

A WALK IN NOVEMBER.

“Next was November; he full grosse and fat
As fed with lard, and that right well might seeme;
For he had been a fattening hogs of late,
That yet his browes with sweat did reek and steem,
And yet the season was full sharp and breem¹;
In planting eeke he took no small delight;
Whereon he rode, not easie was to deeme;
For it a dreadfull Centaure was in sight,
The seed of Saturne and faire Nais, Chiron hight.”
—*Spenser*.

NOVEMBER—month of fogs and storms, rain, and dying vegetation, yet November has mild days and sunny; and St. Martin’s Summer towards the middle of the month makes a country ramble delightful still. Verstegan tells us that November was the “Wintmonat, to wit, wind-moneth, whereby we may see that our ancestors were in this season of the yeare made acquainted with blustering Boreas; and it was the antient custome for shipmen then to shrowd themselves at home, and to give over sea-faring (notwithstanding the littleness of their then used voyages) until blustering March had bidden them well to fare.” Another less pleasant name is Blot-monath, from the Saxon *blotan*, to slay or *blot*, blood, because at this time many cattle were killed for winter use, and also for sacrifice, indeed it is said that the Christmas baron of beef is a relic of the Druidical sacrifices at the cutting of the mistletoe.

Spenser’s November, after fattening hogs on the fallen beech-mast and acorns, takes “no small delight” in planting, for crops

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are now sown, also, the sap being quiescent, trees are transplanted in order that they may have time to become properly rooted before the winter frosts set in, as an old saying advises, “Set trees at Allhallows-tide and command them to prosper, set them after Candlemas and intreat them to grow.” The Lansdowne MS. tells us “It was an old English custom to provide seed cake to entertain the ploughmen after the season of sowing wheat, which was commonly on All Saints’ Night,” while Tusser writes:

“Wife, sometime this week, if ye weather hold cleare,
An end of wheate sowing we make for the yeare;
Remember you therefore, though I do it not,
The seed cake, the pasties, the furmenty pot.”

Now the Weasel’s fur has a lighter tinge, and in the more northern counties the Stoat dons its white coat. The hibernating animals creep into their winter quarters, the young Squirrels retiring with their parents to the snug nest, cunningly protected from rain, and firmly fixed in the fork of a tree; while the Hedgehog rolls itself into a ball in its nest of moss and leaves, and the pretty little Dormouse curls itself up; the old ones are already asleep and now the juniors follow their example. The winter nest is globular in form, made of twigs, leaves,

moss, and grass, and in it is a store of food for winter use; the burrow of the Field Mouse, too, is well furnished for the warmer, wakeful days, when even the Common Bat will sally forth in search of gnats. The Great Bat or Noctule (*Vespertilio noctule*), the largest of our British species, and the Hairy-armed Bat (*V. leisleri*) retire early and have long been asleep in some sheltered crevice, head downwards, suspended by their strong, slender claws, but the Pipistrelle or Common Bat (*V. pipistrellus*) remains abroad till October and re-appears towards the middle of March. It is the smallest of our British bats, measuring rather more than an inch and a half, exclusive of the tail, with a span of wing about eight and a half inches, whereas the Great Bat measures three inches and the spread of its wings is from thirteen to over fourteen inches. The Serotine Bat (*V. serotinus*) occurs locally in the South of England; it is usually seen alone and has a slow fluttering flight.

Larks, Linnets, Titmice, and various Buntings have formed themselves into flocks. The Snow Bunting or Snow-flake (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) is only a winter visitor to England, but breeds in the north of Scotland. It is a plump little bird and in Green-

