

Literature, &c.

New Works.

FOREST DAYS, A ROMANCE OF OLD TIMES.

[During the last week we have perused this highly interesting New Work, by JAMES, from which we take the following extracts:]

A SCENE IN SHERWOOD FOREST, DURING THE DAYS OF ROBIN HOOD.

WHETHER planted by accident or design I know not, but at the side of one of the little savannahs I have described, where the grass was short and dry, six old oaks came forward from the rest of the wood, three on either hand, at the distance of about a forty feet apart, forming a sort of natural avenue. Their long branches stretched across and nearly met each other, and under this natural canopy was spread out the long table, prepared for the good Earl's repast; while from bough to bough above, crossing each other in various graceful sweeps, were innumerable garlands, forming a sort of net-work of forest flowers,—the board, too—let not the reader suppose that it was rude and bare, for it was covered with as fine linen as ever came from the looms of Ireland or Saxony. The board had a nosegay laid where every man was expected to sit, and the ground beneath was strewn with rushes and green leaves to make a soft resting place for the feet. Under the trees were gathered together the various groups of stout archers in their peculiar garb, with many a country girl from the neighbouring villages all in holiday apparel. A number of young countrymen, too, were present, showing that the rovers of the forest were at no great pains to conceal their places of meeting; for their lawless trade found favour in the eyes of the many; and their security depended as much upon the confidence and good-will of the lower orders, as upon the dissensions and disunions of the higher classes.

The first sight of the Earl and the outlaw caused not a little bustle amongst the companions of the latter. There was running here and there, and putting things in array; and it was very evident that, although expected and prepared for, everything was not quite ready when the Earl arrived.

'Give him good morrow—give the noble Earl good morrow!' cried the forester, putting his horn to his lips and waving his hand for a signal.

Every man followed his example, and in a moment the whole glades of the forest rang with the sound of the merry horn. Not a note was out of tune, no two were inharmonious, and, as with a long swell and fall, the mellow tones rose and died away, the effect in that wild yet beautiful scene was not a little striking and pleasant to the ear.

'Yeomanly! yeomanly! right yeomanly done!' cried Robin Hood. 'This is the way, my lord, that we receive a true friend to the English Commons and the good old Saxon blood. Will you please to dismount, and taste our cheer? If yonder cooks have not done their duty, and got all ready, I will fry them in their own grease, though I guess from their blazing log that they are behindhand.'

As he spoke, he fixed his eyes upon a spot, to which those of the Earl followed them, where a scene not quite harmonious with the poetry of the rest of the arrangements was going on, but one very satisfactory to the hungry stomachs of the Earl's retainers. An immense pile of blazing wood, fit to have roasted Hercules himself, was crackling and hissing and roaring so close to a distant angle of the wood, that the flames scorched the green leaves on the farther side. Beside it were some five men, in clean white jackets, running hastily about, and bustling sundry things of a very savoury odour, which by the contrivance of small chains and twisted strings, were made to revolve before the fire. Each man was glad enough to keep to windward of the blaze; and, even then, full many a time were they forced to run to a distance for cool air and free breath, for the heat was too intense for any one to endure it long without suffering the fate of the immense masses of meat which were turning before it.

About fifty yards from this burning mountain was a lesser volcano, from which, upon the primitive tripod of three long poles, hung sundry pots of vast dimensions, emitting steams very grateful to the nose; while, in a cool spot under the trees, appeared the no less pleasant sight of two large barrels, one twined round with a garland of young vine-leaves, and the other with a wreath of oak. A host of drinking cups, fit to serve an army, lay near them, and a man with a mallet was busily engaged in driving a spigot and faucet to give discreet vent to the liquor within.

'Ho! where is Little John?' cried Robin Hood—'a small friend of mine, my lord, whom you must know. What! Naylor! the master of our revels—where is he? By my life he is basting the cooks for not basting the capons! Hallo! friend John!—You will easily see, my lord, how he deserves his title.'

As he spoke, a yeoman, some six feet four in height, with shoulders that seemed as fit to carry the bull as the calf, a round head covered with nut-brown hair, and a face runnig over with fun and jest, came near and shook the Earl's proffered hand.

'We have met before, I believe, Little John,' said the Earl, 'and I think in as warm a feast-day as this!'

'Warmer, my lord, by a bucket full,' replied Naylor. 'One of those feasts where one is as likely to be carved as carve.'

