



A VILLAGE POLITICIAN.

I am a rogue if I do not think I was designed for the helm of state ; I am so full of nimble stratagems, that I should have ordered affairs, and carried it against the stream of a faction, with as much ease as a skipper would laver against the wind.—THE GOBLINS.

IN one of my visits to the village with Master Simon, he proposed that we should stop at the inn, which he wished to show me, as a specimen of a real country inn, the head-quarters of village gossip. I had remarked it before, in my perambulations about the place. It was a deep, old fashioned porch, leading into a large hall, which serves for tap-room and travellers' room ; having a wide fireplace, with high-backed settles on

each side, where the wise men of the village gossip over their ale, and hold their sessions during the long winter evenings. The landlord is an easy, indolent fellow, shaped a little like one of his own beer barrels, and is apt to stand gossiping at his door, with his wig on one side, and his hands in his pockets, whilst his wife and daughter attend to customers. His wife, however, is fully competent to manage the establishment ; and, indeed, from long habitude, rules over all the frequenters of the tap-room as completely as if they were her dependents instead of her patrons. Not a veteran ale-bibber but pays homage to her, having, no doubt, been often in her arrears. I have already hinted that she is on very good terms with Ready-Money Jack. He was a sweetheart of hers in early life, and has always countenanced the tavern on her account. Indeed, he is quite "the cock of the walk" at the tap-room.

As we approached the inn, we heard some one talking with great volubility, and distinguished the ominous words "taxes," "poor's rates," and "agricultural distress." It proved to be a thin, loquacious fellow, who had penned the landlord up in one corner of the porch, with his hands in his pockets, as

usual, listening with an air of the most vacant acquiescence.

The sight seemed to have a curious effect on Master Simon, as he squeezed my arm, and, altering his course, sheered wide of the porch as though he had not had any idea of entering. This evident evasion induced me to notice the orator more particularly. He was meagre, but active in his make, with a long, pale, bilious face; a black, ill-shaven beard, a feverish eye, and a hat sharpened up at the sides into a most pragmatistical shape. He had a newspaper in his hand, and seemed to be commenting on its contents, to the thorough conviction of mine host.

At sight of Master Simon the landlord was evidently a little flurried, and began to rub his hands, edge away from his corner, and make several profound publican bows; while the orator took no other notice of my companion than to talk rather louder than before, and with, as I thought, something of an air of defiance. Master Simon, however, as I have before said, sheered off from the porch, and passed on, pressing my arm within his, and whispering as we got by, in a tone of awe and horror, "That's a radical! he reads Cobbett!"

I endeavored to get a more particular account of him from my companion, but he seemed unwilling even to talk about him, answering only in general terms, that he was "a cursed busy fellow, that had a confounded trick of talking, and was apt to bother one about the national debt, and such nonsense;" from which I suspected that Master Simon had been rendered wary of him by some accidental encounter on the field of argument; for these radicals are continually roving about in quest of wordy warfare, and never so happy as when they can tilt a gentleman logician out of his saddle.

On subsequent enquiry my suspicions have been confirmed. I find the radical has but recently found his way into the village, where he threatens to commit fearful devastations with his doctrines. He has already made two or three complete converts, or new lights; has shaken the faith of several others; and has grievously puzzled the brains of many of the oldest villagers, who had never thought about politics, or scarce anything else, during their whole lives.

He is lean and meagre from the constant restlessness of mind and body; worrying about with newspapers and pamphlets in his

pockets, which he is ready to pull out on all occasions. He has shocked several of the staunchest villagers by talking lightly of the squire and his family ; and hinting that it would be better the park should be cut up into small farms and kitchen gardens, or feed good mutton instead of worthless deer.