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land quantities are killed and dried for winter use. The Peregrine Falcon may be seen hunting for food, and sometimes the Short-eared and Long-eared Owls, so called from the tufts of feathers above the ear, which tuft the Long-eared Owl carries erect, while the Short-eared depresses its horns. The Short-eared Owl (*Asio accipitrinus*), also called the Woodcock Owl, from the time of its appearance, frequents open moors and fields; the Long-eared (*A. otus*), a rather smaller bird, prefers wooded localities. The Barn or White Owl, also called the Church and the Screech Owl (*Strix flammea*), is the most common of British Owls, and belongs to the same genus as the Tawny, Brown, or Wood-owl. The Little Owl (*Carine noctua*) is the bird associated with Minerva, and familiar on coins and sculpture. It was, till quite recently, only a casual visitor to our shores, but of late years, has greatly increased. The cry of the short-eared Owl is thought to resemble the sound *keaw-keaw*, that of the White Owl is a discordant scream but it can also make a snoring and hissing noise. "They say," says Ophelia in her madness, "the owl was a baker's daughter," alluding to the old tradition that when our Saviour was on earth He entered a baker's shop and asked for bread. The baker's daughter put a very small piece of dough into the oven (another version says that the mother put in the dough, and the daughter, grumbling that the piece was too big, broke off a much smaller portion and replaced it). Immediately the dough began to swell and grew to such a size that

[sic] The piece was transformed to a crusty loaf
Too risen to pass the door.

And the woman flew from the miracle—
Flew out a screaming bird;
To hide through the day, ashamed to be seen,
Her weeping at night-time heard.

Yes, the owl was the baker's daughter once,
With faults all folk should dread;
So great was her greed, so little her love,

She grudged the dear Lord His bread.”²

The Lark sings for the last time, occasionally a Thrush is heard,
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but the real November songster is the Robin Redbreast, Keble’s “sweet messenger of calm decay,” when

“Plaintively, in interrupted thrills
He sings the dirge of the departing year.”

Often the singer is one of the younger birds, who after their second moult, don the scarlet feathers of the adult and begin to practise their strains.

Now the Frog burrows into the mud at the bottom of the pond, Queen Wasps, Bees, and Ants are asleep, and Slugs and Snails retire to crevices. The November and the Winter Moth emerge from their cocoons, the former (*Oporabia dilutata*) is a woodland species, and may be seen resting on the under-surface of leaves, it measures about one and a half inches from wing to wing; the later (*Cheimatobia brumata*) is smaller than the November Moth and of a pale brown colour, the upper wings darker than the lower, the female has rudimentary wings; the larvæ of this moth appear in May and are most destructive in orchards.

Now

“The early mornings have an aspect strange,
The day is breaking in a dense grey mist
That will not be dispersed. The fields are white,
And scarce a gleam of the uprising sun
Lights the dull landscape. E’en across the field
The trees are massed like fog-banks, in the hedge,
With ghostly vagueness. With his silver shields,
The Coltsfoot decks the bank. The garden plot
Shows every plant out-lined in purest white,
And the dark Gorse, in the pale morning beam,
Glistens as though with crystals.”

The edges of leaves are cool and the sap does not circulate so freely, hence the border of white hoar-frost that turns each blade of grass into a fairy spear, and lies in sparkling beauty on the dying brambles.

The fruit of the Alder is now ripe, and after the seeds have fallen the empty cones remain on the boughs throughout the Winter, as do those of the Larch, the last of our woodland trees to lose its leaves and the only one of the conifers to do so, for its Fir cousins retain their dark green dress. Oak-galls and Bedegars, often called Robin Redbreast’s Pincushions, stand out conspicuously; both are the work of various Gall-flies or Gall-wasps (*Cynipida*), which last Spring punctured the bark and deposited an egg or eggs beneath. It still is uncertain in what

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way the presence of the egg results in the growth of the gall, whether the irritation set up is sufficient to account for the change of cells in the plant, or if a fluid produced by the grub assists in the process.

Few and scattered are the flowers of November, but Ragwort, Red Campion, Yarrow, Daisy, and Toadflax still defy the cold, with an occasional Corn Feverfew, Common Red Hemp Nettle, Scabious, Succory, or Spotted Persecaria. Somewhere, too, we shall find the bright yellow flowers of the Furze, for even in the depth of Winter this cheery shrub puts forth its blossoms, [sic]