'I recollect your face well,' said the Earl. John of Andeleys would recollect it better, my lord, if he could recollect any thing, poor

fellow,' answered the yeoman. 'When last he and I and you met together, he had got you by the throat, with his dagger through your avant-taille. I just tapped him on the head, to remind him not to do such things; and whether he went away or not I don't know, but if he did, he certainly did not carry his brains with him.'

'Ay, you did me good service there,' replied the Earl—'I should have lost an eye, at least. There's a jewel, my good friend,' he continued, taking a ring from his finger—'I won it with hard strokes myself, near Tripoli, and I give it to you for as good a blow as ever was struck by an English yeoman.'

'I'll set it in my cap, my lord,' replied Little John, 'and perhaps, some day—'

'Nay, now, no boasting, John!' cried Robin Hood, 'but let the Earl sit down to meat. It is the season, my good lord, when one strikes neither hart nor hare, when the partridge is free for her brood, and even the wild bustard runs unscathed. Thus, my good lord, I cannot give you forest cheer; otherwise, so help me Heaven, you should dine at the King's expense, while his majesty is revelling with my lord of Leicester. However, not being able to treat you as a yeoman, I will treat you as a baron; and if those good cooks do but their duty, no castle hall in all merry England shall show a better supper than your's this day.'

'I doubt it not, good Robin—I doubt it not!' replied the Earl, with a good-humoured laugh; 'you are Lord of Sherwood, and may hold your court of free-baron when you like. On my life, you have a peacock,' he continued, as a long train of men began to approach, bearing large wooden trenchers loaded with viands—'and the noble baron of beef too!'

'True, my lord, true!' replied Robin, 'I could not feast an earl, you know, without giving him a young peacock with his tail spread, nor receive your merry men honorably without a double sirloin from the best ox in the country. The beef's my own,' he continued, 'for I bought it with gold out of my purse; and the peacock's my own, for Little John gave it to me.'

'And how he came by it—you did not ask,' said the Earl smiling.

'Nay, why should I?' demanded Robin Hood in the same jesting tone; 'you would not have me doubt my man's honesty?'

'Heaven forbid!' replied the Earl; 'and I will claim a slice of the fair bird by the same title.'

'Come my Lord, come,' cried Robin, let us sit down. We have no salt cellar here, to make a distinction between highest and lowest,' he continued aloud; 'so let every man place himself where he can find room. Peaceably there—peaceably! Give seats to the women, and show yourselves courteous as knights. If there be not stools for all, there are platters for all, with meat to spare, and God made the green ground, you know, long before man made a settle. Here my lord, sit by me, and I will help you; and, as my chaplain is not here, I will give you a forest grace to your meat—Reverence my men—reverence!'

Each man stooped up, took off his hat, and crossed himself, and Robin Hood, bowing his head, and running the two parts of his sentence somewhat close together, though there was a slight pause between them, said, 'God give us his blessing—and let no man disturb us.'

We have given the words of the forester, as affording the best account of the arrangement of his party; and it is only necessary to add that about a third of the number of those present found seats upon the ground, while the rest placed themselves on stools round the table; and it is to be remarked that many of the village girls, who had come as guests, preferred the green sward, with a stout young bowman beside them, eating, as was then customary with lovers, out of the same dish.

As Robin had said, indeed, there was plenty of food for all; for, besides two gigantic barons of beef, there was many a roasted pig of tender age, capons, and fowls, and pigeons, a heron here and there, together with that most excellent of all ancient dishes, a bittern made into soup, while, in the centre of the table, was seen the peacock with his magnificent tail spread out.

Close by the herons, wherever they appeared, had been placed, by direction of Little John, who would have his jest at the long-legged fowl, large dishes of magnificent trout. 'There,' said the master of Robin Hood's revels, 'the ancient enemies sit side by side peaceably, to show that man's maw made friends of all things.'

There was no serving at the table of Robin Hood. The Earl's good yeomen fell as readily into the customs of Sherwood as their lord, and, sitting down pell-mell with the green-coated rangers, attacked the meat as soon as grace was said. The cooks themselves, when their function was done, and the dinner was dished up, took such places as they could find, and every man drawing forth an elace or dagger, as the case might be, assailed the dish that was before him, and helped his neighbours and himself. For some time a deep silence fell over the whole party, and less noise attended the proceeding than ever occurs now-a-days, for dishes and platters were all of wood, and the knives were encountered by no forks in those times, so that little clatter accompanied the operation either of carving or eating.

