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The Shepherd of Banbury's Rules to Judge of the Changes of the Weather, Grounded on Forty Years' Experience

John Claridge

Imprint

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INTRODUCTION.

AS we very justly esteem it a fit Tribute of Admiration to adorn natural Curiosities, by setting them as richly and as advantageously as art can direct, so the following Observations of the Shepherd of *Banbury* have appeared to me worthy of being presented to the Eye of the Public, with all the Lustre that it was in my Power to give them. It is one thing to observe, and another to reason upon Observations, and it very rarely happens that both can be taken into the Compass of one Man's Life. We ought therefore to consider it as a very lucky Incident, when the Observations of another Man, upon whom we can depend, fall into our Hands, and enable us to add natural Experience to the Notions derived to us from Books of Philosophy.

THERE is a Degree of Pedantry in Desarts as well as Colleges. Men who derive their Knowledge entirely from Experience are apt to despise what they call Book Learning, and Men of great Reading are as apt to fall into a less excusable mistake, that of taking the Knowledge of Words for the Knowledge of Things; whereas there are not any two points more opposite in Nature, since we very rarely see, that either true Scholars are talkative, or that talkative Men are true Scholars.

THE Shepherd, whose sole Business it is to observe what has a Reference to the Flock under his Care, who spends all his Days and many of his Nights in the open Air, and under the wide spread Canopy of Heaven, is in a Manner obliged to take particular Notice of the Alterations of the Weather, and when once he comes to take a Pleasure in making such Observations, it is amazing how great a Progress he makes in them, and to how great a Certainty at last he arrives by mere dint of comparing Signs and Events, and correcting one Remark by another. Every thing in Time becomes to him a Sort of Weather-Gage. The Sun, the Moon, the Stars, the Clouds, the Winds, the Mists, the Trees, the Flowers, the Herbs, and almost every Animal with which he is acquainted. All these I say become to such a person Instruments of real Knowledge.

THERE are a Sort of half wise People, who from the Consideration of the Distances of Things, are apt to treat such Prognostications, as they phrase them, with much Contempt. They can see no Connexion between a Cat's washing her Face, and the Sky's being overspread with Clouds, and therefore they boldly pronounce that the one has no Relation to the other. Yet the same People will readily own that the fluttering of the Flame of a Candle is a certain token of Wind, which however is not discernible by their Feeling; because it lies within the Compass of their Understanding to discern that this Fluctuation of the Flame is caused by the Wind acting upon it, and therefore they are inclined to believe this, though it does not fall actually under the Cognizance of their Senses. But a Man of a larger Compass of Knowledge, who is acquainted with the Nature and Qualities of the Air, and knows what an Effect any Alterations in the Weight, the Dryness, or the Humidity of it has upon all animal Bodies, easily perceives the Reason why other Animals are much sooner sensible of any Alterations that happen in that Element than Men, and therefore to him the cawing of Ravens, the chattering of Swallows, and a Cat's washing her Face are not superstitious Signs, but natural tokens (like that of the Candle's fluttering) of a Change of Weather, and as such they have been thought worthy of Notice by Aristotle, Virgil, Pliny, and all the wisest and gravest Writers of Antiquity.

BUT still a few slight and trivial Observations of this Kind, and such as are in the Power of every Man to make, go but a very little Way in furnishing us with a useful Knowledge of the Indications of the Weather. To supply these, and to have constantly at Hand the Means of judging of these Alterations, Men of great Genius have invented, and wonderful Inventions they are! Instruments for measuring the Heat, the Cold, the Weight, the Dryness, and the Humidity of the Air, with great Exactness, and upon these they reason as to the changes of Weather with great Accuracy and Certainty. It would undoubtedly be a great Folly to pretend to question either the Truth of their Observations, or the Usefulness of them: but then we may have leave to consider how far, and to how great a Degree they are useful. The Thermometer measures exactly the Degrees of Heat, but the Air must be hot to such or such a Degree before it is discerned by this Instrument. The barometer indicates the Weight of the Air, and the rising and falling of the Quicksilver expresses the Alterations in its Weight with wonderful Nicety, but then those Alterations are the Cause of this. In like manner the Hygrometer, or Hygroscope, measures the Dryness or the Humidity of the Air very plainly and very exactly, but the Weather must alter, must become dryer or moister than it was, before these Alterations are visible; and therefore, however ingenious, however curious, however useful these Instruments may be in other Respects, they undoubtedly contribute very little to the prognosticating a Change of Weather at a Distance; and it is from the Experience of this, that they are so little esteemed, so lightly regarded by the common People.

