

When raised high above the inhabited world on the stupendous crag, how sweetly the chimes of the grazing herds come sounding from the alps below. How cheerfully their sonorous and varied peal comes floating over the wide pastures, or along the alpine valley at even-tide, when the cattle instinctively begin to move towards the châteaux to be milked ; or, while leaving the same neighbourhood at early morning, they wind in long irregular lines up the mountain to their destined day's pasturage.

When hours have passed over the head of the solitary traveller, while struggling with the difficulty of his way, in those grey and mazy solitudes which lie at the base of the higher mountains, faint in body with the heat of a summer's noon, and bewildered in spirit by many a heavy and questionable step ; it is not easy to conceive the thrill of pleasure which passes through the frame when the faint echo of the herd-bells strikes upon the ear.

But the custom of decorating the cattle in this manner, must not be supposed to be merely intended to give pleasure to the eye and the ear, however harmless that sole purpose might appear.

On the immense and elevated pastures occupying the heads of the secondary mountains, and the flanks and off-sets from the main chain, where it is usual for the herds to pass the summer, (ascending, according to the season, in May or June, and returning into the vallies about October), the ground is often very uneven, interspersed with rocks, and bordered by vast and terrible precipices. In these regions, it will not be supposed possible for a vacher to confine ninety or a hundred

cows, each choosing her own pasture, and going her own way, within a circle of any moderate circumference; much less in sight of the *châlet* where he and his people are occupied in carrying on the operations of their dairy; or without considerable labour to himself and his four-footed assistants, to collect the cattle night and morning for the purpose of milking.

In many herds, it is true, the cows are so well-trained that little or no trouble is experienced in bringing them into the neighbourhood of the *châlets*, at the accustomed hour, the sound of the alp-horn being quite sufficient to make them bestir themselves, and instantly to return, in many instances often at a hand gallop. Even without this signal, instinct will bring the herd home at the proper hour. But this cannot always be expected to be the case with every individual in a large herd, and yet accidents rarely happen, because the *vacher* or his dogs have, in their search after any straying animal, always a clue in the bell; the slightest tinkle of which is heard to an unusual distance in these still and elevated regions. Yet this is not all. The traveller may become convinced, by his own observation, of the truth of what is generally upheld amongst the Swiss peasantry, that the bell is actually considered by the animal as a mark of distinction and approval of good behaviour; and the deprivation of this species of ornament, as a punishment and sign of displeasure. The discipline in the little monarchy, of which the *vacher* is the undisputed lord and master, tends in every way to inculcate this; and experience has furnished multiplied proofs that it has taken effect in an extraordinary degree.

The cow, whose superior beauty, sagacity, or good

conduct seems to calculate her for leader, is always on gala-days distinguished by the largest and finest-toned bell and the bravest ornamented collar; and so down through all the gradations of good, to the small appendage that marks the indifferently good or clever animal, and the total absence of ornament and distinction, which points out the self-willed or vicious.

If any animal has been guilty of straying, unseemly behaviour, breach of discipline, or any vicious trick, the displeasure of the vacher is not testified by blows, but by the temporary deprivation of her bell; and this seldom fails to reduce her to order, and prevent a repetition of the offence. It is only necessary to see the cow on a gala-day with her badge of distinction strapped round her neck, and then deprived of it for one or another reason, to be convinced that this is true; now gay, good-humoured and frolicsome—and then sulky and gloomy. I have never noticed that the *moonies*, or bulls, wore any thing of the kind; from which I have inferred, that the effect on the animal may be attributed to the universal diffusion of the harmless quality, called female vanity, through the better half of the animal creation, whether biped or quadruped.

One anecdote in illustration.—It is well known, that the day when the vachers leave their winter quarters in the villages and set out to conduct their herds to the high pastures, is considered a day of rejoicing and festivity. The master and his valets are dressed out in their holiday clothes, and bedizened with ribbons and nose-gays; the good wife and her children appear in their best bib and tucker; the cattle are all well cleaned, and the largest sized bells, seldom used on any but like

solemn occasions, on account of their weight, distributed to the most worthy. The leaders, in addition, are decorated with garlands, and many bear between their horns some light utensil belonging to the dairy, while a car follows with the heavier materials.

The preparations being concluded, the leaders set forward, generally preceded by one of the cowherds; the *ranz de vache* is struck up, and mingles with the shouts and good wishes of the neighbours for a fortunate and fruitful summer. As the whole body gets in motion, the jarring sound of the bells soon fills up all intervals, and the cavalcade, defiling through the village, disappears among the inequalities of the ground at the foot of the mountains.

On one of these occasions, it was judged proper to omit the decoration of the great bell, in the toilet of a fine cow, one of the leaders in a large herd which was upon the point of quitting a village at the foot of the Alps, for the purposes just alluded to, on account of her having calved but a few days before, and under the idea that she might perhaps be injured by the additional fatigue it might occasion. When the herd was on the point of leaving the village, she was nevertheless turned out of the stall to take her place; but after proceeding a few paces, she began to show signs of great uneasiness, and at length replied to the attempts made to coax her forward, by lying down on her side, as though in a fainting fit.