He is a great thorn in the side of the squire, who is sadly afraid that he will introduce politics into the village, and turn it into an unhappy, thinking community. He is a still greater grievance to Master Simon, who has hitherto been able to sway the political opinions of the place, without

much cost of learning or logic ; but has been very much puzzled of late to weed out the doubts and heresies already sworn by this champion of reform. Indeed, the latter has taken complete command at the tap-room of the tavern, not so much because he has convinced, as because he has out-talked all the established oracles. The apothecary,



with all his philosophy, was as naught before him. He has convinced and converted the landlord at least a dozen times ; who, however, is liable to be convinced and converted the other way by the next person with whom he talks. It is true the radical has a violent antagonist in the landlady, who

is vehemently loyal, and thoroughly devoted to the king, Master Simon, and the squire. She now and then comes out upon the reformer with all the fierceness of a cat-o'-mountain, and does not spare her own soft-headed husband, for listening to what she terms such "low-lived politics." What makes the good woman the more violent, is the perfect coolness with which the radical listens to her attacks, drawing his face up into a provoking supercilious smile; and when she has talked herself out of breath, quietly asking her for a taste of her home-brewed.

The only person who is in any way a match for this redoubtable politician is Ready-Money Jack Tibbets, who maintains his stand in the tap-room, in defiance of the radical and all his works. Jack is one of the most loyal men in the country, without being able to reason about the matter. He has that admirable quality for a tough arguer, also, that he never knows when he is beat. He has half-a-dozen old maxims, which he advances on all occasions, and though his antagonist may overturn them never so often, yet he always brings them anew into the field. He is like the robber in Ariosto, who, though his head

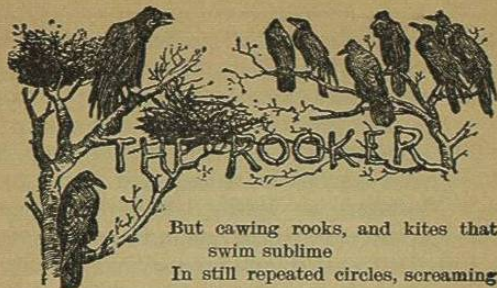
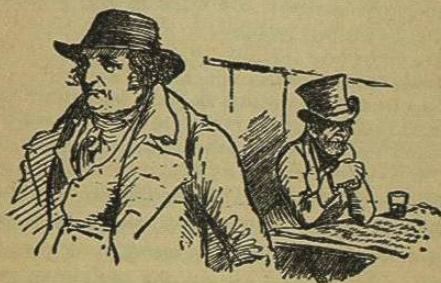
might be cut off half a hundred times, yet whipped it on his shoulders again in a twinkling, and returned as sound a man as ever to the charge.

Whatever does not square with Jack's simple and obvious creed, he sets down for "French politics"; for, notwithstanding the peace, he cannot be persuaded that the French are not still laying plots to ruin the nation, and to get hold of the Bank of England. The radical attempted to overwhelm him one day by a long passage from a newspaper; but Jack neither reads nor believes on newspapers. In reply he gave him one of the stanzas which he has by heart from his favorite and indeed only author, old Tusser, and which he calls his Golden Rules:

Leave Princes' affairs undescanted on,
And tend to such doings as stand thee upon;
Fear God, and offend not the King nor his laws,
And keep thyself out of the magistrate's claws.

When Tibbets had pronounced this with great emphasis, he pulled out a well-filled leathern purse, took out a handful of gold and silver, paid his score at the bar with great punctuality, returned his money, piece by piece, into his purse, his purse into his pock-

et, which he buttoned up, and then giving his cudgel a stout thump upon the floor, and bidding the radical "Good-morning, sir!" with the tone of a man who conceives he has completely done for his antagonist, he walked with lion-like gravity out of the house. Two or three of Jack's admirers who were present, and had been afraid to take the field themselves, looked upon this as a perfect triumph, and winked at each other when the radical's back was turned. "Ay, ay!" said mine host, as soon as the radical was out of hearing, "let old Jack alone; I'll warrant he'll give him his own!"



But cawing rooks, and kites that
swim sublime
In still repeated circles, screaming
loud,

The jay, the pie, and e'en the boding owl,
That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.

COWPER.

IN a grove of tall oaks and beeches, that crowns a terrace walk, just on the skirts of the garden, is an ancient rookery, which is one of the most important provinces in the squire's rural domains. The old gentleman sets great store by his rooks, and will not suffer one of them to be killed, in consequence of which they have increased amazingly; the tree tops are loaded with their nests; they have encroached upon the great avenue, and have even established, in times long past, a colony among the elms and pines of the churchyard, which, like other distant colonies,

has already thrown off allegiance to the mother-country.

