins and ends in the complexion of a brunette, ... The white thistledown, which stays on the bursting thistles because there is no wind to waft it away, reflects it; the white is pushed aside by the colour that the stained sunbeams bring. Pale yellow thatch on the wheat ricks becomes a deeper yellow; broad roofs of old red tiles smoulder under it. What can you call it but tawniness?—the earth sunburnt once more at harvest time. Sunburnt and brown—for it deepens into brown. … Here and there a thin layer of brown leaves rustles under foot. The scaling bark on the lower part of the tree-trunks is brown. Dry dock stems, fallen branches, the very shadows, are not black, but brown. With red hips and haws, red bryony and woodbine berries, these together cause the sense rather than the actual existence of a tawny tint." "All things brown, and yellow, and red," he tells us, "are brought out by the autumn sun, the brown furrows freshly turned where the stubble was yesterday, the brown bark of trees, the brown fallen leaves, the brown stalks of plants, the red haws, the red unripe blackberries, red bryony berries, reddish-yellow fungi, yellow hawkweed, yellow ragwort, yellow hazel

leaves, elms, spots on lime or beech; not a speck of yellow, red or brown the yellow sunshine does not find out. And these make autumn, with the caw of rooks, the peculiar autumn call of laziness and full feeding, the sky blue as March between the great masses of dry cloud floating over, the mist in the distant valleys, the tinkle of traces as the plough turns, and the silence of the woodland birds."

Now young Otters choose their winter feeding grounds, and the Squirrel is busy laying up a store of nuts and acorns, burying his little hoard in various places for future visits on sunny days in Winter. The Redwing, Fieldfare, Wood-cock, and Snipe arrive; Chaffinches, Missel-thrushes, and other birds congregate in flocks for convenience of feeding, Starling and Wild Duck don their finest plumage, and Wild Geese betake them to their winter quarters.

The Redwing (*Turdus Iliacus*), like the Wood-cock and Snipe, travels by night, and may often be heard crying to its fellows as the flock passes over a town. It is one of the sweetest songsters of Northern Europe, nesting on the continent, varying

the site according to the nature of its surroundings, sometimes choosing a low tree or bush, while at other times the nest is placed on the ground. The Fieldfare (*T. pilaris*), like the Redwing, is a species of Thrush, and the most numerous of the northern Thrushes; it lives in colonies and builds its nest of long dry grass with a lining of mud between the inner and outer layers. It is estimated that "myriads of Fieldfares annually cross" the North sea "to winter in the British Isles and Central Europe; and on one occasion a solitary straggler landed as far west as Iceland."

The Mallard or Wild Duck (*Anas boscas*) inhabits the whole of the Northern Hemisphere and is the ancestor of our domestic birds; it usually flies in groups of three to ten, and later in pairs; the smaller Gadwall (*A. strepera*) is also a British species, both are allied to the Common Sheldrake or Burrowduck. The Shoveller Duck (*Spatula clypeata*) like the Gadwall, is a winter visitor, usually arriving in September, and leaving us in April or May, it has a broader, more ungainly-looking beak than the Mallard. The Pochard (*Fuligula ferina*) arrives in October, and usually remains on the coast, returning in March or April, though some stay and breed here; other visiting species are the Scaup and Tufted Ducks. The Common Scoter (*Œdemia nigra*) and the Velvet Scoter (*Œ. fusca*) are also winter visitors. Four species of Mersanger are found in Britain, two as casual visitors, and one, the Red-breasted Mersanger (*Mergus serrator*) breeds regularly in Scotland and Ireland. The Widgeon or Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) also breeds in Scotland, it is known as the Whew-duck or Whewer, from its shrill whistle. The only resident Eider-Duck is the Common or True Eider (*Somateria mollissima*), but two other species are occasional visitors, while the Common Teal (*Querquedula crecca*), the Pintail and Golden-eye Ducks are well-known.

