

RHYMES RESPECTING WEATHER.

THIS class of rhymes embodies the wisdom of our ancestors, such as it was, upon a subject which is necessarily interesting above most others to a rural people, and invariably attracts a large share of their attention. The Scottish rural class, in former times, had no barometer, no means of scientific calculation of any kind; even the hours of the day and night were chiefly inferred from natural circumstances. The knowledge which long-continued observation gives respecting meteorological changes was embodied

in verses of the usual simple kind, which were handed down from sire to son with the greatest fidelity, and are still occasionally quoted by old people. They may be arranged in two sections—first, those which relate to the character of a year or season; and second, those which refer to an ordinary change.

INDICATIONS FROM THE HAWTHORN BLOSSOM.

Mony hawes,
Mony snaws.

It is thus inferred that, when there is a great exhibition of blossom on the hedgerows, the ensuing winter will be remarkable for snow-storms.* Some have remarked that in this there might be a providential object—namely, to supply food for the birds in the coming season.

VARIABLE WINTER.

A variable winter is not liked by the pastoral farmers of the south of Scotland, who thus describe its effects on their stocks :—

Mony a frost and mony a thowe,
Soon maks mony a rotten yowe.†

TOO EARLY FINE WEATHER.

If the grass grow in Janiveer,
'Twill be the worse for't all the year.

EARLY WINTER.

An air' winter,
A sair winter.

That is, an early winter is likely to be a sore or severe one.

THE PLOUGH OF GOLD.

One of the most familiar rhymes respecting the weather, is popularly understood to be the composition of no less distinguished a man than George Buchanan. This illustrious

* In Germany, there is a rhyme which may be thus translated :—

When the hawthorn has too early hawes,
We shall still have many snaws.

It is to be observed that on the continent the hawthorn sometimes blooms so early as the end of February or beginning of March, and that, accordingly, a tract of wintry weather often follows.

† Ewe.

scholar and patriot is vulgarly believed in Scotland to have been the king's *fool* or jester—a mere *natural*, but possessed of a gift of wit which enabled him to give very pertinent answers to impertinent questions. He was once asked—so runs the story—what could buy a plough of gold; when he immediately answered—

‘A frosty winter, and a dusty March, a rain about April,
Another about the Lammas time, when the corn begins to fill,
Is weel worth a pleuch o’ gowd, and a’ her pins theretill.’

Which, accordingly, is believed to contain the exact description of a season calculated to produce a good harvest—a thing not over-estimated at the value of a plough composed of the most precious metal.

FEBRUARY.

Of all the months, February, though the shortest, appears to be considered by rural people as the most important. We have as many rhymes about this docked month as about all the rest put together; many of them expressing either an open detestation of it, or a profound sense of its influence in deciding the weather that is to follow. In Tweeddale they say—

fev d
 Februar, an ye be fair,
 The hoggs* ’ill mend, and naething pair; †
 Februar, an ye be foul,
 The hoggs ’ll die in ilka pool.

Yet throughout the country generally, good weather in February is regarded as an unfavourable symptom of what is to come—

A’ the months o’ the year,
 Curse a fair Februar.

In England there is the same notion, as witness a proverb from Ray’s Collection—

The Welshman would rather see his dam on her bier,
 Than see a fair Februeer.

Also—

February, fill the dike,
 Be it black, or be it white!
 If it be white, it’s the better to like.

* Sheep in their second year.

† Impair, or lessen.

Meaning, give us either rain or snow, to fill the hollows;
but snow is preferable.

The Norman peasant in like manner says—

Fevrier qui donne neige,
Bel été nous plege.

I. E. When February gives snows,
It fine weather foreshows.*

In Germany they say—

Matheis bricht's Eis,
Find't er keins, so macht er eins.

That is, *Matthew* [St Matthew's day is the 24th February] *breaks the ice: if he find none, he will make it.* It seems to be generally felt in temperate regions, that the snowy covering of the earth during winter is useful in promoting vegetable growth in spring and summer.

Upon the whole, there is a prejudice against February in the Scottish mind. The pastoral people of Peeblesshire and Selkirkshire say—

Leap year
Was never a good sheep year.

The Aberdonians have a saying—

The fair-day of Auld Deer
Is the warst day in a' the year.

