



GYPSIES.

What's that to absolute freedom, such as the very beggars have ; to feast and revel here to-day, and yonder to-morrow ; next day where they please ; and so on still, the whole country or kingdom over ? There's liberty ! the birds of the air can take no more.

JOVIAL CREW.

SINCE the meeting with the gypsies, which I have related in a former paper, I have observed several of them haunting the purlieus of the Hall, in spite of a positive interdiction of the squire. They are part of a gang that has long kept about this neighborhood, to

170

the great annoyance of the farmers, whose poultry-yards often suffer from their nocturnal invasions. They are, however, in some measure, patronized by the squire, who considers the race as belonging to the good old times ; which, to confess the private truth, seem to have abounded with good-for-nothing characters.

This roving crew is called "Starlight Tom's Gang," from the name of its chieftain, a notorious poacher. I have heard repeatedly of the misdeeds of this "minion of the moon ;" for every midnight depredation that takes place in park, or fold, or farm-yard, is laid to his charge. Starlight Tom, in fact, answers to his name ; he seems to walk in darkness, and, like a fox, to be traced in the morning by the mischief he has done. He reminds me of that fearful personage in the nursery rhyme :

"Who goes round the house at night ?
None but bloody Tom !
Who steals all the sheep at night ?
None but one by one !"

In short, Starlight Tom is the scapegoat of the neighborhood ; but so cunning and adroit,

that there is no detecting him. Old Christy and the gamekeeper have watched many a night in hopes of entrapping him ; and, Christy often patrols the park with his dogs, for the purpose, but all in vain. It is said that the squire winks hard at his misdeeds, having an indulgent feeling towards the vagabond, because of his being very expert at all kinds of games, a great shot with the cross-bow, and the best morris dancer in the country.

The squire also suffers the gang to lurk unmolested about the skirts of his estate, on condition that they do not come about the house. The approaching wedding, however, has made a kind of Saturnalia at the Hall, and has caused a suspension of all sober rule. It has produced a great sensation throughout the female part of the household ; not a housemaid but dreams of wedding favors, and has a husband running in her head. Such a time is a harvest for the gypsies ; there is a public footpath leading across one part of the park, by which they have free ingress, and they are continually hovering about the grounds, telling the servant girls' fortunes, or getting smuggled in to the young ladies.

I believe the Oxonian amuses himself very

much by furnishing them with hints in private, and bewildering all the weak brains in the house with their wonderful revelations. The general certainly was very much astonished by the communications made to him the other evening by the gypsy girl : he kept a wary silence towards us on the subject, and affected to treat it lightly ; but I have noticed that he has since redoubled his attentions to Lady Lillycraft and her dogs.

I have seen also Phoebe Wilkins, the housekeeper's pretty and love-sick niece, holding a long conference with one of these old sibyls behind a large tree in the avenue, and often looking round to see that she was not observed. I make no doubt that she was endeavoring to get some favorable augury about the result of her love quarrel with young Ready-Money, as oracles have always been more consulted on love affairs than upon anything else. I fear, however, that in this instance the response was not so favorable as usual, for I perceived poor Phoebe returning pensively towards the house ; her head hanging down, her hat in her hand, and the ribbon trailing along the ground.

At another time, as I turned a corner of a terrace, at the bottom of the garden, just by

a clump of trees, and a large stone urn, I came upon a bevy of the young girls of the family, attended by this same Phoebe Wilkins. I was at a loss to comprehend the meaning of their blushing and giggling, and their apparent agitation, until I saw the red cloak of a gypsy



vanishing among the shrubbery. A few moments after, I caught sight of Master Simon and the Oxonian stealing along one of the walks of the garden, chuckling and laughing at their successful waggery ; having evidently put the gypsy up to the thing, and instructed her what to say.

After all, there is something strangely pleasing in these tamperings with the future, even where we are convinced of the fallacy of the prediction. It is singular how willingly the mind will half deceive itself, and with what a degree of awe we will listen even to these babblers about futurity. For my part, I cannot feel angry with these poor vagabonds, that seek to deceive us into bright hopes and expectations. I have always been something of a castle-builder, and have found my liveliest pleasures to arise from the illusions which fancy has cast over commonplace realities. As I get on in life I find it more difficult to deceive myself in this delightful manner ; and I should be thankful to any prophet, however false, that would conjure the clouds which hang over futurity into palaces, and all its doubtful regions into fairyland.

