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The Year 1825. pp. 382-390

We are naturally solicitous to look back upon seasons remarkable for atmospheric phenomena, and compare their results with those passing before us, though we may be fully sensible that no conclusions can be safely be drawn from them, - a variety of circumstances not known, or comprehended, combining to produce results beyond our means of calculation. There have been times when such recollections brought no pleasure with them, by displaying the injuries and sufferings that hurricanes and floods have occasioned; and thus we who were witnesses of the distress occasioned by the lamentable rains of 1793, and several successive years, when every wheat-sheaf presented a turf of verdant vegetation, cannot recollect it without sorrow, or ever forget that famine in our land. Yet it is amusing, on some occasions, to note the extremes of weather that our island has experienced; for though in general our seasons pass away without any very considerable dissimilitude, still we have known periods of irregularity, drought or moisture, cold or heat. The freezing of great rivers, with the roasting of animals and passage of carriages upon the ice, our calendars and diaries relate; but instances of an opposite temperature, affording less striking events, are not so fully detailed as might be wished. The winter of 1661 appears to have been remarkable for its mildness; and it is rather curious that, in the century following, the winter of 1761 should have been equally notable for the mildness of its temperature. The winter of 1795 seems to have partaken of none of the severity usual to the season; and the summer of 1765 was remarkable for its heat and dryness, and all vegetation being influenced by their effects, brought forth fruits and flowers in unusual perfection.

But perhaps the year 1825, taking all its circumstances, is the most extraordinary to be found in our annals. The winter of 1824-5 had been mild and wet; the ensuing spring dry, but with keen winds and frosty mornings, which greatly injured the fine blossoms that appeared on our fruit-trees; and the continued and profuse nightly fall of honey-dew was quite unusual: the leaves of the oak, the cherry, and the plum, were constantly smeared and dropping with this clammy liquor, which, falling from the foliage on the ground, blackened it as if some dark fluid had spilled upon it: the leaves of most of our stone fruits curled up, covered with aphids, and became deciduous; and their young shoots were destroyed by the punctures of these insects that clustered on them. This honey-dew continued to fall till about the middle of July, affording an abundant supply of food to multitudes of bees, moths, and other insects, which swarmed about the trees. We rarely begin cutting our grass before the first week in July; but in consequence of the heat of June in this year, it was so drawn up, that much hay was made and carried by the 20th of June, which commonly is not accomplished till August. Our crops on good ground were considered as fair, though in general the chilling season of May had occasioned a deficiency; but all our clover crops and artificial grasses were harvested in the finest order, producing good-sized ricks and mows; yet their bulk was delusive, the provender cutting out light and strawy. The heat and drought continued, with very partial and slight showers of rain, all June and July; nor had we any thing like serviceable rain till the second of August. In consequence our grass lands were burned up, and our fields parched, presenting deep fissures in all parts. The heat was unusually distressing all day; and evening brought us little or no relief, as every wall radiated throughout the night the heat it had imbibed from the torrid sun of the day. Our bedroom windows were kept constantly

open, all apprehension from damps and night airs, which at other times were of the first consideration, being disregarded; a cooler temperature however obtained, was alone required; and we lingered below, unwilling to encounter the tossings and restlessness that our heated beds occasioned. Our wainscots cracked, furniture contracted and gaped with seams; a sandal-wood box, which had been in use for upwards of twenty years in dry rooms, shrunk and warped out of all form; a capsule of the sandbox tree (*hura crepitans*), which had remained in repose for over a shelf above the fire-place for an unknown length of time, now first experienced an excess of dryness, and exploded in every direction; door-frames contracted, window-sashes became fixed and immovable. These are trifles to relate, but yet they mark the very unusual dryness of the atmosphere.