Namely, the third Thursday of February.

CANDLEMAS DAY.

Candlemas day (February 2), the festival of the *Purification of the Virgin*, appears to have been one of the most venerated and carefully-observed of all the Romish festivals. It is one of very few which have continued impressed upon the minds of the Presbyterian people of Scotland after all ostensible veneration for such days had passed away. And it is somewhat remarkable that these few days are chiefly of those which are understood to have been Pagan festivals before the introduction of Christianity (Candlemas, Beltane, Lammas, and Hallowmass), as if the impression made by the festivals of the church during the four centuries of its predominance amongst us had been comparatively superficial.

* Foreign Quarterly Review, xxxii. 376.

The undesirableness of mild weather in February has found a concentrated expression with regard to Candlemas day. The Scottish rhyme upon the subject is this—

If Candlemas day be dry and fair,
The half o' winter's to come and mair ;
If Candlemas day be wet and foul,
The half o' winter's gane at Yule.

Sir Thomas Browne speaks, in his *Vulgar Errors*, of this being 'a general tradition in most parts of Europe, being expressed in the following distich :—

Si sol splendescat Maria purificante,
Major erit glacies post festum quam fuit ante.'

In Germany, there are two vernacular proverbs to express the same idea :—1. The shepherd would rather see the wolf enter his stable on Candlemas day than the sun. 2. The badger peeps out of his hole on Christmas day, and when he finds snow, walks abroad ; but if he sees the sun shining, he draws back into his hole.

Mr Hone, in his *Every-Day Book*, quotes the following to the same purpose from the *Country Almanac* for 1676, the passage occurring under February :—

'Foul weather is no news ;
Hail, rain, and snow,
Are now expected, and
Esteemed no wo ;
Nay, 'tis an omen bad,
The yeomen say,
If Phœbus shows his face
The second day.'

Dr Forster, in his *Encyclopædia of Natural Phenomena*, remarks, that about Candlemas day the weather has generally become a little milder. The exception to this rule, or a frosty Candlemas day, is found to be so generally indicative of cold for the next six weeks or two months, that it has given rise to several proverbs, especially,

If Candlemas day be fair and bright,
Winter will have another flight.

Dr Forster states that he had consulted several journals of weather, which satisfied him that this adage was generally correct. It is worthy of notice that a similar notion pre-

vails as extensively in Europe respecting the day of the conversion of St Paul (January 25):—

‘ Let no such vulgar tales debauch thy mind,
Nor *Paul* nor *Swithin* rule the clouds and wind.’

GAY.

Before passing from Candlemas day, I may transcribe a verse popular in the south of Scotland, as a direction by which to ascertain from this day on what day the movable Feast of St Faustinus (Shrove Tuesday) will fall:—

First comes Candlemas, and then the new moon,
The next Tuesday after is Fasten’s e’en.

This, it is to be remarked, may be true in many cases, but cannot in all, as Shrove Tuesday may occur on any day between February 2d and March 9th, a space of time during which there may be of course a second renewal of the moon after Candlemas day.

MARCH.

The generally severe character of this month in our climate is denoted with some force in the following rhyme, taken down in Northumberland:—

March yeans the lammie,
And buds the thorn,
But blows through the flint
Of an ox’s horn.

A Scotch rhyme says—

March whisker
Was ne’er a good fisher.

Signifying that a windy March is unfavourable to the angler, though the reverse to the farmer.

THE BORROWING DAYS.

The three last days of March are the subject of a strange and obscure popular story, which leads the mind back into the very earliest stage of society. These three days are called the *Borrowing Days*, being alleged to have been a loan from April to March. The idea is also prevalent in England, where there is a proverb, thus given by Ray in his collection:—

April
Borrows three days of March, and they are ill.

In an ancient Romish calendar, to which frequent reference is made in Brand's *Popular Antiquities*, there is an obscure allusion to these Borrowing Days, under 31st March: it is to the following effect—'A rustic fable concerning the nature of the month: the rustic names of six days which shall follow in April, *or may be the last of March.*' So strong was this superstition in the seventeenth century, that when the Covenanting army under Montrose marched into Aberdeen on the 30th March 1639, and was favoured by good weather, a minister pointed it out in his sermon as a miraculous dispensation of Providence in behalf of the good cause.—(*Gordon of Rothiemay's History of Scots Affairs from 1637 to 1641*, ii. 226.) Sir Thomas Browne says (*Vulgar Errors*), 'so it is usual among us to ascribe unto March certain borrowed days from April which men seem to believe upon annual experience of their own and the received traditions of their forefathers.'