A consultation was immediately held, and various were the opinions broached, as to the cause of her sudden indisposition. They would have lodged her again in the stable, would she have moved. In this

dilemma, one of the old vachers came up, and seeing how the case stood, coolly went into the house, and brought out the bell and collar, which the animal no sooner felt about her neck, than up she got, shook herself, raised and crooked her tail over her haunches in token of complete satisfaction, went off prancing, kicking, and curvetting, with every appearance of health and gaiety, and, taking her place in the van, was, from that moment, as well as ever.

The summit of the Stockhorn was attained about noon, without particular adventure, except that, precisely at the critical passage over the three ridges, I was surprised, somewhat at disadvantage, by a violent tornado, which forced me, more than once, to forsake the erect and godlike position of my species, and scramble in all humility, *à quatre pattes*, after my four-footed friend.

The principal features of the view from this noble rock, both towards the Oberland and the Jura, have been for the greater part enumerated in the sketch given at a former page of the panorama from the opposite summit of the Niesen; and though the idea I have attempted to give of it should be very imperfect and very unworthy, I feel unable to add to it.

Baron Humboldt has expressed (when among like scenes in another hemisphere) a sentiment to this effect: 'That it is very difficult to paint those sensations which act with so much the more force, as they have something undefined produced by the immensity of the space, as well as the greatness, the novelty, and the multitude of the objects which are displayed before us.' I cannot hope to communicate to any other bosom, by the mere details of

description, the glowing sensations excited by the contemplation of scenes like these.

It is possible to give the outlines; to throw the sunshine over them; to separate the broader masses of light and shade; to picture forth the wide expanse of smiling country, stretched like a map beneath, farther and farther to the dim horizon; the glistening river and white-walled town, the blue lakes embosomed in hills, and piled-up mountains, over-topped by the vast glaciers,—but to describe the height, the depth, and space of the vast picture, to paint the blending of innumerable colours and of lights and shadows; to embody in words the spirit and the feeling that rest upon the whole, and give it its harmony and beauty,—*that* neither the tongue, the pen, nor the pencil, can do adequately.

After some time spent in enthusiastic admiration of the scene around me, I stretched myself on the short grassy turf, which here and there occupies a few yards among the rocks at the brink of the precipice, and for an hour indulged in that half-dreaming half-waking state of repose which is one of the greatest luxuries I am acquainted with, under such circumstances.

In attempting to explain, I fear I may be unintelligible to those who have not made experience that it is one thing to doze and dream common-places, in an arm-chair, after dinner, by a snug fire-side, and very different one to take your siesta on the summit of lofty mountains, fanned by the gale which sighs around them, and breathing freely the pure mountain atmosphere.

With what a voluptuous sense of tranquillity you feel alumber stealing over you, withdrawing the blue sky

from your gaze, and the consciousness of your position from your senses. The wind sighing among the pine forests below, or whistling shrilly for a moment among the shivered crags around, or bearing to your ear the chime of the bells from the pastures; the short scream of the falcon, wheeling his flight near the summit, or some sudden and unusual sound rising up from the 'hoar profound;'—these may bring you to your consciousness for the moment, your eye fixes upon the deep blue sky, a thought of where you are steals over your brain, and is as quickly obliterated.

I am sorry that I can give no particular information, from personal adventure, of that singular race of people, called by the mountaineers *Berggeister* (spirits of the mountain), corresponding to the dwarf of the old German legends. They form a very considerable item in the trembling belief of the inhabitants of these vallies, where they have the poetical appellation of *Nachtvölki* (little people of the night). And we may yet speak with grandmothers, who remember perfectly, and most positively record the visits of these urchins, on long autumnal evenings, in the farm-houses of their parents, and their good natured offers of assistance, in any work which happened to be going on.

Alas! alas! we live in a sad matter-of-fact age, when incredulity is much more fashionable than that amiable and unhesitating credence in matters like these, which distinguished the olden time. Of all the many and diverse classes of beings, corporeal and incorporeal, which in times gone by seemed to have formed the link between the visible and invisible world, and administered, by their casual presence, to the terrors, fancy, and amusement

of old and young for so many centuries, there is scarcely a single one sufficiently bold and unblushing to make his appearance in the present age of general unbelief. Alas ! for Robin Goodfellow ! he churns cream for none of the present race of gainsaying housewives. The fairy has left the green sward of our summers, though both the moon-beams and the dew fall upon it as they ever did. The brownie and the pixie have deserted the moor, and the kelpie the ford. No one now sees any thing of either Guy Trash or Gilpin Horner ; and even the place of good Friar Rush, whom every child was accustomed to see and to speak of, not many generations back, is usurped in our times by what the present enlightened race of children call *Ignis Fatuus* !

My descent was deferred till towards evening. I then took a new line of route in the direction of the Stockenfluh and the second lake, and returned through the forests and pastures to Erlenbach.

A great annual horse and cattle fair, a few days after, converted our retired village and its environs, as well as the roads leading to it, from Thun and the Ober-Simmenthal, into a scene of temporary uproar and bustle. The proposed nuptials of David the schoolmaster, which were announced about the same time, set the tongues of all the parish agog : so that, what between the conversation of the peasants, who were interested in the purchase or disposal of cattle, and the continual palaver held by select bodies of their wives and daughters in every corner of the village, to decide upon the expediency of the match in question, the character of my favourite retirement seemed greatly changed.