“A token to the wintry earth that beauty liveth still,” and the characteristic has given rise to the rustic saying, “When the gorse is out of bloom kissing is out of fashion.” There are three British species; the Common Furze, Gorse, or Whin (*Ulex europæus*) flowers from February to June and again in August or September, it is the most common and the tallest of the three, attaining in sheltered places a height of ten to twelve feet. The Larger Dwarf Furze or Autumnal Gorse (*U. Gallii*) grows from two to five feet high and flowers from August to November. The Lesser Dwarf Furze (*U. nanus*) flowers from July to September, and may be distinguished from the Larger by its more prostrate stem and straight, weak spines, whereas those of the Larger Dwarf Furze are curved and strong; in the latter, too, the wing-petals are rather longer than the keel of the flower, but in the Lesser Dwarf Furze the reverse is the case; there is also a difference in the colour of the flowers, which in the Lesser Dwarf Furze are paler than those of the Larger. Furze is distinctly a plant of the temperate zone, it will not flourish in either hot or cold countries, being uncommon in the Highlands, while who can forget the story of Linnæus, who on visiting England and first seeing the plant in full glory of bloom, instinctively

“Knelt before it on the sod
For its beauty thanking God.”

Cattle, Sheep, and Rabbits devour the young, tender shoots, insects delight in its flowers, and the little Whin-chat or Furze chat (*Pratincola rubetra*) is so called because it frequents Gorse coverts. The scientific name is supposed to be from the Keltic *ec* or *ac*, a prickle.

The feathery tufts of the Wild Clematis justify its name of Old Man’s Beard; like the Willow, Thistle, etc., its seeds are dispersed by the wind. The Nodding Bur-Marigold (*Bidens* [p 107]

cernua) has also ripened its seeds, each fruit is furnished with three or four stiff bristles set with barbs which fasten themselves to the coats of animals, like burrs. The scientific name *bidens*, from the Latin *bi*, double, and *dens*, a tooth, refers to these notched bristles.

Among the Fungi still lingering are the various Hedgehog Mushrooms, the Blewits, the Amethyst Agaric, and the Ivory Caps, the last surviving for a time the slight frosts that kill its more delicate relations. Truffle-hunting, once a regular industry, is now practically abandoned in England, our supply being obtained almost entirely from the Continent, and the Truffle dog, a breed of poodle, specially trained for the purpose, is as unknown to-day as the Turn-spit or that once familiar breed of Spaniels only represented now by old chimney ornaments. In France and Italy pigs are employed to scent out the Truffles, which grow beneath the earth, in a calcareous soil, usually near the roots of trees, being found in Beech, Oak, Birch, Chestnut, Hazel, and Hornbeam woods. In England the Downs of Wiltshire, Hampshire, and Kent were favourite

localities. The English Truffle (*Tuber aestivum*) is a black irregular-shaped nodule, varying from the size of a walnut to that of a large potato, its surface covered with many-sided lumps. There are two or three British species, but the Red Truffle, (*Melanogaster variegatus*) once famous in the markets of Bath, is not really a Truffle but allied to the Puff-balls. It is a smooth brownish coloured fungus, usually found at the foot of Beech-trees. The White Truffle of Germany (*Choironomyces albus*), also found in Britain, is another allied species.

Numerous mosses attract our attention:

“Earth’s verdant mantle to protect the germ
Of plant and insect life from winter’s cold,
'Midst which the tiny branches, without harm,
Luxuriate in hues of green and gold.”

Many are dotted with the little green capsules that contain the spores, others ripen these at other seasons, while some species rarely fruit in Britain. The Long-beaked Water Feather Moss (*Hypnum rusCIFolium*) is a winter-fruiting moss, it grows among stones and rocks of waterfalls, as does the Curled Fern Feather Moss (*H. commutatum*). The Sickle-leaved Feather Moss (*H. uncinatum*) may be known by its bright green colour and the hook-like appearance of its leaves; the Glittering Feather Moss

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(*H. splendens*) is found in woods, on hedge-banks, heaths, etc., the Triquetrous Feather Moss (*H. triquetum*) is also found in woods.