The squire, who, as I have observed, has a private good will towards gypsies, has suffered considerable annoyance on their account. Not that they requite his indulgence with ingratitude, for they do not depredate very flagrantly on his estate ; but because their pilferings and misdeeds occasion loud murmurs in the village. I can readily understand the old gentleman's humor on this point ; I

have a great toleration for all kinds of vagrant, sunshiny existence, and must confess I take a pleasure in observing the ways of gypsies. The English, who are accustomed to them from childhood, and often suffer from their petty depredations, consider them as mere nuisances ; but I have been very much struck with their peculiarities. I like to behold their clear olive complexions, their romantic black eyes, their raven locks, their lithe, slender figures, and to hear them, in low, silver tones, dealing forth magnificent promises of honors and estates, of world's worth, and ladies' love.

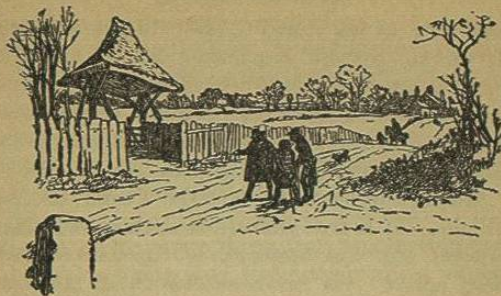
Their mode of life, too, has something in it very fanciful and picturesque. They are the free denizens of nature, and maintain a primitive independence, in spite of law and gospel ; of county jails and country magistrates. It is curious to see the obstinate adherence to the wild, unsettled habits of savage life transmitted from generation to generation, and preserved in the midst of one of the most cultivated, populous, and systematic countries in the world. They are totally distinct from the busy, thrifty people about them. They seem to be like the Indians of America, either above or below the ordinary

cares and anxieties of mankind. Heedless of power, of honors, of wealth ; and indifferent to the fluctuations of the times, the rise or fall of grain, or stock, or empires, they seem to laugh at the toiling, fretting world around them, and to live according to the philosophy of the old song :

“ Who would ambition shun,
And loves to lie i' the sun,
Seeking the food he eats,
And pleased with what he gets,
Come hither, come hither, come hither ;
Here shall he see
No enemy,
But winter and rough weather.”

In this way they wander from county to county, keeping about the purlieus of villages, or in plenteous neighborhoods, where there are fat farms and rich country seats. Their encampments are generally made in some beautiful spot ; either a green shady nook of a road ; or on the border of a common, under a sheltering hedge ; or on the skirts of a fine spreading wood. They are always to be found lurking about fairs and races, and rustic gatherings, wherever there is pleasure, and throng, and idleness. They are the oracles of milkmaids and simple serving girls ;

and sometimes have even the honor of perusing the white hands of gentlemen's daughters, when rambling about their father's grounds. They are the bane of good housewives and thrifty farmers, and odious in the eyes of country justices ; but, like all other vagabond beings, they have something to commend them to the fancy. They are among the last traces, in these matter-of-fact days, of the motley population of former times ; and are whimsically associated in my mind with fairies and witches, Robin Goodfellow, Robin Hood, and the other fantastical personages of poetry.



VILLAGE WORTHIES.

Nay, I tell you, I am so well beloved in our town, that not the worst dog in the street would hurt my little finger.

COLLIER OF CROYDON.

As the neighboring village is one of those out-of-the-way, but gossiping little places, where a small matter makes a great stir, it is not to be supposed that the approach of a festival like that of May-Day can be regarded with indifference, especially since it is made a matter of such moment by the great folks at the Hall. Master Simon, who is the faithful factotum of the worthy squire, and jumps with his humor in everything, is frequent

just now in his visits to the village, to give directions for the impending fete ; and as I have taken the liberty occasionally of accompanying him, I have been enabled to get some insight into the characters and internal politics of this very sagacious little community.

Master Simon is in fact the Cæsar of the village. It is true the squire is the protecting power, but his factotum is the active and busy agent. He intermeddles in all its concerns, is acquainted with all the inhabitants and their domestic history, gives counsel to the old folks in their business matters, and the young folks in their love affairs, and enjoys the proud satisfaction of being a great man in a little world.