The most common rhyme on this subject, in Scotland, goes thus:—

March borrowed from April
 Three days, and they were ill:
 The first o' them was wind and weet,
 The second o' them was snaw and sleet,
 The third o' them was sic a freeze,
 It froze the birds' nebs to the trees.

A Stirlingshire version is more dramatic, and gives the name of one of the months in nearly the original French:—

March said to Averil,
 'I see three hoggs on yonder hill;
 And if you'll lend me dayis three,
 I'll find a way to gar them die!'
 The first o' them was wind and weet,
 The second o' them was snaw and sleet,
 The third o' them was sic a freeze,
 It froze the birds' feet to the trees.
 When the three days were past and gane,
 The silly poor hoggs came hirpling hame.

What could have inspired March with so deadly a design against the three sheep, is one of those profound questions which only can be solved by the cottage fireside, 'between gloaming and supper time.' Certes, however, the three last days of March are still occasionally observed to be of the

kind described in these rhymes—and that in defiance of the statute 24 Geo. II. cap. 23. It is vain to point out to one of the sages who keep an eye upon the Borrowing Days, that the three last days of March are not now the same as they were before the year 1752, but, in reality, correspond with that part of the year which was once the 18th, 19th, and 20th of the month. ‘Nonsense!’ said one old man, to whom I had explained this circumstance; ‘what have acts o’ parliament to do with the weather?’

CAUTION IN SEED-TIME.

Nae hurry wi’ your corns,
 Nae hurry wi’ your harrows ;
 Snaw lies ahint the dike,
 Mair may come and fill the furrows.

APRIL, MAY, AND JUNE.

It is generally conceded that

April showers
 Make May flowers.

The beau-ideal of a good May is different among the farmers from what it is among the poets. Buchanan exclaims in rapture,

‘ All hail to thee, thou first of May !’

Au contraire, the agriculturist says,

Mist in May, and heat in June,
 Maks the harvest richt sune ;

while the Galloway version speaks still more decidedly—

A wet May and a winnie,
 Brings a fou stackyard and a finnie ;*

implying that rain in May and dry winds afterwards produce a plentiful crop, with that mark of excellence by which grain is generally judged of by connoisseurs—a good feeling in the hand.† On the other hand, it is allowed that

* The Germans say—

Ein May kühl und nass,
 Füllt die Scheune und das Fass.

May cool and wet,
 Fills the stackyard and the casks [*wine casks*].

This rhyme, however, applies with propriety only to certain hilly districts of Germany.

† Maettaggart’s *Gallovidian Encyclopædia*.

heat in May hastens the ripening of the victual, though it may be prematurely :—

March dust, and May sun,
Makes corn white, and maidens dun.

So alleges a Perthshire rhyme, which, however, is varied in the Mearns—

March water, and May sun,
Makes claes clear, and maidens dun.

The explanation of this is, that water in the month of March is supposed to be of a more cleansing quality than in any other month, as expressed in a proverb in that county—*March water is worth May soap.*

It may be added that in Clydesdale they say—

March dust, and March's win',
Bleaches as weel as simmer's sun.

There is another ungracious rhyme about the favourite month of the poets—

Till May be out,
Change na a clout :

That is, thin not your winter clothing till the end of May—a good maxim, if we are to put faith in the great father of modern medicine, Boerhaave, who, on being consulted as to the proper time for putting off flannel, is said to have answered, 'On midsummer night, and—put it on again next morning!' In Scotland, the rule for household fires is—

All the months with an R in them.

This may be the most proper place to introduce a rhyme expressive of the different sensations which attend similar experiences when they are new and when they are old—

The Lentren even's lang and teuch,
But the hairst even tumbles owre the heuch.

The evening in harvest is of the same length as in Lent, but passes more quickly to appearance, from being a greater novelty.

THE MOON.

