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THE COUNTRYMAN'S DELIGHT.

Larkspur: An Anthology. The Vine Press, Steyning. Six Shillings net.

I don't know that countrymen are more jolly than townsmen, but they are always so in poetry. There they live chiefly on good brown ale, dancing under the greenwood tree, kissing milkmaids and singing ditties to fair shepherdesses. It is a good life and a gay one. Innocently followed, it should lead to rubicundity and lamb's-wool sidewhiskers with a place of honour in the village taproom.

This spirit of fun and jolly, careless pleasure, touched with broad and simple humour, is found in most of the pages of this little anthology. Its editor as ranged far and wide in his selection, going back to the work of Nicholas Udall (1504-1556) the Eton schoolmaster who wrote the first English comedy, "Ralph Roister Doister," and quoting other poets whom I cannot trace, but who are in the spiritual succession. One of the merriest of all the songs is "The Countryman's Delight," by Tom D'Urfey (1658-1723) who was full of good humour and jolly comedy. His poem is delicious and should be washed down with a pot of beer before a blazing open fire upon a winter's night. Best of all, perhaps, is the fresh and playful "Sharing Eve's Apple," by John Keats—the young, fanciful, madcap Keats who was not often seen in the later poems. Edmund Waller (1606-1687), the turncoat Cavalier poet, is here and Robert Green (1560-1592) gives us a fine piece of tomfoolery, whilst William Drummond of Hawthornden, bows rather stiffly. All the book makes a townsman pine for smock and gaiters. It is beautifully produced in a limited edition on "antique" paper and the letterpress is enlivened by quaint woodcuts, designed and cut by Dennis West.

It has a dedication, prologue, epilogue and colophon which are too deep for me, but seem to be well-meant. Every country house near should have a copy and leave it by a window seat. It is more beautiful than even a Bradshaw, if not so impressive as a Brett's.