He is the dispenser, too, of the squire's charity, which is bounteous ; and, to do Master Simon justice, he performs this part of his functions with great alacrity. Indeed I have been entertained with the mixture of bustle, importance, and kindheartedness which he displays. He is of too vivacious a temperament to comfort the afflicted by sitting down moping and whining and blowing noses in concert ; but goes whisking about like a sparrow, chirping consolation into every hole and corner of the village. I have seen an old

woman, in a red cloak, hold him for half an hour together with some long phthisical tale of distress, which Master Simon listened to with many a bob of the head, smack of his dog-whip, and other symptoms of impatience, though he afterwards made a most faithful and circumstantial report of the case to the squire. I have watched him, too, during one of his pop visits into the cottage of a superannuated villager, who is a pensioner of the squire, when he fidgeted about the room without sitting down, made many excellent off-hand reflections with the old invalid, who was propped up in his chair, about the shortness of life, the certainty of death, and the necessity of preparing for "that awful change"; quoted several texts of Scripture very incorrectly, but much to the



edification of the cottager's wife ; and on coming out pinched the daughter's rosy cheek, and wondered what was in the young men, that such a pretty face did not get a husband.

He has also his cabinet councillors in the village, with whom he is very busy just now, preparing for the May-Day ceremonies. Among these is the village tailor, a pale-faced fellow, that plays the clarionet in the church choir ; and, being a great musical genius, has frequent meetings of the band at his house, where they "make night hideous" by their concerts. He is, in consequence, high in favor with Master Simon ; and, through his influence, has the making, or rather marring, of all the liveries of the Hall ; which generally look as though they had been cut out by one of those scientific tailors of the Flying Island of Laputa, who took measure of their customers with a quadrant. The tailor, in fact, might rise to be one of the monied men of the village, was he not rather too prone to gossip, and keep holidays, and give concerts, and blow all his substance, real and personal, through his clarionet, which literally keeps him poor both in body and estate. He has for the present thrown by all his regular work, and suffered the breeches of the

village to go unmade and unmended, while he is occupied in making garlands of parti-colored rags, in imitation of flowers, for the decoration of the May-pole.

Another of Master Simon's councillors is the apothecary, a short, and rather fat man, with a pair of prominent eyes, that diverge



like those of a lobster. He is the village wise man ; very sententious ; and full of profound remarks on shallow subjects. Master Simon often quotes his sayings, and mentions him as rather an extraordinary man ; and even consults him occasionally in desperate cases of the dogs and horses. Indeed he seems

to have been overwhelmed by the apothecary's philosophy, which is exactly one observation deep, consisting of indisputable maxims, such as may be gathered from the mottoes of tobacco boxes. I had a specimen of his philosophy in my very first conversation with him ; in the course of which he observed, with great solemnity and emphasis, that " man is a compound of wisdom and folly ;" upon which Master Simon, who had hold of my arm, pressed very hard upon it, and whispered in my ear, " That's a devilish shrewd remark !"



There will no mosse stick to the stone of Sisiphus, no grasse hang on the heels of Mercury, no butter cleave on the bread of a traveller. For as the eagle at every flight loseth a feather, which maketh her bauld in her age, so the traveller in every country loseth some fleece, which maketh him a beggar in his youth, by buying that for a pound which he cannot sell again for a penny.—repentance.

LILLY'S EUPHUES.

AMONG the worthies of the village, that enjoy the peculiar confidence of Master Simon, is one who has struck my fancy so much that I have thought him worthy of a separate notice. It is Slingsby, the schoolmaster, a thin, elderly man, rather threadbare and slovenly, somewhat indolent in manner, and with an easy, good-humored look, not often met with in his craft. I have been interested in his favor by a few anecdotes which I have picked up concerning him.

He is a native of the village, and was a contemporary and playmate of Ready-Money Jack in the days of their boyhood. Indeed, they carried on a kind of league of mutual good offices. Slingsby was rather puny, and withal somewhat of a coward, but very apt at his learning; Jack, on the contrary, was a bully boy out of doors, but a sad laggard at his books. Slingsby helped Jack, therefore, to all his lessons: Jack fought all Slingsby's battles; and they were inseparable friends. This mutual kindness continued even after they left school, notwithstanding the dissimilarity of their characters. Jack took to ploughing and reaping, and prepared himself to till his paternal acres; while the other loitered negligently on in the path of learning, until he penetrated even into the confines of Latin and mathematics.