Saturday's change, and Sunday's prime,
Is enough in seven years' time.

Auld moon mist
 Ne'er died o' thirst.

Foggy weather in the last quarter of the moon is thought to betoken moisture.

When the new moon is in such a part of the ecliptic as to appear turned much over upon her back, wet weather is expected—

The bonny moon is on her back,
 Mend your shoon, and sort your thack.

That is, mend your shoes, and see after the thatch of your cottages.

About the moon there is a brugh ;
 The weather will be cauld and rough.

The halo seen round the moon, being a consequence of the humidity of the atmosphere, may well forebode wet weather. The Scottish name for this object is the early Teutonic word for circle ; the same term which, being applied to circular forts on hills, came afterwards to be extended to the towns which sprang up in connection with them—burghs, or boroughs.

THE MICHAELMAS MOON.

The Michaelmas moon
 Rises nine nights a' alike soon.

Michaelmas is the 29th of September—the close of harvest. The above rhyme describes a simple astronomical phenomenon which takes place at that season, and which is usually called in England the *Harvest Moon*. As the moon moves from west to east about thirteen degrees every day, she rises generally about fifty minutes later every evening. Her orbit, however, being considerably inclined to the equator, does not always make the same angle with the horizon. When her orbit is most oblique to the horizon, which happens when she is in the beginning of Aries, the thirteen degrees of her orbit which she recedes daily, rise in *seventeen minutes* ; whereas, in the opposite case, the time required is one hour and seventeen minutes. Of course this phenomenon occurs every month ; but generally happening when the lunar orb is not full, it is not remarked. In September, however, the sun is in Virgo

and Libra, the signs opposite to Pisces and Aries. The moon of course only can be full when the sun is opposite to her. Rising nearly at the same time for several nights when in her greatest splendour, and when her light is considered as useful both in drying the cut grain and lighting the husbandman to his unusual labours, the phenomenon impresses the mind, raising at the same time, as it ought to do, sentiments of admiration and gratitude for the Beneficent Wisdom which planned an arrangement so useful to the inhabitants of the earth.

THE TURN OF THE YEAR IN WINTER.

As the day lengthens,
The cold strengthens.

The corresponding German remark is—

Wenn die Tage beginnen zu langen,
Dann komm erst der Winter gegangen.

Ray gives as explanation, that early in winter the heat imparted to the earth in summer has not been dissipated, and that it is some time after the winter solstice ere the heat of the sun has again had any considerable effect in dispelling the cold which has for some time been accumulating.

SUNDAY.

There is a general superstition that

Such as a Friday,
Such is a Sunday.

This may have been suggested by some consideration of the connection of these two days in the history of the Passion.

WEATHER INDICATED BY HILL-TOPS.

Of the rhymes respecting immediate and temporary weather, the most common are those which deduce the obvious probability of a near access of rain from the mists on the tops of hills. Every district in Scotland has a rhyme of this kind, with little variation, except what is necessary to admit the name of the most conspicuous mountain or mountains of the respective districts. Thus, in Roxburghshire, they say—

When Ruberslaw puts on his cowl,
 The Dunion on his hood,*
 Then a' the wives o' Teviotside
 Ken there will be a flood.

In Forfarshire, Craigowl and Collie-law, two eminences in the Sidlaw range, are substituted for Ruberslaw and the Dunion, and the 'Lundy lads' for the wives o' Teviotside. In the middle of Fife, they say—

When Falkland hill puts on his cap,
 The Howe o' Fife will get a drap ;
 And when the Bishop† draws his cowl,
 Look out for wind and weather foul.

Sometimes the rhyme is confined to the fact, that, when mist descends on one hill-top, it soon appears on those near it—as, in Annandale—

When Criffel wears a hap,‡
 Skiddaw wots full well o' that.

In Galloway—

When Cairnsmuir puts on his hat,
 Palmuir and Skyreburn laugh at that.

Palmuir and Skyreburn being mountain rivulets which rise to sudden importance whenever rain falls about Cairnsmuir.

In Haddingtonshire—

When Traprain puts on his hat,
 The Lothian lads may look to that.

A Devonshire rhyme, quoted by Grose from Brice's Topographical Dictionary, is superior to these Scotch couplets in clearness of meaning—

When Halldown has a hat,
 Let Kenton beware of a skat.

