Mr. Urban,

IF you think the following desultory observations made during a late excursion in the Forest of Dean, worthy insertion, they are most heartily at your service.

The Forest of Dean, from the vale of Gloucester, presents a confused mass of little eminences covered with underwood, and detached groupes of timber trees. These eminences are very beautiful, their bases are studded with meadows and corn-fields, and the little cottages of the peasants peeping irregularly through the trees has a very pleasing effect.

On approaching the banks of the Severn, the scene grows more picturesque, and from Purton Ferry it is beautiful in the extreme. The Severn in this part assumes the appearance of a placid lake, the shores sloping on every side like an emerald esplanade; except on the Dean Forest side, where a small chain of cliffs appear, resembling a range of triumphal arches, crowned with stunted oaks. About the middle of the river, a small opening discloses the picturesque scenery around Berkeley, among whose shades resides the venerable Dr. Jenner, devoting his whole time to acts of benevolence. May the evening of his days be as peaceful and serene as his life has been beneficent to mankind!

On arriving on the Dean Forest side of the river, a shady walk affording many charming views of the majestic river I had just crossed, conducted me to the Viney hill. Beneath appeared the neat little village of Blakeney embossed in fruit trees in full blossom. The Severn likewise appeared like a silver crescent glittering between two strings of emeralds. The Cotswolds rise gradually from the bosom of the river, and swell into a magnificent amphitheatre, their sides crowned with all the beauties of luxuriant vegetation.

On a small gteen near the abovementioned mentioned village, a large party of rustics were engaged in their Whitsuntide amusement of Morris dancing, and the appearance of the dancers covered with ribbons gliding at intervals through the vistas formed by the fruit trees, had a very pleasing effect.

The Morris, or more properly the Moresque Dance, was introduced into England as early as the reign of Henry the Seventh, and, as its name imports, is of Moorish origin, and the more grotesque the dress and actions of the dancers are, the more near they resemble the antient dance. For this reason I think the Morris Dance of Dean Forest bears a striking similitude to the original. They literally cover their bodies and hats with ribbons of all colours, and, preceded by two persons bearing a flag and two rusty swords, a Tom Fool (as they call him), and a Maid Marian, they cut the most ridiculous capers and contortions, and actually fulfil these lines of Goldsmith,

"The dancing pair that simply sought renown, By holding out, to tire each other down."

Leaving the Morris dancers, I turned to the right and descended into a deep ravine, the acclivities on each side being thickly overspread with orchards. I ascended the steep eminence of Blakeney Hill, from whence I caught a full view of the Severn, then roaring and thundering amid the black and craggy rocks that in some parts intersect it. Kingroad, where it swells into a sea, was distinctly visible, and the eye ranged over a scene as beautiful and picturesque as any in our isle.

The scenery from thence to Coleford is nearly uniform. Sloping hills covered with the golden-coloured furze, and secluded vallies through whidh generally murmured a tinkling stream, afforded a pleasing concatenation of rural objects.

The foresters, from the secluded situation of this part of the country, and by not mixing much with their more enlightened neighbours, have a great many superstitious customs among them, of which the following are some of the most remarkable.

They implicitly believe old Christmas (5th of January) to be the real Christmas Day, and no arguments whatever would convince them of their error. On that night (they say), exactly at twelve o'clock, the herb

rosemary blossoms, which is a proof that our Saviour was born at that hour. The oxen likewise kneel down at the same time; and some will go so far as to say they have actually seen these prodigies.

On old Christmas Day they will not suffer any females to enter their houses, and during the above day and the eleven succeeding ones, they will not suffer any fire to be taken out of their houses. If you ask them their reasons for observing the above customs, they will tell you it is uulucky to break them, and recount several strange accidents which have happened to persons who have been presumptuous enough to do so.

At the new Moon they turn the money in their pockets, thinking it to be lucky.

They believe in witchcraft, and wonderful are the tales they relate of wizards, apparitions, and enchanters.

If you admit this paper into your Miscellany, I shall at some future time give you a more detailed account of Dean Forest scenery and manners, for the subject is far from being exhausted. W. S. Wickenden.

Mr. Urban, Dec. 10.

Reproduced from the The Gentleman's magazine, Volume 92, Part 2, July 1822

by W. S. Wickenden