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THE HORKEY.

A PROVINCIAL BALLAD.

ADVERTISEMENT.

In the descriptive ballad which follows, it will be evident that I have endeavoured to preserve the style of a gossip, and to transmit the memorial of a custom, the extent or antiquity of which I am not acquainted with, and pretend not to enquire.

In Suffolk husbandry the man who, (whether by merit or by sufferance I know not) goes foremost through the harvest with the scythe or sickle, is honoured with the title of "Lord," and at the Horkey, or harvest-home feast, collects what he can, for himself and brethren, from the farmers and visitors, to make a "frolick" afterwards, called "the largess spending." By way of returning thanks, though perhaps formerly of much more,

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or of different signification, they immediately leave the seat of festivity, and with a very long and repeated shout of "a largess," the number of shouts being regulated by the sums given, seem to wish to make themselves heard by the people of the surrounding farms. And before they rejoin the company within, the pranks and the jollity I have endeavoured to describe, usually take place. These customs, I believe, are going fast out of use; which is one great reason for my trying to tell the rising race of mankind that such were the customs when I was a boy.

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I have annexed a glossary of such words as may be found by general readers to require explanation. And will add a short extract from Sir Thomas Brown, of Norwich, M.D. who was born three years before Milton, and outlived him eight years.

"It were not impossible to make an original reduction of many words of no general reception in *England*, but of common use in *Norfolk*, or peculiar to the *East-Angle* counties; as, Baund, Bunny, Kedge, Seele, Straft, Clever, Dere, Nicked, Stingy, Noneare, Fefit, Thepes, Gosgood, Kamp, Sibret, Fangast, Sap, Cothish, Thokish, Bide-owe, Paxwax. Of these, and some others, of no easy originals, when time will permit, the resolution shall be attempted; which to effect, the Danish language, new and more ancient, may prove of good advantage: which nation remained here fifty years upon agreement, and have left many families in it, and the language of these parts had surely been more commixed and perplex, if the fleet of *Hugo de Bones* had not been cast away, wherein three-score thousand souldiers, out of Britany and Flanders, were to be wafted over, and were, by King *John's* appointment, to have a settled habitation in the counties of *Norfolk* and *Suffolk*." Tract the viii. on Languages, particularly the Saxon. Folio, 1686, page 48.

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THE HORKEY

A PROVINCIAL BALLAD

What gossips prattled in the sun,

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Who talk'd him fairly down,
Up, memory! tell; 'tis Suffolk fun,
And lingo of their own.

Ah! *Judy Twitchet!** though thou'rt dead,
With thee the tale begins;
For still seems thrumming in my head
The rattling of thy pins.

*Judie Twichet was a real person, who lived many years with my mother's cousin Bannock, at Honington.

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Silence commanded.

Thou Queen of knitters! for a ball
Of worsted was thy pride;
With dangling stockings great and small,
And world of clack beside!

"We did so laugh; the moon shone bright;
"More fun you never knew;
"'Twas Farmer Cheerum's *Horkey night*,
"And I, and Grace, and Sue——

"But bring a stool, sit round about,
"And boys, be quiet, pray;
"And let me tell my story out;
"'Twas *sitch* a merry day!

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The Story begun.

"The butcher whistled at the door,
"And brought a load of meat;
"Boys rubb'd their hands, and cried, 'there's more,'
"Dogs wagg'd their tails to see't.

"On went the boilers till the *hake**
"Had much ado to bear 'em;
"The magpie talk'd for talking sake,
"Birds sung;—but who could hear 'em?

"Creak went the jack; the cats were *scar'd*
"We had not time to heed 'em,
"The *owd hins* cackled in the yard,
"For we forgot to feed 'em!

*A sliding pot-hook.

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Judie sure to be right.

"Yet 'twas not I, as I may say,
"Because as how, d'ye see;
"I only help'd there for the day;
"They cou'dn't lay't to me.

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"Now Mrs. Cheerum's best lace cap
"Was mounted on her head;
"Guests at the door began to rap,
"And now the cloth was spread.

"Then clatter went the earthen plates—
"Mind Judie,' was the cry;
"I could have *copt** them at their pates;
"Trenchers for me,' said I.

*Thrown.

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The Horkey Load.

"That look so clean upon the ledge,
"And never mind a fall;
"Nor never turn a sharp knife's edge;—
"But fashion rules us all.'

"Home came the jovial *Horkey load*,
"Last of the whole year's crop;
"And Grace amongst the green boughs rode
"Right plump upon the top.

"This way and that the waggon reel'd,
"And never queen rode higher;
"*Her* cheeks were colour'd in the field,
"And ours before the fire.

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The Harvest Supper.

"The laughing harvest-folks, and John,
"Came in and look'd askew;
"'Twas my red face that set them on,
"And then they leer'd at Sue.

"And Farmer Cheerum went, good man,

"And broach'd the *Horkey beer*;

"And *sitch a mort** of folks began

"To eat up our good cheer.

"Says he, 'Thank God for what's before us;

"'That thus we meet agen,'

"The mingling voices, like a chorus,

"Join'd cheerfully, 'Amen.'—

*Such a number.

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An old Kind of Contest.

"Welcome and plenty, there they found 'em,

"The ribs of beef grew light;

"And puddings—till the boys got round 'em,

"And then they vanish'd quite!