The rooks are looked upon by the squire as a very ancient and honorable line of gentry, highly aristocratical in their notions, fond of place, and attached to church and state; as their building so loftily, keeping about churches and cathedrals, and in the venerable groves of old castles and manor-houses, sufficiently manifests. The good opinion thus expressed by the squire put me upon observing more narrowly these very respectable birds; for I confess, to my shame, I had been apt to confound them with their cousins-german the crows, to whom, at the first glance, they bear so great a family resemblance. Nothing, it seems, could be more unjust or injurious than such a mistake. The rooks and crows are, among the feathered tribes, what the Spaniards and Portuguese are among nations, the least loving, in consequence of their neighborhood and similarity. The rooks are old-established housekeepers, high-minded gentlefolk that have had their hereditary abodes time out of mind; but as to the poor crows, they are a kind of vagabond, predatory, gypsy race, roving about the country, without any settled home; "their hands are

against everybo y, and everybody's against them," and they are gibbeted in every cornfield. Master Simon assures me that a female rook that should so far forget herself as to consort with a crow, would inevitably be disinherited, and indeed would be totally discarded by all her genteel acquaintance.

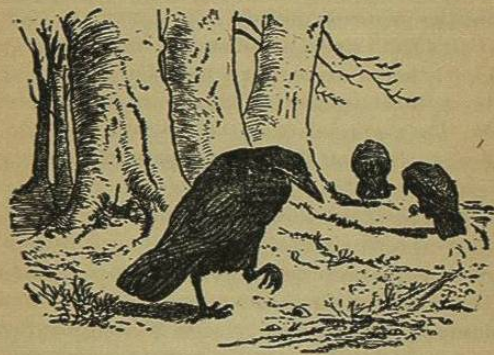
The squire is very watchful over the interests and concerns of his sable neighbors. As to Master Simon, he even pretends to know many of them by sight, and to have given names to them; he points out several which he says are old heads of families, and compares them to worthy old citizens, beforehand in the world, that wear cocked hats and silver buckles in their shoes. Notwithstanding the protecting benevolence of the squire, and their being residents in his empire, they seem to acknowledge no allegiance, and to hold no intercourse or intimacy. Their airy tenements are built almost out of the reach of gunshot; and, notwithstanding their vicinity to the Hall, they maintain a most reserved and distrustful shyness of mankind.

There is one season of the year, however, which brings all birds in a manner to a level, and tames the pride of the loftiest highflyer;

which is the season of building their nests. This takes place early in the spring, when the forest trees first begin to show their buds ; the long withy ends of the branches to turn green ; when the wild strawberry, and other herbage of the sheltered woodlands, put forth their tender and tinted leaves, and the daisy and the primrose peep from under the hedges. At this time there is a general bustle among the feathered tribes ; an incessant fluttering about, and a cheerful chirping, indicative, like the germination of the vegetable world, of the reviving life and fecundity of the year.

It is then that the rooks forget their usual stateliness, and their shy and lofty habits. Instead of keeping up in the high regions of the air, swinging on the breezy tree-tops, and looking down with sovereign contempt upon the humble crawlers upon earth, they are fain to throw off for a time the dignity of a gentleman, and to come down to the ground, and put on the painstaking and industrious character of a laborer. They now lose their natural shyness, become fearless and familiar, and may be seen flying about in all directions, with an air of great assiduity, in search of building materials. Every now and then

your path will be crossed by one of these busy old gentlemen, worrying about with awkward gait, as if troubled with the gout or with corns on his toes, casting about many a prying look, turning down first one eye, then the other, in earnest consideration upon every straw he



meets with, until espying some mighty twig, large enough to make a rafter for his air-castle, he will seize upon it with avidity, and hurry away with it to the tree-top ; fearing, apparently, lest you should dispute with him the invaluable prize.