The Goose is a member of the Duck Family, and we have six British species, the Grey-lag Goose (*Anser cinereus*) the best known, and probably the ancestor of our domestic birds, the White-fronted Goose (*A. albifrons*), the Bean Goose (*A. segetum*), so-called from its favourite food, the Pink-footed Goose (*A. brachyrhynchus*) the Brent Goose (*Bernicla brenta*), and the Bernicle or Barnacle Goose (*B. lencopsis*), all but the first are winter visitors only. The Barnacle Goose was supposed in former times to be hatched from the Ship Barnacle, hence called the Goose-mussel, an old book actually gives illustrations of the trans

formation from barnacle to bird, tracing the origin of the shells themselves to “a certain spume or froth, that in time breedeth into certain shells, in shape like those of the muskle, but sharper pointed, and of a whitish colour.” From these the bird was developed till “it commeth to full maturitie, and falleth into the sea, where it gathereth feathers, and groweth to a fowle.”

> “So rotten planks of broken ships do change
> To Barnacles . . . .
> ’Twas first a green tree, then a broken hull,
> Lately a mushroom, now a flying gull.”

Another view was that the bird was the fruit of a tree growing by the sea-shore, or else developed from the fruit, hence it was known as the Tree-goose. The meaning of *Barnacle* is unknown, but *The Century Dictionary* suggests that the earliest Middle-English form of the word, *bernekkle*, “could be simply ‘bare-neck,’ with a possible allusion to the large white patches on the bird’s neck and head.”

The Goose is familiar to us from earliest days, from “Goosey goosey-gander” and the grey goose that “ran right round the hay-stack” to the grey goose-shaft of the archer and the useful goose-quill, not forgetting the historic birds that saved Rome, and the goose, that, according to Pliny, was the “constant companion of the peripatetic philosopher Lacydes,” while everyone of us, sometime or other, has participated in that provoking sport, a “wild-goose chase.” The custom of eating goose on Michaelmas Day is older than the time of Queen Elizabeth and the defeat of the Armada, for the practice existed in the reign of Edward IV., when it was customary to bring a goose for the lord’s dinner, and Gascoyne, in 1575, writes:

> “And when the tenauntes come to paie their quarter’s rent,
> They bringe some fowles at Midsummer, a dish of fish in Lent,
> At Christmasse a capon, at Michaelmas a goose,
> And somewhat else at New Yeares tide, for fear the lease flees loose.”

On the continent geese are eaten on St. Martin’s day (November 11th), and the Goose is known as St. Martin’s bird; it is said that, on being elected to his bishopric, St. Martin hid himself, but was discovered through a goose, and probably our Michaelmas goose was originally a Martinmas goose; other suggestions refer the custom to the ancient offerings made at this season both to Proserpine and to Odin, in which the goose figured.

During the greater part of the year the Greylag remains
[p 97]
near lakes, moors, or marshes, and here builds its nest of grass and flag; in winter Wild Geese unite in flocks and will then visit the coast. Anent the flight of these birds the Scots say:

> “Wild geese, wild geese, ganging to the sea,
> Good weather it will be;
> Wild geese, wild geese, ganging to this hill,
> The weather it will spill’.’ [sic]

When travelling some distance Geese fly at a considerable height in a double line, each bird behind but rather to the outside of its fellow, making a wedge, this formation enabling it to keep its eye on the single leader, an old gander at the head of the column; this leader being changed from time to time. It was probably the calling and sight of these flocks, which, white against the grey sky, present in their movements a stong [sic] resemblance to running dogs, that gave rise to the popular belief in the Gabriel Hounds, a spectral aerial pack which was thought to foretell disaster.[3] Since the draining of the fen district the Grey Lag Goose breeds only in Northern Scotland and the Hebrides, visiting Ireland in the winter.

The curious Death's-Head Hawk Moth (*Acherontia atropos*) emerges from its cocoon in October; it is the largest of British insects, often measuring five inches from wing to wing, and easily recognised by the cream-coloured skull-shaped mark on its back. The caterpillar, usually found on potato-plants, though sometimes on Buckthorn, is also large and of a bright green colour with blue diagonal stripes down the side, and the curious tail that is characteristic of the caterpillars of Hawk-Moths. When about to become a pupa the caterpillar buries itself eight or ten inches below the ground; both caterpillar and moth possess the curious power of squeaking when frightened or irritated, a power possessed also by the pupa. The pretty Marveil-du-Jour (*Agriopis aprilina*) is an autumn moth, the Scarce Marveil-du-Jour (*Moma Orion*) appears in summer. The second, and more numerous, brood of the Angle-Shades Moth (*Plogophora meticulosa*) appears in October, and the pretty little Many-plumed Moth is fond of entering our houses.