Skat signifying a shower of rain.

The hills, by their attracting and precipitating rain, serve as natural barometers all over Scotland.

It appears, from the following pleasantly-told legend, that

* This is a very common metaphor. Schiller says, in *Wilhelm Tell*—

Der Mytenstein zieht seine Haube an.
 [Mytenstein takes on its hood.]

† Falkland hill and Bishop hill are two prominent conical eminences in the Lomond range.

‡ Any stout exterior garment for protection against cold is called in Scotland a 'hap.'

this proverb is not confined to our insular regions:—‘Mount Pilatus has so bad a name, that few ever attempt now to climb its haunted sides, or pry into its mysterious hollows, where the evil shade of Pilate may chance to be met with. Mount Pilatus shares his reputation with many a lofty mountain both in France, England, and Wales, and even in the East. I have heard the legend attached to him in this country, in various localities far distant. Some derive the name from Pila, a mountainous strait; others from Pileus, a cap or hat, because the summit is often covered with a cap of clouds, whence the proverb—

“Quand Pilate a mis son chapeau
Le tems sera serein et beau.”

But the current belief is, that Pontius Pilate, having been condemned to suffer death, overcome by remorse of conscience, put an end to his existence, and his body was thrown into the Tiber, loaded with stones to sink it. The elements all conspired to revenge this insult to the river, and frightful storms were the consequence. Pilate’s body was therefore taken up, and thrown into the Rhone, at Vienne; but the pure purple waters of “the arrowy Rhone” rejected it indignantly. The body was again taken from the waves, and conveyed to Lausanne; but in the lake of Geneva it could find no rest, and was thrown up on the shore. At last it was carried to Lucerne, and cast into the dark waters at the foot of Mount Pilate; and ever since that period, tempests, inundations, and hurricanes have been the handmaidens of that gloomy region. The lake is here a mere swamp; and sometimes gliding over the muddy waves, the spectre of the wicked governor is seen; at others, it places itself on a rock above; or in the air is heard a loud contention between him and King Herod. He may occasionally be met striding with hasty steps over the mountain, wandering to and fro, and returning on his path, as if he sought something which he can nowhere find. The shepherds know him but too well, for he scatters their sheep, and terrifies their stoutest dogs. It is, however, rare now that he appears; for a student of Salamanca, who was traversing the mountains of Switzerland, once encountered the evil spirit, and as he was deeply learned in occult science, he boldly accosted the unquiet soul, which violently and bodily resisted him. A furious combat took place between

the student and the spectre, as can be verified by any one who visits a certain spot where no grass has ever grown since. The student got the better, and succeeded in inducing Pilate to become invisible. He keeps his word "indifferently well;" but it is not safe to trust to it; and travellers are so well aware of his treachery, that they are fonder of ascending the Righi, where no ghosts or demons reside, than daring the perils of Mount Pilatus.'—*Miss Costello in Bentley's Miscellany.*

WEATHER AUGURED FROM THE CLOUDS.

Hen scarts and filly tails,
Make lofty ships wear low sails.

Certain light kinds of clouds are thus denominated, from their supposed resemblances to the scratches of hens on the ground and the tails of young mares. They are held as prognosticative of stormy weather.

WEATHER AUGURED FROM THE WIND.

Deductions as to weather from the wind must of course depend altogether on local circumstances. In Forfarshire, which lies on the east coast of Scotland, with a long stretch of country intervening between its borders and the opposite sea, the following rhyme is applicable:—

When the carry* gaes west,
Guid weather is past;
When the carry gaes east,
Guid weather comes neist.

In Selkirkshire and Peeblesshire, which enjoy a central situation, and are not far distant from the sea in any direction, they say—

When the wind's in the north,
Hail comes forth;
When the wind's in the wast,
Look for a wat blast;
When the wind's in the soud,
The weather will be fresh and good;
When the wind's in the east,
Cauld and snaw comes neist.

* The current of the clouds.

A general one on the winds is this :—

East and wast,
The sign of a blast ;
North and south,
The sign of drouth.

In *Teonge's Diary*, 1675, the following English proverb is quoted :—

The wind from north-east,
Neither good for man nor beast.