Like other castle-builders, these airy architects seem rather fanciful in the materials

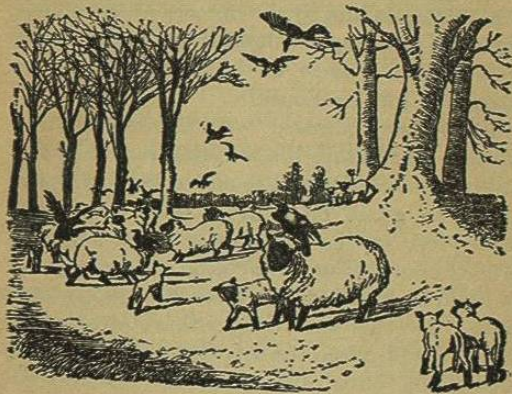
with which they build, and to like those most which come from a distance. Thus, though there are abundance of dry twigs on the surrounding trees, yet they never think of making use of them, but go foraging in distant lands, and come sailing home, one by one, from the ends of the earth, each bearing in his bill some precious piece of timber.

Nor must I avoid mentioning what, I grieve to say, rather derogates from the grave and honorable character of these ancient gentleman-folk, that, during the architectural season, they are subject to great dissensions among themselves; that they make no scruple to defraud and plunder each other; and that sometimes the rookery is a scene of hideous brawl and commotion, in consequence of some delinquency of the kind. One of the partners generally remains on the nest to guard it from depredation; and I have seen severe contests when some sly neighbor has endeavored to filch away a tempting rafter that has captivated his eye. As I am not willing to admit any suspicion hastily that should throw a stigma on the general character of so worshipful a people, I am inclined to think that these larcenies are very much discountenanced by the higher classes, and even

rigorously punished by those in authority; for I have now and then seen a whole gang of rooks fall upon the nest of some individual, pull it all to pieces, carry off the spoils, and even buffet the luckless proprietor. I have concluded this to be some signal punishment inflicted upon him by the officers of the police, for some pilfering misdemeanor; or, perhaps, that it was a crew of bailiffs carrying an execution into his house.

I have been amused with another of their movements during the building season. The steward has suffered a considerable number of sheep to graze on a lawn near the house, somewhat to the annoyance of the squire, who thinks this an innovation on the dignity of a park, which ought to be devoted to deer only. Be this as it may, there is a green knoll, not far from the drawing-room window, where the ewes and lambs are accustomed to assemble towards evening for the benefit of the setting sun. No sooner were they gathered here, at the time when these politic birds were building, than a stately old rook, who, Master Simon assured me was the chief magistrate of this community, would settle down upon the head of one of the ewes, who, seeming conscious of this condescension,

would desist from grazing, and stand fixed in motionless reverence of her august brethren ; the rest of the rookery would then come wheeling down, in imitation of their leader, until every ewe had two or three of them



cawing, and fluttering, and battling upon her back. Whether they required the submission of the sheep by levying a contribution upon their fleece for the benefit of the rookery, I am not certain, though I presume they followed the usual custom of protecting powers.

The latter part of May is a time of great tribulation among the rookeries, when the young are just able to leave the nests, and balance themselves on the neighboring branches. Now comes on the season of "rook shooting" : a terrible slaughter of the innocents. The squire, of course, prohibits all invasion of the kind on his territories ; but I am told that a lamentable havoc takes place in the colony about the old church. Upon this devoted commonwealth the village charges "with all its chivalry." Every idle wight that is lucky enough to possess an old gun or a blunderbuss, together with all the archery of Slingsby's school, take the field on the occasion. In vain does the little parson interfere, or remonstrate in angry tones, from his study window that looks into the churchyard ; there is a continual popping from morning to night. Being no great marksmen, their shots are not often effective ; but every now and then a great shout from the besieging army of bumpkins makes known the downfall of some unlucky squab rook, which comes to the ground with the emphasis of a squashed apple-dumpling.

Nor is the rookery entirely free from other troubles and disasters. In so aristocratical

and lofty-minded a community, which boasts so much ancient blood and hereditary pride, it is natural to suppose that questions of etiquette will sometimes arise, and affairs of honor ensue. In fact, this is very often the case: bitter quarrels break out between individuals, which produce sad scufflings on the tree tops, and I have more than once seen a regular duel take place between two doughty heroes of the rookery. Their field of battle is generally the air; and their contest is managed in the most scientific and elegant manner; wheeling round and round each other, and towering higher and higher to get the vantage ground, until they sometimes disappear in the clouds before the combat is determined.