"Now all the guests, with Farmer Crouder,

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"Began to prate of corn;
"And we found out they talk'd the louder,
"The oftner pass'd the Horn.

"Out came the nuts; we set a cracking;
"The ale came round our way;
"By gom, we women fell a clacking
"As loud again as they.

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Something very true.

"John sung 'Old Benbow' loud and strong,
"And I, 'The Constant Swain,'
"Cheer up my Lads,' was Simon's song,
"'We'll conquer them again.'

"Now twelve o'clock was drawing nigh,
"And all in merry cue;
"I knock'd the cask, 'O, ho!' said I,
"'We've almost conquer'd you.'

"*My Lord** begg'd round, and held his hat,
"Says Farmer Gruff, says he,
"There's many a Lord, Sam, I know that,
"Has begg'd as well as thee.'

*The leader of the reapers.

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"Bump in his hat the shillings tumb'l'd

"All round among the folks;

"Laugh if you wool,' said Sam, and mumb'l'd,

"You pay for all your jokes.'

"Joint stock you know among the men,

"To drink at their own charges;

"So up they got full drive, and then

"Went out to *halloo largess**.

"And sure enough the noise they made!!—

—"But let me mind my tale;

"We follow'd them, we wor'nt afraid,

"We'ad all been drinking ale.

*See advertisement

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A bit of Fun.

"As they stood hallooming back to back,

"We, lightly as a feather,

"Went sideling round, and in a crack

"Had pinn'd their coats together.

"'Twas near upon't as light as noon;

"*'A largess,*' on the hill,

"They shouted to the full round moon,

"I think I hear 'em still!

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"But when they found the trick, my stars!

"They well knew who to blame,

"Our giggles turn'd to ha, ha, ha's,

"And *arter* us they came.

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The Chace.

"Grace by the tumbril made a squat,

"Then ran as Sam came by,

"They said she could not run for fat;

"*I know* she did not try.

"Sue round the *neathouse** squalling ran,

"Where Simon scarcely dare;

"He stopt,—for he's a fearful man—

"*"By gom* there's *suffen*+ there!"

" And off set John, with all his might,

"To chase me down the yard,

"Till I was nearly *gran'd* ^ outright;

"He hugg'd so woundly hard.

*Cow-house

+Something

^Strangled

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A Mistake

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"Still they kept up the race and laugh,
"And round the house we flew;
"But hark ye! the best fun by half
"Was Simon *arter* Sue.

"She car'd not, dark nor light, not she,
"So, near the dairy door
"She pass'd a clean white hog, you see,
"They'd *kilt* the day before.

"High on the *spirket** there it hung,—
"Now Susie—what can save ye?"
"Round the cold pig his arms he flung,
"And cried, 'Ah! here I have ye!'

*A iron hook.

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Something like Mischief.

"The farmers heard what Simon said,
"And what a noise! good lack!
"Some almost laugh'd themselves *to dead*,
"And others clapt his back.

"We all at once began to tell
"What fun we had abroad;
"But Simon stood our jeers right well;
—"He fell asleep and snor'd.

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"Then in his button-hole upright,
"Did Farmer Crouder put,
"A slip of paper twisted tight,
"And held the candle *to 't*.

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Reserve trown off.

"It smok'd, and smok'd, beneath his nose,
"The harmless blaze crept higher;
"Till with a vengeance up he rose,
"Grace, Judie, Sue! fire, fire!
"The clock struck one—some talk'd of parting,
"Some said it was a sin,
"And hitch'd their chairs;—but those for starting
"Now let the moonlight in.

"*Owd* women, loitering *for the nonce**,
"Stood praising the fine weather;
"The menfolks took the hint at once
"To kiss them altogether.

*For the purpose

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Mirth without Mischief.

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"And out ran every soul beside,

"A *shanny-pated** crew;

"*Owd* folks could neither run nor hide,

"So some *ketch*'d one, some *tew*.

"They *skrigg*'ld + and began to scold.

"But laughing got the master;

"Some *quack*'ling^ cried, 'let go your hold; '

"The farmers held the faster.

"All innocent, that I'll be sworn,

"There wor'nt a bit of sorrow,

"And wome, if their gowns *are* torn,

"Can mend them on the morrow.

*Giddy. thoughtless.

+To struggle quick.

^Choaking.

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The Separation.

"Our shadows helter skelter danc'd

"About the moonlight ground;

"The wondering sheep, as on we pranc'd,

"Got up and gaz'd around,

"And well they might—till Farmer Cheerum,

"Now with a hearty glee,

"Bade all good morn as he came near 'em,

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"And then to bed went he.

"Then off we stroll'd this way and that,

"With merry voices ringing;

"And Echo answered us right pat,

"As home we rambl'd singing.

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Conclusion

"For, when we laugh'd, it laugh'd again,

"And to our own doors follow'd!

"Yo, ho!" we cried; "Yo, ho!" so plain

"The misty meadow halloo'd.

"That's all my tale, and all the fun,

"Come, turn your wheels about;

"My worsted, see!—that's nicely done,

"Just held my story out!!"

Poor Judie!—Thus Time knits or spins

The worsted from Life's ball!

Death stopt thy tales, and stopt thy pins,

—And so he'll serve us all.