This month, too, sees the last generation of Green-Fly or Aphis, for the eggs laid now will not hatch till Spring. The Aphis has a most interesting life-history, for while some pass through
[p 98]
the ordinary stage of grub, pupa, and perfect insect, others are born in an almost mature state; the Spring and Autumn broods consist of males and females, and these pass through the larval stage, but the intervening generations, of females only, almost dispense with this, for, after changing their skins several times, they become mature and parents in their turn, so that it has been said that "its powers of reproduction are so incredibly great, and the rate of its multiplication so infinitely rapid, that parent, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-great-grandchildren, may all be found living and feeding together," and were it not for their numerous enemies, the world would be over-run by Aphides. Ants delight to feed on the sticky juice that exudes from the bodies of these tiny creatures, and will keep them near their nests, and actually "milk" what are known as their "cows" by stroking them with their antennæ.

Now

"Bright yellow, red, and orange
The leaves come down in hosts"

a thin layer of corky material has been formed at the base of each, and this not only prevents the sap circulating as before, but assists the leaf to drop at touch of wind or frost, leaving a slight scar but no wound. The new bud, formed during Spring and Summer, also helps to loosen the old leaf, which, quietly dropping to the ground, enriches the soil in its decay. The falling of

the leaf in temperate climates is necessary for the protection of the tree; for the amount of water lost by a plant through its leaves is very considerable, and in a dry season these will quickly shrivel, even in early Summer, whereas in a wet Autumn they will be retained much later, passing meanwhile through the most glorious changes of tint. The leaves of evergreeens and plants that grow in dry situations are furnished with a thick skin and few pores, to reduce evaporation of moisture, and can therefore resist prolonged heat or cold.

One of the earliest trees to lose its leaves is the Lime, closely followed by the Walnut, Horse Chestnut, Sycamore, Poplar, and Birch. The dark spots on the fading Sycamore leaf are a species of fungus. The Oak, Beech, and Hazel keep their foliage, though hanging brown and dead, for a considerable time, especially the first two. *The Shepherd's Kalendar* tells us that if in the fall of leaf in October many leaves wither on the bough and hang there it betokens a frosty winter and much snow. The Germans express the same belief in "Sitz das Laub in October noch fest auf

[p 99]

den Bäumen, so deuter das auf einen strengen Winter," and in Britain it is supposed that if Hips and Haws are plentiful a hard winter may be expected for "mony haws, mony snaws."

Now Dock, Spurge, and Herb Robert glow in crimson dress and beautiful are the curious berries of the Spindle-tree or Prickwood (*Euonymous europœus* [sic]), [sic]the fruit that in our autumn woodlands looks a flower," the orange capsule splitting when ripe and disclosing the scarlet fruit; these berries are known in France as Priests' Bonnets. The chequered fruit of the Wild Service Tree (*Pyrus torminalis*) may be distinguished from that of the White Beam (*P. aria*) by the fact that the former is spotted with brown and the latter with red. The Red Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos Uva-ursi*) has red fruit, the rare Black Bear-berry (*A. alpina*) black; the name is from the Greek, ἄρκος a bear, υταφυλή a bunch of grapes. Blackberries will soon be over, for in Ireland the devil has already "put his foot on them" at Michaelmas, and in England they are only safe till St. Martin's Day. In East Sussex the date is earlier, for here he "puts his paw" on them on the 1st of October, and in the western part of the county he "goes his rounds on the 10th, and spits on the blackberries, and if anyone picks them he won't see the year out."