OUR Shepherd's Observations are of quite another Nature, most of them give us a Day's Notice, many a Week's, and some extend to several Months' Prognostication of the Changes of the Weather, and of how great Use these may be to all Ranks and Degrees of People, to the sedentary Valetudinarian, as well as the active Traveller, to the Sportsman who pursues his Game, as well as to the industrious Husbandman who constantly follows his Labour; in short, to every Man in every Situation in some Degree or other, is so very clear and intelligible, that it would, be a mere waste of Words, and a very idle display of Rhetoric, to attempt the making it clearer. Every Man living would be glad to foresee the Alterations of Weather if he could, and consequently to most People, if not to all, these Observations, grounded on no less than forty Years' Experience, cannot but be acceptable.

TO make the best use of one's Talent, and to employ the Lights derived from the Station in which Providence has placed one for the Benefit of Mankind, is undoubtedly discharging one's Duty, answering the End of our Creation, and corresponding with the Œconomy of Nature, which does nothing in vain. This Proposition is equally true, let a Man's Station be what it will. It is the Manner in which we perform, and not the Character, that makes the Player, and in this Sense what Man is not a Player? Here then is an Instance of one who has for many Years studied his Part, and now communicates his Discoveries freely. In a Physician, in a Philosopher, in

a Mathematician, this would be highly commendable, and why not in a Shepherd? We do not cast our own Parts in the Drama of Life; no, this is performed by the great Author of Nature. He who adjusted every Thing on Earth with such Beauty and Harmony, he who taught the Heavenly Bodies to move; the same distributed their several Offices to Men. May we not therefore suppose that every Man's Part is well cast, and that our Abilities are exactly proportioned to our Stations? If so, he who does all he can, does all that ought to be expected from him, and merits from impartial Judges the most general and just Applause. To be convinced of this, we need not only reflect on the narrow and selfish Conduct of some, who either by Study or by Chance, have acquired certain valuable Secrets, which with the utmost Industry they conceal in order to be the more admired, or that they may render them beneficial to themselves. How contrary the Conduct of our Shepherd! His Pains were all his own, but the Fruit of them he thus generously offers to the Public. Good Sense and the dictates of Nature taught him this Maxim, That what might benefit many, should not be concealed by one from Views of Profit or of Pride.

IN my Remarks upon the Shepherd's Rules, I have sometimes endeavoured to support them by Authorities, which I must confess would have been of little Use if the Author had been a Person of Learning; but when it is considered that these Observations were purely the Effect of his own Attention and Experience, it certainly strengthens them, and adds greatly to their Credit that they have been esteemed evident Signs of the same Effects, by the greatest Masters in this Kind of Science. The Art of prognosticating the Weather may be considered as a Kind of decyphering, and in that Art it is always allowed a point of great Consequence, when several Masters therein agree as to the meaning of a Character, and it is from thence very justly presumed that this Character is rightly decyphered.

I have also endeavoured to explain most of his Observations, according to the Rules of the new Philosophy, which, as it is grounded upon. Experiments, so it generally speaking enables us to give a fair and rational Account of almost all the Phænomena taken notice of by the Shepherd of *Banbury*. I likewise have added some other Rules in Relation to the Weather, taken from the common sayings of our Country People, and from old *English* Books of Husbandry, but I have distinguished all these from the Observations themselves, so that the Reader will have no Trouble to discern the Text from the Commentary, or to know what belongs to the Shepherd of *Banbury*, and what to the Editor of his Observations. This I think may serve by the Way of Introduction, let us now proceed to the Rules themselves.

THE

Country Calendar,

OR THE

Shepherd of BANBURY's

OBSERVATIONS.

I.

SUN. If the Sun rise red and firey. } Wind and Rain.

THE Reason of this Appearance is, because the Sun shines through a large Mass of Vapours, which occasions that red Colour that has been always esteemed a Sign of Rain, especially if the Face of the Sun appear bigger than it ought, for then in a few Hours the Clouds will grow black, and be condensed into Rain, sudden and sharp, if in the Summer, but settled and moderate if in Winter.