Monday and Tuesday, July 18th and 19th, will long be remembered as the acme of our suffering, the thermometer standing in the shade of a passage communicating immediately with the outer air, in an open situation, at 82° of Fahrenheit. A few yards nearer the air, on which the sun shone, it rose to 93°, without any influence from reflection or other causes. In towns, and more confined places, it is said, the heat was much greater. The current of air now felt like that near the mouth of an oven, heavy and oppressive, and occasioning more unpleasant sensations than such a temperature usually creates; animals became distressed, the young rooks of the season entered our gardens, and approached our doors, as in severe frosts, with open bills, panting for a cooler element; horses dropped exhausted on the roads; many of the public conveyances, which usually travelled by day, waited till night, to save the cattle from the overpowering influences of the sun. The leaves of our apple and filbert trees, especially the elm, had their leaves so scorched by the sun, that they fell from their spays as in autumn, rustling along the ground; the larch became perfectly deciduous. In our gardens, the havoc occasioned by the heat was very manifest. The fruit of the gooseberry, burnt up before maturity, hung shrivelled upon the leafless bushes; the strawberry and raspberry quite withered away; the stalk of the early potato was perfectly destroyed, and the tubers near the surface in many places became roasted and sodden by the heat, few obtaining their natural size, and sold at this period in the Bristol market at twenty-four shillings the sack. A few choice plants were saved by watering them daily; but in general the exhalation from the foliage, by reason of the heat of the earth, was greater than the root could supply, the green parts withering as if scared by a frost.

On the 20th of July some farmers began to cut their wheat; and by the 25th reaping had generally commenced. Our bean crop presented, perhaps, an unprecedented instance of early ripeness, being usually mowed in September; but this year it was universally ripe, indeed more perfectly so than the wheat, by the 1st August. The crop, however, proved a defective one: water became scarce, and herbage of the fields afforded so little nutriment, that the cows nearly lost their milk, eight or ten being milked into a pail that four should have filled; and one week, from July the 18th to the 24th, butter could not be made to harden, but remained a soft oleaginous mass.

This extreme heat, had a favourable influence on many of our exotic plants, enabling several to perfect their seed, which do not usually in our climate; such as night-stocks, erodiums, heliotrope, groundsels, cape-asters, and such green-house plants vegetating in the open air. With me all the polyanthus tribe, especially the double varieties, suffered greatly; lovers of the cold and moisture of a northern climate, in this tropical heat, they became so parched as never properly to recover their verdure, and in the ensuing spring I missed these gay and pleasing flowers in my borders.

It was a sad destructive season for all the poor butterflies, and no sooner did a specimen appear upon the wing, than the swallow and all the fly-catching tribe snapped them up, rendered eager and vigilant from the scarcity of insect food. Even that active and circumspect creature the humming-bird sphinx could not always, with every exertion of its agility, escape their pursuit.

Early in August rains fell, and continued seasonably until September; and their effect upon our scorched vegetation, from the general heat of the earth and the air, was extremely rapid. The larch, and other trees which had shed their leaves, now put forth their tender green foliage as in spring; and by the end of September the universal verdure of the country, and profusion of feed in the pastures, was so perfectly unlike what we had been accustomed to in common years, as to be astonishing. Even as low in the year as the 11th of October, there was no appearance of any change in the foliage, except a slight tinge upon the leaves of the maple; and this day was so brilliant, that the cattle were reposing in the shade, the thermometer varying from 66° to 68° F., and the general warmth to our feelings was greater than that indicated by the instrument. October the 20th, the weather changed, with snow, the thermometer falling to 40°, and all our hirundines, which had been sporting about us up to this period, departed: yet still vegetation continued in all its vigour, and on the 1st of November dog-roses hung like little garlands in the hedges; the cornel bushes (*cornus sanguinea*) were in full bloom; and corn-roses (*rosa arvensis*) were decorating our hedges in a profusion equal to that of a common August. November 4th there were slight ice and partial snow, with various alternations undeserving of notice, but the weather was generally fair and mild until Christmas.

All these preceding heats and rapid changes had, I think, a manifest influence upon our constitutions. Violent catarrhs, and lingering, unremitting coughs, prevailed among all classes, both before and after Christmas, to a degree that I never remember; and children were afflicted with measles almost universally. Early in January a violent wind was succeeded by a severe frost, and in some places by deep snow; but, after about ten days' duration, a very gentle thaw removed this, and the remainder of our winter was mild and agreeable, introducing what might be called an early spring, dry and propitious for every agricultural purpose. The trees that re-foliated so vigorously in autumn seemed in no way weakened by this unusual exertion, but produced their accustomed proportion of leaves, and sprays of every bush and tree, ripened and matured by last summer's sun, displayed a profusion, an accumulation of blossom, that gave the fairest promise of abundance of fruit, and every product of the earth.