At the end of about ten minutes, some five or six of the younger men rose from various parts of the table, and made an excursion towards the barrels we have mentioned. They returned, loaded with large flaggons, and the only act of ceremony which took place was, that Little John himself, with a large black jack full of strong als in one hand, and a stoup of wine in the other, approached the Earl, while another brought a large silver cup, and offered him to drink. Thus refreshed, another attack upon the unresisting viands succeeded, after which more tankards of wine were set around for

every one to help himself as he liked. The juice of the grape seen had its effect so far as to quicken the movements of the tongue; and the jests and laughter, and, it must be said, noise also, became considerable.

From time to time the Earl and Robin Hood exchanged a word in a lower and more serious tone; but, in general, the old nobleman joined in gaily with the rest, with few words, indeed, and calm withal, but with a well-pleased smile, and with a frequent glance down each side of the table at the row of merry faces which surrounded him.

'Come, Pigmy, come!' cried Robin Hood; at length, addressing Little John, 'cheer us with a song, if thy portion of the baron have left thee any voice; but mind, no ribaldry, and as little impudence as may be.'

'Heaven deliver us!' cried Little John, 'I shall never be able to sing! I am like a city lady, who has just been called madam for the first time in her life, and somewhat faint with the smell of fat viands. Come, Billy of Southwell, fill me a cup of wine, for I must do our captain's bidding.'

And having taken a deed draught, he went on, in a voice of a fine tone, indeed, but loud enough, according to the whimsical thought of the poet, to

'Sweep the sear leaves off the trees,  
As if a storm pass'd by.'

SONG.

ROBIN HOOD AND THE GRINDER.

'Lythe and listen, my merry men all,  
Lythe and listen to me,  
Of a wonderful matter that once did befall  
Under the greenwood tree.

'Those who go out to catch are caught,  
As you shall presently hear;  
For bold Robin Hood once a lesson was taught  
Which well nigh had cost him dear.

'I'm going alone,' said Robin, one day—  
'I'm going alone, to see  
What sport I can make on the king's highway,  
For I am as good as three.

'Take any three men from Nottingham town,  
And set them all of a row,  
And if they bide my buffet and do not go down  
They shall set me up for a show.'

'Bold Robin went out and he met with a man,  
A grinder he was by trade;  
And 'Hillo! stand fast!' good Robin began,  
Bide here till the toll be paid.'

'Get out of my way, toll-taker, said he;  
'I'm a grinder, and one of hot blood,  
And I have a strap that should well leather thee,  
Wert thou even our bold Robin Hood!'

'Then Robin he took his stout staff in his hand,  
And struck at the grinder a blow,  
But he jumped aside, and his running wheel-band  
O'er Robin's two shoulders did throw.

'With a tug at the end, and a twitch at the buckle,  
He pull'd it down over his wrists—  
I know not if Robin's forgotten his knuckle,  
But he left him the sign of his fists.

'Good luck for bold Robin!—the grinder took fright  
At three yeoman, who came from the wood,  
Or right sure he'd have pummell'd him on  
Until night,  
And made jelly of bold Robin Hood!'

Robin laughed heartily at the song; and turning to the Earl, he said—'If men should ever talk of me after I am dead, they'll take my character from you knave's songs. But come, my lord, I'll give you one myself, to another tune.'

SONG.

MERRY ENGLAND.

'Ho, merry England! merry England, ho!  
The crimson grape grows ruddy in fair France;  
The rich juices from the wine-cup flow,  
There beat the timely feet in merry dance.  
But give me back the bower,  
Where pass'd youth's jocular hour—  
Ho, merry England! merry England, ho!

'Ho, merry England! merry England, ho!  
Light fills the skies, and gilds the fields of Spain;  
Orange and olive, thyme and myrtle grow  
O'er purple hill and perfume-breathing plain;  
But give to me the glade  
And twinkling forest shade,  
Of merry England! merry England, ho!

'Ho, merry England! merry England, ho!  
Bright shines the sun on the Italian shore,  
And art and nature gain a brighter glow  
From memories of greatness gone before;  
But my dear island home  
Veils not the crest to Rome,  
Ho, merry England, merry England, ho!

'Ho, merry England, merry England, ho!  
Thy hills, and dells, and groves,  
Are full of brighter things than other lands:  
Glorious remembrances, and happy loves,  
And hearts sincere, and true and honest hands.  
There let my life go by,  
And my grave, when I die,  
Be merry England, merry England, ho!

It seemed to be a favorite song with the outlaw, and also with his companions, for at the close of each stanza they took up the refrain of

'Ho, merry England, merry England, ho!  
And singing it to a wild though very simple minor air, produced a powerful effect upon their hearers, and upon each other. When they had

done, and their leader poured out some wine, saying, 'Pledge us a cup my lord the Earl, in wine—better than which Gascony never produced—to that dear mother-land for which we have bled, or are willing to bleed. Here's to merry England!'