THE old *English* Rule published in our first Almanacks agrees exactly with our Author's Observation.

If red the Sun begins his Race,

Be sure that Rain will fall apace.

IF the Reader would see this elegantly described, the Master of Poets hath it thus.[*a*]

Above the Rest, the Sun, who never lies,

Foretels the Change of Weather in the Skies;

For if he rise unwilling to his Race,

Clouds on his Brow, and Spots upon his Face,

Or if thro' Mists he shoots his sullen Beams,

Frugal of light, in loose and straggling Streams,

Suspect a drizzling Day and southern Rain,

Fatal to Fruits and Flocks, and promis'd Grain.

II.

If cloudy, and it soon decrease. } Certain fair Weather.

I Conceive the Reason of this to be, that the Vapours being then specifically lighter than the Air, are still rising upwards, in which they are assisted by the Heat of the Sun Beams, agreeable to the Notion of Dr. *Derham*, who observes, that after much cloudy Weather, it is always fair before it rains, because the watery Vapours are not condensed till they reach the cold upper Region, agreeable to the common *English* saying,

The Evening red, and Morning grey,

Is a Sign of a fair Day.

IT is also an Observation, of *Pliny's* in his natural History.[b]

SI ab ortu solis repellentur Nubes, & ad occasum abibunt, *Sereni-tatem* denunciabunt,

That is,

IF at Sun rising the Clouds are driven away, and retire as it were to the *West*, this denotes fair Weather.

THERE is an old Adage to this Purpose, which, because it is very prettily expressed, deserves our notice, *viz*.

A red Evening and a grey Morning,

Sets the Pilgrim a Walking.

In French thus.

Le rogue Soir, & blanc Matin; Font rejouvir le Pelerin.

The *Italians* say the same.

Sera rosa, & nigro Matino;

Allegra il Peregrino.

III.

CLOUDS *Small and round, like a Dappleygrey, with a* North-Wind. Fair Weather for 2 or 3 Days.

THIS is differently expressed by other Authors. My Lord *Bacon* tells us, that if Clouds appear white, and drive to the *N*. *W*. it is a Sign of several Days fair Weather.

OUR old English Almanacks have a Maxim to this Purpose.

If woolly Fleeces spread the Heavenly Way,

Be sure no Rain disturbs the Summer Day.

AND *Pliny* to the same Purpose.[c]

SI Sol oriens cingetur Orbe, & postea totus defluxerit æqualiter, *Serenitatem* dabit.

That is,

IF the rising Sun be incompassed with an Iris, or Circle of white Clouds, and they equally fly away, this is a Sign of fair Weather.

THERE is another English Proverb worth remembering.

In the Decay of the Moon,

A cloudy Morning bodes a fair Afternoon.

IV.

Large like Rocks. – – Great Showers.

IN the old Almanacks we have this Sign of the Weather thus expressed.

When Clouds appear like Rocks and Towers,

The Earth's refresh'd by frequent Showers.

THE Reason of this seems to be, that the watery Vapours are then condensed, or condensing, which gives them this rough and ragged Appearance, and as soon as the thin Films that retain the Water are broke by this Pressure, these heavy Clouds descend in Rain.

THESE Observations, as well as some that follow, are agreeable to all Climates, which is the Reason that they appear in so many different Authors, and have been taken notice of in so many Ages. This however does not at all diminish the Credit, or the Merit of our Shepherd's Observations, who certainly drew them not from Books, but from his own Experience, and therefore their agreeing so well with the Rules of other great Masters, ought to establish his Authority in such Cases as are not supported by alike concurrence from ancient or modern Writers, the Testimony of Nature is always sufficient Evidence.

If small Clouds increase – – Much Rain.

THIS and the following Observation cannot well be understood, without giving some Account of Clouds in general. The Atmosphere is supposed to extend itself about five Miles round this Globe of Earth, and within that Space move all kind of Vapours exhaled by the Sun's Force, or protruded by the subterraneous Heat. The ascending of these Vapours into the Air, depends upon many things, and therefore as different as its Causes; for instance, their ascent depends in the first place on the degree of Heat with which they are drawn up or forced out; next upon the Lightness of the Vapours themselves; thirdly, on the Density or Rarity of the Air through which they pass; and lastly, on the Force and Direction of the Winds, which they encounter in their Passage.