In an unlucky hour, however, he took to reading voyages and travels, and was smitten with a desire to see the world. This desire increased upon him as he grew up; so, early one bright, sunny morning, he put all his effects in a knapsack, slung it on his back, took staff in hand, and called in his way take leave of his early schoolmate. Jack was just going out with the plough: the friends shook

hands over the farm-house gate; Jack drove his team afield, and Slingsby whistled "Over the hills, and far away," and sallied forth gayly "to seek his fortune."

Years and years passed by, and young Tom Slingsby was forgotten; when, one mellow Sunday afternoon in autumn, a thin man, somewhat advanced in life, with a coat out at elbows, a pair of old nankeen gaiters, and a few things tied in a handkerchief and slung on the end of a stick, was seen loitering through the village. He appeared to regard several houses attentively, to peer into the windows that were open, to eye the villagers wistfully as they returned from church, and then to pass some time in the churchyard, reading the tombstones.

At length he found his way to the farm-house of Ready-Money Jack, but paused ere he attempted the wicket; contemplating the picture of substantial independence before him. In the porch of the house sat Ready-Money Jack, in his Sunday dress, with his hat upon his head, his pipe in his mouth, and his tankard before him, the monarch of all he surveyed. Beside him lay his fat house-dog. The varied sounds of poultry were heard from the well-stocked farm-yard; the bees

hummed from their hives in the garden ; the cattle lowed in the rich meadow : while the crammed barns and ample stacks bore proof of an abundant harvest.

The stranger opened the gate and advanced dubiously towards the house. The mastiff growled at the sight of the suspicious-looking intruder, but was immediately silenced by his master, who, taking his pipe from his mouth, awaited with inquiring aspect the address of this equivocal personage. The stranger eyed old Jack for a moment, so portly in his dimensions, and decked out in gorgeous apparel ; then cast a glance upon his own threadbare and starveling condition, and the scanty bundle which he held in his hand ; then giving his shrunk waistcoat a twitch to make it meet his receding waistband ; and casting another look, half sad, half humorous at the sturdy yeoman, " I suppose," said he, " Mr. Tibbets, you have forgot old times and old playmates ? "

The latter gazed at him with scrutinizing look, but acknowledged that he had no recollection of him.

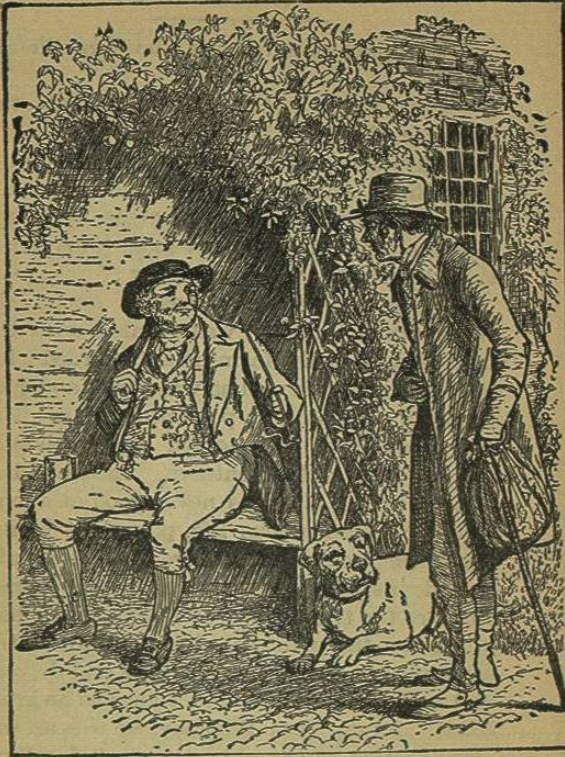
" Like enough, like enough," said the stranger ; " everybody seems to have forgotten poor Slingsby ? "

" Why, no sure ! it can't be Tom Slingsby ? "

" Yes, but it is, though ! " replied the stranger, shaking his head.

Ready-Money Jack was on his feet in a twinkling ; thrust out his hand, gave his ancient crony the gripe of a giant, and slapping the other hand on a bench, " Sit down there," cried he, " Tom Slingsby ! "

A long conversation ensued about old times, while Slingsby was regaled with the best cheer that the farm-house afforded ; for he was hungry as well as wayworn, and had the keen appetite of a poor pedestrian. The early playmates then talked over their subsequent lives and adventures. Jack had but little to relate, and was never good at a long story. A prosperous life, passed at home, has little incident for narrative ; it is only poor devils, that are tossed about the world, that are the true heroes of story. Jack had stuck by the paternal farm, followed the same plough that his forefathers had driven, and had waxed richer and richer as he grew older. As to Tom Slingsby, he was an exemplification of the old proverb, " A rolling stone gathers no moss." He had sought his fortune about the world, without ever find-



"Why, no sure! it can't be Tom Slingsby?"—PAGE 189.

ing it, being a thing oftener found at home than abroad. He had been in all kinds of situations, and had learned a dozen different modes of making a living; but had found his way back to his native village rather poorer than when he left it, his knapsack having dwindled down to a scanty bundle.