They have also fierce combats now and then with an invading hawk, and will drive him off from their territories by a *posse comitatus*. They are also extremely tenacious of their domains, and will suffer no other bird to inhabit the grove or its vicinity. There was a very ancient and respectable old bachelor owl that had long had his lodgings in a corner of the grove, but has been fairly ejected by the rooks, and has retired, disgusted with the world, to a neighboring wood, where he



leads the life of a hermit, and makes nightly complaints of his ill-treatment.

The hootings of this unhappy gentleman may generally be heard in the still evenings, when the rooks are all at rest; and I have often listened to them of a moonlight night, with a kind of mysterious gratification. This gray-bearded misanthrope of course is highly respected by the squire, but the servants have superstitious notions about him; and it

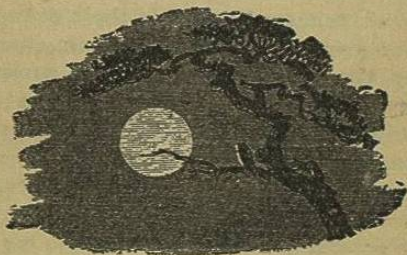
would be difficult to get the dairymaid to venture after dark near to the wood which he inhabits.

Besides the private quarrels of the rooks, there are other misfortunes to which they are liable, and which often bring distress into the most respectable families of the rookery. Having the true baronial spirit of the good old feudal times, they are apt now and then to issue forth from their castles on a foray, and to lay the plebeian fields of the neighboring country under contribution ; in the course of which chivalrous expeditions they now and then get a shot from the rusty artillery of some refractory farmer. Occasionally, too, while they are quietly taking the air beyond the park boundaries, they have the incaution to come within the reach of the truant bowmen of Slingsby's school, and receive a flight shot from some unlucky urchin's arrow. In such case the wounded adventurer will sometimes have just strength enough to bring himself home, and giving up the ghost at the rookery, will hang dangling "all abroad" on a bough like a thief on a gibbet ; an awful warning to his friends, and an object of great commiseration to the squire. But, maugre all these untoward incidents, the rooks

have, upon the whole, a happy holiday life of it. When their young are reared, and fairly launched upon their native element, the air, the cares of the old folks seem over, and they resume all their aristocratical dignity and idleness. I have envied them the enjoyment which they appear to have in their ethereal heights, sporting with clamorous exultation about their lofty bowers ; sometimes hovering over them, sometimes partially alighting upon the topmost branches, and there balancing with outstretched wings, and swinging in the breeze. Sometimes they seem to take a fashionable drive to the church, and amuse themselves by circling in airy rings about its spire : at other times a mere garrison is left at home to mount guard in their stronghold at the grove, while the rest roam abroad to enjoy the fine weather. About sunset the garrison gives notice of their return ; their faint cawing will be heard from a great distance, and they will be seen far off like a sable cloud, and then nearer and nearer, until they all come soaring home. Then they perform several grand circuits in the air, over the Hall and garden, wheeling closer, and closer, until they gradually settle down upon the grove, when a prodigious cawing takes

place, as though they were relating their day's adventures.

I like at such times to walk about these dusky groves, and hear the various sounds of these airy people roosted so high above me. As the gloom increases, their conversation subsides, and they seem to be gradually dropping asleep ; but every now and then there is a querulous note, as if some one was quarrelling for a pillow, or a little more of the blanket. It is late in the evening before they completely sink to repose, and then their old anchorite neighbor, the owl, begins his lonely hootings from his bachelor's hall in the wood



MAY-DAY

It is the choice time of the year,
For the violets now appear ;
Now the rose receives its birth,
And pretty primrose decks the earth.
Then to the May-pole come away,
For it is now a holiday.

ACTEON AND DIANA.

As I was lying in bed this morning, enjoying one of those half-dreams, half-reveries, which are so pleasant in the country, when the birds are singing about the window, and the sunbeams peeping through the curtains, I was roused by the sound of music. On going downstairs, I found a number of villagers dressed in their holiday clothes, bearing a