

"Who shall say there is no genius, when a boy once lived who could write these!" cried my brother. "I have always thought how fortunate it was that Keats died young. Since the rhymes rung about his ears in youth, he had no need of longer life. How much better we love him than we love the poets who lived to become old! It is for what he leaves unsaid. 'It is not in mere death that men die most.' There are deaths and deaths. . . . How still it is!"

The pages fluttered once more. The violet mists, impalpable and encroaching, had come upon us as we loitered, softly blotting out the dim sunlight, lying like a shadow upon the leaf as we read aloud from the sonnet whose atmosphere of absolute quietude closed us in:—

"And calmest thoughts come round us; as, of leaves

Budding,—fruit ripening in stillness,—Autumn suns

Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves,—

Sweet Sappho's cheek,—a smiling infant's breath,—

The gradual sand that through an hour-glass runs,—

A woodland rivulet,—a Poet's death."

The last faint yellow rays from the mist-obscured sun distantly irradiated the beginnings of innumerable cedar colonnades up which a vague and unutterably saddening fragrance, as of burial flowers, floated finely to our senses.

We thought of the young poet face saved from the dead by the artist hand. We remembered the exquisite gentleness of the eternally closed lips; the womanish length of the dark lashes etched forever against the cheeks; the delicate, vexed brows drawn together for the last time over the intricate problem of life. . . . We bent above the shadowy page in silence.

THERE is an element of pleasure in ignorance that it is sometimes
A Breton Survival. an unkindness to attempt to take away. With the loss of ignorance goes the loss of satisfaction in making one's discovery for one's self. It would

be difficult indeed, after experiencing it, to forget the exquisite surprise of coming suddenly upon one of the familiar customs of Brittany, and having its meaning and its historical association gradually dawn upon the mind. Brittany is full of an atmosphere of hoariness. Dolmens and menhirs, "lines" and tumuli, mark, of course, the far-off culminating point of her antiquity. But the rocks and even the vegetation seem here more rusted and time-worn than they do in other old provinces. The very broom that mingles everywhere its yellow blossoms with the pink of the heather smacks, to the imagination, of the centuries when it gave its name to the Plantagenets of England. Yet in spite of the vast age and awesomeness of the prehistoric remains, the attractiveness and interest of the architecture of the towns and churches, and the beauty of the scenery, there is nothing that fascinates the eye more at the time, or that fastens itself more tenderly in the memory afterwards, than the bit of battered shrub that hangs by a nail in the wall over the front door of every wayside inn or tavern.

It is true that the prevalence everywhere of this primitive signboard eloquently contradicts the proverb commonly attributed to our own greatest poet, who is quoted as saying that "good wine needs no bush." But it is with the axiom of the poet, and not with the custom of the country, that one finds one's self ready to fall out in rustic Brittany. It is impossible not to feel that the local advertisement of a host's good cheer is the most apposite that could be found. To realize its complete appropriateness, one must come upon a tavern where the bush over the doorway has been freshly renewed. Then it is easy to see what in the dried and shriveled state of the bunch may have escaped notice, namely, that it is of mistletoe. But the mistletoe in Brittany grows upon the *pommiers*, or apple trees; the *pommiers* give the fruit

for cider; cider is the drink of the country; it is to a cup of good, homely, home-made, familiar cider that the thirsty wayfarer is bidden to come and sit down. Could the chain of logic, even with the logical French disposition, be better sustained? And is it any wonder that, as one bowls along the hard, white, boardlike Breton roads, one is tempted, in passing an orchard, to keep an open eye for the curious green of the leaves of the shy parasite that feeds on the substance of the oldest of the gnarly, aged Breton apple trees?

Once in a while, though this is rare, there is to be seen swinging in the breeze, beside the ubiquitous tuft of *gui*, or mistletoe, still another bait hung out for the enticement of dry throats. This is, in shape and color, something like an old battered straw hat, though it has not the remotest kinship to the fascinating felt or muslin head covering of the Breton man or woman. Possibly an ingenious tourist may at once penetrate its identity and its significance. But there have been those who have been able to discover only by dint of questioning that the strange *affiche* is a beehive, and that its announcement is that a drink concocted of honey is sold on the premises. When the interpretation has been learned, the mead of our own Saxon forefathers flashes into recollection, and once more one enjoys the rare sensation of coming face to face with something that is part and parcel of a remote past.