A well-known moss is the Common Hair or Golden Maiden Hair Moss (*Polytrichum commune*) which grows in large cushions, the upper part green and the stems and lower leaves brown. It is from six to eighteen inches high, the leaves standing out from the stem and giving the moss, viewed from above, the appearance of a cluster of stars. This moss is used in Lapland for beds and pillows. Dillenius tells us that in his day an oil for the hair was expressed from it, and Gilbert White mentions the little besoms made from it, “very proper for the dusting of beds, curtains, carpets, etc.” The name of the genus is from the Greek πολύτριχος, having much hair, in allusion to the fine hairs on the calyptra, or veil, that covers the unripe capsule.

The Silver Thread Moss (*Bryum argenteum*) with silver-green tips, is a winter fruiting moss; the leaves closely pressed to the stem give the drooping clusters of flowers the appearance of a catkin, hence Dillenius called it the Catkin-stemmed Silver Moss. The Lesser Matted Thread Moss (*B. caespitium*) grows on walls and the roofs of houses, and here, too, we may find the Sessile Grimmia (*Grimmia aporcalpa*) and many of the Screw Mosses. The Sessile Grimmia may be found also on rocks and trees, it grows in compact cushions, the long hair-point tipping each leaf giving it a silvery look. Of the Screw Mosses, family *Tortula*, Miss Tripp in a paper on *British Mosses* says, “No Mosses add more to the beauty of our everyday sights. Their round, green and grey cushions, with red ‘clumps of spears’ rising from them, shining in the sun, glistening in the rain, fill the same home place among Mosses, as daisies do among flowers, and robins among birds.”

The Greater Water Moss (*Fontinalis antipyretica*) with dark green leaves and stems often more than a foot long, grows on rocks and stones in rivers and streams, sometimes in

stagnant water, and most of the pretty Apple Mosses with little round fruits are found by water.

The Fork Mosses, family *Dicranum*, are so called from the supposed resemblance of the minute teeth surrounding the capsule to a flesh-hook or fork, Greek δίκρανος, two headed. One of the most noticeable is the Broom Fork Moss (*Dicranum scorparium*) found in woods; the Variable Fork Moss (*D. varium*) grows

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on damp, clayey soil and moist banks, and the Silky-leaved Fork Moss (*D. heteromallum*) on banks and at the foot of trees. The bright green leaves of the last turn over in the same direction, presenting a smooth, satiny look; the capsules are reddish brown, and appear in Autumn and Winter. It was one of the Flat Fork Mosses, the slender Fern or Lesser Pennate-leaved Fork Moss (*Fissidens bryoides*) that caught the eye of the explorer Mungo Park, robbed and despairing in the wilds of Africa, comforting him with the thought

“Shall not He who keeps thee green
Here in the waste, unknown, unseen,
Thy fellow-exile save.”

Of the various species of Bog Moss (*Sphagnum*) with leaves of palest green, almost white, the Blunt-leaved Bog Moss (*Sphagnum cymbifolium*) is the most common, growing abundantly in bogs and pools, especially in moorland districts or near heaths; its leaves turn red when old or exposed to drought. The Spreading-leaved Bog Moss (*S. squarrosum*) may be known by its pointed re-curved leaves. Linnæus tell [sic] us in his *Flora of Lapland* that Bog Moss after being dried, was largely used in that country as bedding for infants, and in our own land to-day it is increasingly employed for cushions for hospitals, and antiseptic dressings. Peat is largely composed of this moss, which is one of the most useful of these humble plants. But, indeed, mosses perform invaluable service both by forming soil and by protecting the tender roots of trees, etc. “Lichen and mosses,” says Ruskin, ... “Meek creatures! the first mercy of the earth, veiling with hushed softness its dintless rocks: creatures full of pity, covering with strange and tender honour the scarred disgrace of ruin, laying quiet finger on the trembling stones to teach them rest. No words, that I know of, will say what these mosses are the traceries of intricate silver, and fringes of amber yet all subdued and pensive, and framed for simplest, sweetest offices of grace! They will not be gathered, like the flowers, for chaplet, or love token, but of these the wild bird will make its nest, the wearied child his pillow.” (*Modern Painters* Vol. V. part vi.)

Verily [sic]

“The tiny moss, whose silken verdure clothes
The time-worn rock, and whose bright capsules rise,
Life [sic] fairy urns, on stalks of golden sheen,
Demands our admiration and our praise,
As much as cedar kissing the blue sky.”