As luck would have it, the squire was passing by the farm-house that very evening, and called there, as is often his custom. He found the two schoolmates still gossiping in the porch, and, according to the good old Scottish song, "taking a cup of kindness yet, for auld lang syne." The squire was struck by the contrast in appearance and fortunes of these early playmates. Ready-Money Jack, seated in lordly state, surrounded by the good things of this life, with golden guineas hanging to his very watch chain, and the poor pilgrim Slingsby, thin as a weasel, with all his worldly effects, his bundle, hat, and walking-staff, lying on the ground beside him.

The good squire's heart warmed towards the luckless cosmopolite, for he is a little prone to like such half-vagrant characters. He cast about in his mind how he should contrive once more to anchor Slingsby in his

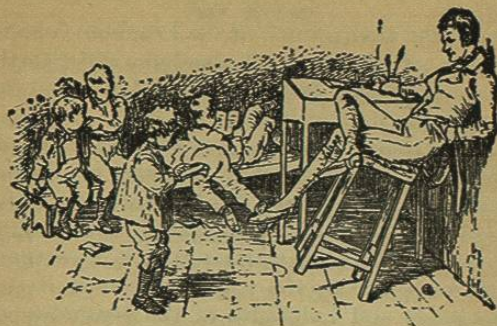
native village. Honest Jack had already offered him a present shelter under his roof, in spite of the hints, and winks, and half remonstrances of the shrewd Dame Tibbets ; but how to provide for his permanent maintenance was the question. Luckily the squire bethought himself that the village school was without a teacher. A little further conversation convinced him that Slingsby was as fit for that as for anything else, and in a day or two he was seen swaying the rod of empire in the very school-house where he had often been horsed in the days of his boyhood.

Here he has remained for several years, and being honored by the countenance of the squire, and the fast friendship of Mr. Tibbets, he has grown into much importance and consideration in the village. I am told, however, that he still shows, now and then, a degree of restlessness, and a disposition to rove abroad again, and see a little more of the world ; an inclination which seems particularly to haunt him about spring-time. There is nothing so difficult to conquer as the vagrant humor, when once it has been fully indulged.

Since I have heard these anecdotes of poor

Slingsby, I have more than once mused upon the picture presented by him and his school-mate Ready-Money Jack, on their coming together again after so long a separation. It is difficult to determine between lots in life, where each is attended with its peculiar discontents. He who never leaves his home repines at his monotonous existence, and envies the traveller, whose life is a constant tissue of wonder and adventure ; while he, who is tossed about the world, looks back with many a sigh to the safe and quiet shore which he has abandoned. I cannot help thinking, however, that the man that stays at home, and cultivates the comforts and pleasures daily springing up around him, stands the best chance for happiness. There is nothing so fascinating to a young mind as the idea of travelling ; and there is very witchcraft in the old phrase found in every nursery tale, of "going to seek one's fortune." A continual change of place, and change of object, promises a continual succession of adventure and gratification of curiosity. But there is a limit to all our enjoyments, and every desire bears its death in its very gratification. Curiosity languishes under repeated stimulants novelties cease to excite

surprise, until at length we cannot wonder even at a miracle. He who has sallied forth into the world, like poor Slingsby, full of sunny anticipations, finds too soon how different the distant scene becomes when visited. The smooth place roughens as he approaches; the wild place becomes tame and barren; the fairy tints that beguiled him on still fly to the distant hill, or gather upon the land he has left behind, and every part of the landscape seems greener than the spot he stands on.



THE SCHOOL.

But to come down from great men and higher matters to my little children and poor school-house again; I will, God willing, go forward orderly, as I proposed, to instruct children and young men both for learning and manners.

ROGER ASCHAM.