ACCORDING to the Nature of these Vapours, and the Circumstance attending their Passage, they appear to us differently below. For if they be extremely subtile they mount very high, and there, according to the Sentiment of Sir *Isaac Newton*, form by Refraction the Azure, or blue Colour, that over-spreads the Sky in serene Weather. Clouds, while they remain visible, do not rise above the Height of a Mile; and we always observe, that the highest are of a very light Colour, and hardly seen. If, therefore, small Clouds increase, it shews, that the Disposition of the Air is such, as that these Clouds cannot rise therein, either from their own Weight, the want of a protrusive Force, or from the falling of the Wind, which in cloudy Weather is always a Sign of Rain.

V.

VI.

If large Clouds decrease – – Fair Weather.

THE same kind of Reasoning accounts very clearly for this Prognostick, since it shews, that the Vapours are either exhaled by the Sun's Heat, or are driven off by Winds, and so resolved into smaller Clouds, capable of ascending higher in the Atmosphere; all which are Circumstances that secure us from Rain, and afford us a certainty of fair Weather.

IT is, however, to be observed, that large black Clouds are frequently, in a Summer Evening, melted into Dews; and this much more frequently happens in the Autumn, because the Evenings are then cooler, and the Vapours more easily condensed for that Reason. In all Observations of this Sort, there is a great degree of Prudence and good Sense required to apply them, and hence it very frequently happens that such Observations are condemned as treacherous and abusive, merely because those who would employ them want the Sagacity which is requisite to understand them clearly. VII.

MISTS. If they rise in low Ground and soon vanish. } Fair Weather.

THIS is a sure Sign and very well expressed, that is, clearly, and, in few Words, which is the Excellency of such Aphorisms. In order to be convinced of its good Sense and Certainty, we must consider a little what *Mists* are, whence they rise, and what becomes of them.

MISTS are, strictly speaking, uncompacted Exhalations, which while they fleet near the Earth are styled *Mists*, but when they ascend into the Air, are called *Clouds*. If therefore, rising out of low Ground, they are driven along the Plain, and are soon lost to the Sight, it must arise from some of these Causes. That there is an Air abroad sufficient to divide and resolve them, or the Heat of the Sun has been strong enough to exhale them, that is, to rarify them, so as to render them lighter than the Air through which they were to pass. Whichever way this happens the Maxim remains unimpeached.

VIII.

If they rise to the Hill-tops. } Rain in a Day or two.

WHEN Mists are very, heavy in themselves, and rise only by the Action of that protrusive Force, exerted by the subterranean Fire, they can rise no higher than where the Gravitation becomes superior to that protrusive force, for then they descend again by their own Weight, and this occasions the Appearance mentioned in the Observation of their hanging upon Hill-tops, where they are very soon condensed, and fall down in Rain.

THERE was formerly a very idle and ill grounded Distinction between moist and dry Exhalations, whereas in Truth all Exhalations are moist, or in other Words are watery Steams thrown off by Bodies respectively dry, and the former Distinction was invented only to solve these Phænomena of which we have been speaking, that is, the Mist rising and, dispersing without Rain, and the Mist condensed and resolved into Rain, which as I have shewn may be much better explained without any such Distinction. A general Mist before the Sun rises, near the full Moon. } Fair Weather.

THIS is a general and a very extensive Observation, which enables us to judge of the Weather for about a Fortnight, and there is very great Reason to believe that it will very rarely deceive us. In order to convince the Reader of this, it will be necessary to explain, as far as we are able, the Causes of this.

MISTS are observed to happen when the Mercury in a Barometer is either very low of very high. They happen when it is high after the Region of the Air has continued calm a good while, and in the mean time a great Abundance of Vapours and Exhalations have been accumulated, making the Air dark by their quantity, and the disorderly Disposition of their parts. They happen when the Mercury is low, sometimes because the Rarity of the Air renders it unable to sustain the Vapours, which therefore descend and fall through it.

BUT none of these Cases agree with the Observation at the Head of the Page, and therefore to form a true judgment of the Weather, we must distinguish between them and the Case which explains the Observation.

IX.