

The Green Sheaf

THE HARVEST HOME.



THE Ceremony of an English Harvest Home is thus described by Hentzner, who travelled through England towards the close of the 16th century, and published his itinerarium in 1598. "As we were returning to our Inn" (at Windsor) "we happened to meet some country people celebrating their harvest home: their last load of corn they crown with flowers, having besides an image richly dressed, by which they would perhaps signify Ceres; this they keep moving about, while men and women, men and maid servants, riding through the streets in the cart, shout as loud as they can till they arrive at the barn."

In the present entertainment the above description is followed with some exactness, though the whole partakes of the character of a Masque. The music is nearly all taken from the most beautiful and in some cases unfamiliar folk music. PURCELL has been drawn upon for a charming country dance, and for the kissing duet.

First we have a procession of harvesters clad in faultlessly correct costumes, who sing their way through the village to the barn with a harvest song. After the ceremony has taken place, they give themselves up to sport and play. Characteristic songs are sung by the various villagers, and the utmost good humour and merriment prevails. For the miller leaves his home by Dee side to sing and enjoy himself, and is not the poacher of Lincoln here telling of "his delight on a starry night?" Then there are the Morris dancers capering about with bells on their legs, and the Hobby Horses with an exact presentment of the dance which took the town and country side by storm in the time of the Merry Monarch,—the Swinging Songs—the Kissing Duets—the Children and their little Maypole—and so on, till you, and the dancers, and singers are tired.

The day's festivities end by a dance in which all join in a rollicking tune called "The King's Jig," the strains of which are heard far away in the distance as the merry makers retire to their homes. The performers number from 30 to 40, and the time taken is about three quarters of an hour, or longer if desired.