The latest of our wild-flowers blooms this month, the Common Ivy (*Hedera helix*), and its greenish-yellow blossoms, rich in nectar, are highly prized by the fast-thinning ranks of insects. No less prized too, are the black berries, which, ripening after Hips and Haws have disappeared, furnish a welcome food supply for Missel-thrush, Woodpecker, and other birds. During the great Plague of London ivy-berries are said to have been employed, powdered with vinegar, as a sudorific, with good effect. The shepherd in *The Winter's Tale*, looking for his stray sheep, went down to the sea-shore, for "if anywhere I have them, 'tis by the sea-side, browzing of ivy" (*Act III., sc. 3*), and in the original from which Shakespeare took his play we read that the man "wandered downe toward the sea cliffes to see if perchaunce the sheepe was browsing on the sea ivy, whereon they greatly doe feede." Horses too, will eat it, as do Cows and Deer.

Ivy was sacred in Egypt to Osiris, and in Greece to Dionysus or Bacchus, said to have been protected by ivy from the lightning that slew his mother Semele; he is often represented as wearing a wreath of ivy-flowers, which garland also figures round the heads of his followers. This wreath, it was believed, would pre [sic]

[p 100]
vent intoxication and, in the same way, wine drunk out of a cup of ivy-wood was supposed to be innocuous. The bush that in former days was hung before the door of taverns, and to which Rosalind refers in the epilogue to *As You Like It*, "Good wine needs no bush," was usually of ivy, hence in Gascoigne's Glass of Government, 1575, we read, "Now-a-days the good wyne needeth none ivye garland." The badge of the clan Gordon and the well-known symbol of friendship, Ivy, from its connection with pagan rites, was inadmissible in Church decoration, and possibly, too, from its association with funerals, it was considered inappropriate even for secular buildings. We find references in various old carols to this effect, notably one in the Harleian MSS., which begins,

> "Nay, Ivy! nay, hyt shal not be I wys,
> Let Holy (hoolly) hafe the maystry, as the maner ys;
> Holy stond in the hall, fayre to behold,
> Ivy stond without the door, she ys ful sore acold.
> Nay, Ivy! nay, etc.
>
> Holy, and his merry men, they dawnsyn and they syng,
> Ivy and hur maydyns, they wepyn and they wryng.
> Nay, Ivy! nay, etc. [sic]

Among October fungi are the Blewits (*Agaricus personatus*) and the Amethyst or Blue-caps (*A. nudus*), the former growing on grass in open spaces, the latter among dead leaves in woods. Here, too, we may find the *Agaricus nebularis* or Dusky Caps. The Common Hedgehog Mushroom (*Hydnum repandum*), like the others of its genus, is also found in woods in September and October; some species, including the rare Tree Hedgehog (*H. erinaceum*) and Medusa's Head (*H. caput medusœ* [sic]) grow on the trunks of trees. The Jelly Hedgehog (*Tremellodon gelatinosum*) also grows on trees, as do the various species of Polyporus. *Polyporus versicolor* is probably the most common of British fungi; it grows in layers, each piece shaped into a rough segment of a circle, its dark greenish-brown surface is soft like velvet, and is marked with brown or orange lines. The Giant-tuft (*P. giganteus*) is larger, velvety also, brown above, lighter beneath; and the Dryad's Saddle (*P. squamosus*) is larger still.

The Inky Mushroom (*Coprinus atramentarius*) and the Brown Inky Mushroom (*C. fuscesceus*) are so-called because, after shedding their spores, they rapidly dissolve into an ink-like fluid; indeed, the liquid, mixed with gum-water, produces a genuine and permanent ink. But we must not linger among the fungi,
[p 101]
and only stop to notice one more specimen, the little dark-coloured *Craterellus cornucopioides*, which Mr. Cooke suggests might be called the Horn of Plenty. Almost hidden among dead leaves, it grows about three inches high, generally two or more together, the thin end of the horn in the ground. The spores are borne on the outer surface, and cause the greyish "bloom"-like appearance. Properly cleansed and cooked, it is said to make an excellent dish.

---

[1] Anglo-Saxon *knol*, Middle English *nol*, *nolle*, head.

[2] [sic]Winter fyllith appellabant composito novo nomine ab hyeme et plenilunis quia videlicet a plenilunis ejusdem mensis hyems sortireteur ititium."
Bede's *De Temporum Ratione*, cap. XIII.

[3] Those who have read Charles Reade's novel, *Put Yourself in his Place*, will recollect his introduction of this phenomenon.