The Earl willingly drunk the toast; and after a few words more, he said, in a low voice, to his companion, 'I fear I must mar your merriment, Robin, by departure. I am anxious for tidings, and have perhaps delayed somewhat too long already. I know that letters must be waiting for me, and they may need an instant answer.'

'Seek them at Nottingham my lord, at all events,' replied the forester; 'aware of the trap they had laid for you there, I have already sent out people to stay any messengers D'Montford may have dispatched to you, and bid them turn aside to the little village of Stapleford.—There you will find them if at all. Yet I would fain have you remain here an hour or two longer; for, in the course of this night, I myself expect tidings by a sure hand and a nearer way.'

'I will leave either the priest or my good yeoman, Blawket, with you,' said the Earl, in a low tone. 'Both are to be trusted.'

'The priest!' exclaimed Robin Hood, 'God bless his reverence, I forgot, and took his trade out of his hand. I must add a pater-noster to-night, when he is at the table; but, in good truth, I forgot quite forgot him.—Blawket must do, I fear, my lord; but yet I could have wished to have some one with me whom I could consult in case of need; for I too, may have to act at a moment's warning, and may require to arrange some plan for joining you speedily, which I could not do with either the yeoman or the priest. Still I suppose you are right, and had better proceed.'

'Hark!' cried the Earl, and after a momentary pause, he added, 'I thought I heard the blast of a horn at a great distance; perhaps it is your messenger.'

'No,' replied the outlaw, 'I heard it too, but it came from the east. I have scouts out that way. Some one must be riding Sherwood worthy of notice. We shall soon know more. Silence, my men, silence.—There is a horn, I think, from the ash tree covert.'

All was instantly still, and for rather more than a minute no one spoke. But patience began to grow weary, and one or two at the lower end of the table were beginning to say an occasional word to their neighbour in a low tone, when the horn again sounded, much nearer than before, and Little John started up, exclaiming 'That's Kaeller's blast at the hollow oak on Mostyn's Edge!'

'Look to your bows, my merry men,' cried Robin Hood; 'whoever it is, he comes this way fast. We may have to show the Earl some of our habits of life.'

Every man now rose from the table at once; the implements of archery (which were hung upon, or leaning against, several of the trees around) were hastily resumed, the bows were strung, and an arrow or two fitted to the string. In about five minutes more, another horn sounded, not many hundred yards from the spot where the tables were laid. The country girls ran to the other side of the green, although they were told not to be afraid; and the old Earl separating his followers from the rest, bade each man have his hand upon his bridle, ready to mount and take whatever part might seem needful; when gradually the sound of horses' feet coming at a quick pace became distinct, and, after a short pause of expectation, Hugh of Monthermer, with four or five servants, somewhat heated and travel-stained, rode into the little open space, suddenly halted as if in wonder at the scene which met their sight.

AN ESCAPE FROM PRISON.

It was an hour past midnight—the sentries had just been relieved upon the castle wall—and Hugh de Monthermer sat by the window, looking out into the depth of night, and gazing at the far twinkling of the stars. The mind was occupied in the same manner as the body, for it was looking forth into the dark night of death, and marking the small bright shining lights from heaven, that tell of other worlds beyond.

His fate had been announced to him—that he had been judged and condemned without his presence—and that the first ray of the morning sun was to witness his death. He had solemnly appealed against the sentence, telling Lord Pembroke, who had brought the announcement thereof, that such a deed was mere murder. Neither had he left anything undone that behoved him to do, to check the base purposes of his enemies, by apprehensions of after retribution.

But they scoffed at his threats, and heeded not his remonstrances, justifying the illegal course they pursued by declaring that he had been taken in the act of treason. All communication was denied him with the world without, and even the materials for writing were refused—perhaps to guard against the chance of his doom being made known to others who might interfere to stay the execution, or, perhaps, to prevent him from recording for after times the iniquity that was about to be committed. A priest was promised him in the morning; but in the meanwhile he remained in solitude. He heard his good yeoman, Blawket, driven back from the door by the guards; and, with nought but his own thoughts to comfort and console him, he sat preparing himself for the grave as best he might.

How often had he met the abhorred enemy, Death, in the battle-field! How often had he staked life's bright jewel on the chances of an hour! How often had fate seemed near at hand in the burning march through the barren sands of the east, and in the deadly pestilence! But in all these shapae had the grim inevitable Lord of the grave seemed less terrible than