HAVING given the reader a slight sketch of the village schoolmaster, he may be curious to learn something concerning his school. As the squire takes much interest in the education of the neighboring children, he put into the hands of the teacher, on first installing him in office, a copy of Roger Ascham's Schoolmaster, and advised him, moreover, to

con over that portion of old Peachum which treats of the duty of masters, and which condemns the favorite method of making boys wise by flagellation.

He exhorted Slingsby not to break down or depress the free spirit of the boys by harshness and slavish fear, but to lead them freely and joyously on in the path of knowledge, making it pleasant and desirable in their eyes. He wished to see the youth trained up in the manners and habitudes of the peasantry of the good old times, and thus to lay the foundation for the accomplishment of his favorite object, the revival of old English customs and character. He recommended that all the ancient holidays should be observed, and that the sports of the boys, in their hours of play, should be regulated according to the standard authorities laid down by Strutt; a copy of whose invaluable work, decorated with plates, was deposited in the school-house. Above all, he exhorted the pedagogue to abstain from the use of birch, an instrument of instruction which the good squire regards with abhorrence, as fit only for the coercion of brute natures, that cannot be reasoned with.

Mr. Slingsby has followed the squire's in-

structions to the best of his disposition and abilities. He never flogs the boys, because he is too easy, good-humored a creature to inflict pain on a worm. He is bountiful in holidays, because he loves holidays himself, and has a sympathy with the urchins' impatience of confinement, from having divers times experienced its irksomeness during the time that he was seeing the world. As to sports and pastimes, the boys are faithfully exercised in all that are on record,—quoits, races, prison-bars, tipcat, trap-ball, bandy-ball, wrestling, leaping, and what not. The only misfortune is, that having banished the birch, honest Slingsby has not studied Roger Ascham sufficiently to find out a substitute, or rather he has not the management in his nature to apply one; his school, therefore, though one of the happiest, is one of the most unruly in the country; and never was a pedagogue more liked, or less heeded, by his disciples than Slingsby.

He has lately taken a coadjutor worthy of himself, being another stray sheep that has returned to the village fold. This is no other than the son of the musical tailor, who had bestowed some cost upon his education, hoping to see him one day arrive at the dig-

nity of an exciseman, or at least of a parish clerk. The lad grew up, however, as idle and musical as his father ; and, being captivated by the drum and fife of a recruiting party, he followed them off to the army. He re-



turned not long since, out of money, and out at elbows, the prodigal son of the village. He remained for some time lounging about the place in half-tattered soldier's dress, with a foraging cap on one side of his head, jerk-

ing stones across the brook, or loitering about the tavern door, a burthen to his father, and regarded with great coldness by all warm householders.

Something, however, drew honest Slingsby towards the youth. It might be the kindness he bore to his father, who is one of the school-master's greatest cronies ; it might be that secret sympathy, which draws men of vagrant propensities towards each other ; for there is something truly magnetic in the vagabond feeling ; or it might be, that he remembered the time when he himself had come back, like this youngster, a wreck to his native place. At any rate, whatever the motive, Slingsby drew towards the youth. They had many conversations in the village tap-room about foreign parts, and the various scenes and places they had witnessed during their wayfaring about the world. The more Slingsby talked with him, the more he found him to his taste, and finding him almost as learned as himself, he forthwith engaged him as an assistant or usher in the school.

Under such admirable tuition, the school, as may be supposed, flourishes apace ; and if the scholars do not become versed in all the holiday accomplishments of the good old

times, to the squire's heart's content, it will not be the fault of their teachers. The prodigal son has become almost as popular among the boys as the pedagogue himself. His instructions are not limited to school hours; and having inherited the musical taste and talents of his father, he has bitten the whole school with the mania. He is a great hand at beating a drum, which is often heard rumbling from the rear of the school-house. He is teaching half the boys of the village, also, to play the fife, and the pandean pipes; and they weary the whole neighborhood with their vague piping, as they sit perched on stiles, or loitering about the barn-doors in the evening. Among the other exercises of the school, also, he has introduced the ancient art of archery, one of the squire's favorite themes, with such success, that the whipsters roam in truant bands about the neighborhood, practising with their bows and arrows upon the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field; and not unfrequently making a foray into the squire's domains, to the great indignation of the gamekeepers. In a word, so completely are the ancient English customs and habits cultivated at this school, that I should not be surprised if the

squire should live to see one of his poetic visions realized, and a brood reared up, worthy successors to Robin Hood and his merry gang of outlaws.