The Breton peasant is not, even in modern France, the sole survivor in the old custom of advertising his wine by a bush. On turning a corner within a stone's throw of the stately Cathedral of St. Gatien, at Tours, one comes suddenly upon a large sapling of evergreen, which projects from over a bar-keeper's front door halfway across the narrow street. It is by no means the only one of its kind in the elegant modernized little capital. By looking carefully along the vista of any of the nar-

rower streets one is almost sure to catch a glimpse of a *bouchon de cabaret*, as it is technically called, though *bouchon* short and simple is its familiar designation. Sometimes the *bouchon* is a mere dried stick, sometimes it is a lively fresh evergreen; but always, in Tours, whatever its state of preservation, it is a bush of a goodly size, and of the fir species. The vintner who hangs it out does, unconsciously, more than offer to slake the thirst of a customer: he helps to appease the desire for the picturesque which, in a more or less insistent form, is chronic with the sightseer from overseas.

The choice of the bough of *sapin* by the publicans of Tours is not made from lack of a supply of mistletoe. Mistletoe in Touraine is as thick as blackberry bushes in New England. It has a more airy lodgment, in the branches of the tall poplar, and is always tantalizingly out of reach of the would-be possessor of a bit fresh from the limb. But there is not a poplar grove in the valleys of the Cher and the Loire that is not richly ornamented with the yellowish tufts of this mystic plant. Nor were its waxen berries lacking in England in the days when Rosalind was made to declare that "to good wine they do put good bushes." To Shakespeare, however, it was the "baleful mistletoe," which grew, not on the social, liberal apple tree, but in lonely solitudes, upon trees "forlorn and lean," a companion to the "nightly owl or fatal raven." Why the ivy should have seemed to his contemporaries a growth of genial omen is a point not clear to the uninstructed. But if scholarship and tradition are not at fault, it was a clump of this last-named evergreen that composed the bush at the vintner's door in Elizabethan England. It no doubt served its purpose excellently in catching the willing eye of the passer-by. To one traveler's mind, at least, they have made, nevertheless, a more poetical and more suggestive choice of a bush in the picturesque corner of

France that has been a fountain of so much happy inspiration to the painter and the novelist.

TIMES change, and so, apparently, do even such well-regulated objects as the heavenly bodies themselves.

There was a time — it was the day of our grandmothers — when the moon, regardless of the condition of the clouds or the season of the month, never failed “to turn night into day ;” when lovers strolled abroad, or took seats upon balconies. It was then that harpstrings, swept by jeweled fingers, sounded “silver sweet” upon the jasmine-scented air ; when voices, melting into melody, quivered and trembled through verses of Byron and Moore ; when ladies, possessing necks “whose whiteness out-ri-valed their gowns,” wore roses and jasmine in curls or braid ; when gentlemen, existing but to play the part of suitors, stood ever ready, at the frown or smile of a lady, to put bullets through their own brains or through those of their rivals, with indiscriminate but always romantic devotion.

It was then that the Belle, a lady set apart from her sisters “by beauty and much admiration,” played the game of hearts in city and town. Many are the traditions concerning her.

There was “the Magnolia Flower of the South,” that lovely Alabama lady of whom Irving declared that such a woman exists but once in the course of an empire ; there was the bewitchful E. M., pride of Gotham, about whose carriage thronged crowds, curious to catch but a glimpse of her loveliness ; there was the ever famous “belle of Jackson’s administration ;” there was that Philadelphia matron, renowned as the Magnificent ; there was the stately and radiant S. W., as illustrious among Kentucky’s women as Clay among her men.

About the traditions of the Belle, about her very existence, there has ever lingered a glamour, a witchery, as subtle,

as alluring, as the scent of her own favored jasmine.

There were her songs. We can see her now, seated in some dimly lighted parlor, her fingers lightly touching the strings of her harp, her bosom rising and falling in sentimental demand to her music. We wonder at the fullness of her skirts, at the languid grace of her movements, at her curls, “dark as the wing of the raven,” “black as the robe of Night.” And seeing her thus in her loveliness, we too, with the admiring gentlemen of the satin waistcoats and chin-touching stocks, lend attentive ear to the words of the song which, quivering in its struggle with emotion, trembles forth from the lovely throat of the singer : —

“We met, ’t was in a crowd, and I thought he would shun me.

He came, I could not breathe, for his eye was upon me.

He spoke, his words were cold, and his smile was unaltered,

I knew how much he felt, for his deep-toned voice faltered.

I wore my bridal robe, and I rivalled its whiteness ;

Bright gems were in my hair, — how I hated their brightness !

He called me by my name as the bride of another.

Oh, thou hast been the cause of this anguish, my mother !”

To-day the Belle has passed into oblivion. She is distinctly a lady of the past, and, as with Hamlet’s father, we shall not look upon her like again. The moon, too, has become obedient to time, and is obliged, occasionally, to turn a dark face upon lovers. The harp is silent in other halls than in that of Tara, and the songs are remembered only by old ladies.

Meditating upon this lady of the past, reflecting upon her former autocracy, we are moved to speculate concerning the curious law which calls into existence distinct types of humanity only to banish them to the shades of oblivion with the changing of the conditions of society :