In Edinburgh, the east wind is the one of worst character among the medical faculty ; while Sir John Dalyell expresses his belief (*Darker Superstitions of Scotland*) that the north is the most fatal to health, adducing the fact, that an epidemic prevailed in 1833, after the wind had remained unusually steady in that direction. According to the rhyme, the truth lies between.

The following was taken down in Northumberland, but expresses an idea also prevalent amongst the Scottish peasantry :—

A west wind north about,
Never long holds out.

That is, a wind which goes round from east to west, as our forefathers expressed it, *withershins*, or contrary to the course of the sun, rarely continues, but soon relapses into the congenial direction.

CALM WEATHER.

Nae weather's ill,
An the wind bide still.

In Devonshire, there is a rhyme on the prognostications of weather from winds and other circumstances, which one could suppose to have been the composition of some unhappy scion of the house of Megrim. A Glasgow friend says it would answer for Greenock—

The west wind always brings wet weather ;
The east wind wet and cold together ;
The south wind surely brings us rain ;
The north wind blows it back again ;
If the sun in red should set,
The next day surely will be wet ;
If the sun should set in gray,
The next will be a rainy day.

After all, let us console ourselves with the quaint distiches of old Tusser (*Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*):—

Though winds do rage, as winds were wood [*i. e. mad*],
 And cause spring-tides to raise great flood,
 And lofty ships leave anchor in mud,
 Bereaving many of life and blood;
 Yet true it is as cow chews cud,
 And trees, at spring, do yield forth bud,
 Except wind stands as never it stood,
It is an ill wind turns none to good.

THE RAINBOW.

A rainbow in the morning is the shepherd's warning;
 A rainbow at night is the shepherd's delight.

'A rainbow can only occur when the clouds containing or depositing the rain are opposite to the sun; and in the evening the rainbow is in the east, and in the morning in the west; and as our heavy rains in this climate are usually brought by the westerly wind, a rainbow in the west indicates that the bad weather is on the road, by the wind to us; whereas the rainbow in the east proves that the rain in these clouds is passing from us.'—*Salmonia, by Sir Humphry Davy.*

APPEARANCES IN EVENING AND MORNING.

The following simple couplet is prevalent throughout the whole of Scotland, and, with slight variations, is also common in England:—

The evening red, and the morning gray,
 Are the tokens of a bonnie day.

The version common in pastoral Yarrow is—

If the evening's red, and the morning gray,
 It is the sign of a bonnie day;
 If the evening's gray, and the morning red,
 The lamb and the ewe will go wet to bed.

Of the antiquity of one part of the remark there is interesting evidence. 'He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say it will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' &c.—*Matthew's Gospel*, xvi. 2.

In France there is a corresponding proverb—

Le rouge soir et blanc matin
 Sont réjouir le pèlerin.

The corresponding English proverb is—

The evening red, and morning gray,
Are certain signs of a fine day ;
The evening gray, the morning red,
Make the shepherd hang his head.

The same prognostics are acknowledged in Germany—

Abend roth gut Wetter bot ;
Morgen roth mit Regen droht.
That is—Evening red, and weather fine,
Morning red, of rain's a sign.*

RAINY SEASON.

Mony rains, mony rowans,
Mony rowans, mony yewns.

Yewns being light grain. The rowans are the fruit of the mountain-ash, which never are ripe till harvest. It is a common observation that an abundance of them generally follows a wet season.

VALUE OF RAIN IN THE LATTER PART OF THE YEAR.

'Tween Martinmas and Yule,
Water's wine in every pool.

WEATHER AUGURED FROM BIRDS.

There is in some districts a belief that the weather of the day is foretold by the two most conspicuous members of the crow family: if the raven cries first in the morning, it will be a good day; if the rook, the reverse.

The corbie says unto the crow,
'Johnnie, fling your plaid awa :'
The crow says unto the corbie,
'Johnnie, fling your plaid about ye.'

DOUBTFULNESS OF ALL WEATHER WISDOM.

Perhaps, after all, the most sensible of the meteorological rhymes is the following, which may be given as a wind-up:—

To talk of the weather, it's nothing but folly,
For when it's rain on the hill, it may be sun in the valley.

* Foreign Quarterly Review, xxxii. 376.