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Allied to the Mosses are the green Liverworts that creep over our damp paths and ruined walls, but the Lichens, grey, yellow, and brown, are a species of fungus. A lichen, in fact, is composed of what may be described as a union of fungus and alga, the former being probably parasitic on the latter, but each assisting the other. Some twelve hundred species of Lichen are found in Britain; one of the prettiest is the Cup Moss Lichen found on walls. Iceland Moss (*Cetraria islandica*) is common to all northern countries; in Iceland it covers large tracts of ground, and grows from one and a half to four inches high. It is used for jellies, and sometimes steeped in water and pounded for bread; it is not uncommon in Britain, in mountainous districts. Reindeer Moss (*Cladonia rangiferina*) is so called because it forms the chief winter food of that animal. Like Iceland Moss, it is suitable for human consumption, and an edict of Gustavus III., of Sweden, recommended its use in times of dearth. It is a common British species, its grey-coloured much-branched cylindrical stem growing to a height of two inches and upwards, the branches, if several plants grow close together, entwined in an intricate mass. In more northern climes it attains a considerably greater height; in Lapland it is collected and stored in heaps as fodder for cattle.

Certain Lichens, found on the bark of trees, are known as Letter Lichens, or Scripture Worts, from their resemblance to the letters of Eastern alphabets; the trunks of Holly trees are a favourite resort of these lichens, and they are also found on the Oak, Ash, Elm, Birch, and Hazel. The shaggy greyish or greenish-yellow tufts of the Old Man's Beard or Beard Moss Lichen grow on old forest trees, especially Firs, and the finer Horse-tail Lichen is also found on Fir trees. The Yellow Wall-Lichen or Wall-Moss (*Parmelia parietaria*) is another well-known species.

Hazel-crottles, or Hazel-rag Lichen, also known as Oak-lungs or Lungwort, according to the tree on which it grows, is olive green, dotted with pits, hence the name Lungwort; this Lichen was formerly used as a dye, especially for the woollen stockings of the Highlands. The word Crottles is from the Gaelic, *crotal*, *crotan*, a general name for Lichens, particularly those used in dyeing, which were known, according to colour, as Black, Brown, or White Crottles, and were usually members of the *Parmelia* group.

Though lowest of all vegetation Lichens may be considered as the fore-runners of the highest for it is their work, not so much

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to prepare as to originate soil, which they do by creeping over the surface of rocks, and by the aid of an acid possessed by their tiny filaments actually eating their way into the solid block, thus assisting the wearing down process. The hard surface of the rock, slowly crumbling away, forms a thin soil on which mosses and other tiny plants can flourish, and these, in their turn, gradually decaying, and forming still more and better soil, prepare the ground for more highly developed plants. To the humble work of these pioneers "the cedar kissing the blue sky" owes its existence [sic]. "And as the earth's first mercy, so they are its last gif- [sic] to us. When all other service is vain, from plant and tree, the soft mosses and gray lichen take up their watch by the head-stone. The woods, the blossoms, the gift-bearing grasses, have done their parts for a time, but these do service for ever. Trees for the builder's yard, flowers for the bride's chamber, corn for the granary, moss for the grave. ... Sharing the stillness of the unimpassioned rock, they share also its endurance; and while the winds of departing spring scatter the white hawthorn blossom like drifted snow, and summer dims on the parched meadow the drooping of its cowslip-gold—far above, among the mountains, the silver lichen-spots rest, star-like, on

the stone; and the gathering orange stain upon the edge of yonder western peak reflects the sunsets of a thousand years.”

¹ Breem, chill. “Comes the breme Winter with chamfred browes.”

—*The Shepherd’s Calendar*.

² In Norway a similar legend is related of the woodpecker, whose human name was Gertrude. She was condemned to seek her food between the wood and the bark till her back was entirely covered with mourning, by which time she would have learned to use her gifts rightly. As these birds grow older the wings become more mottled and “when the white is quite covered the Lord Christ takes them for His own again. No Norwegian will ever hurt the Gertrude bird.”