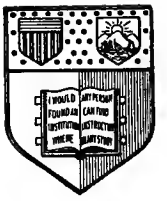

In Garden Orchard and Spinney

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In Garden Orchard and Spinney

BY

PHIL ROBINSON

Author of

"IN MY INDIAN GARDEN" "BIRDS OF THE WAVE AND WOODLAND" &c.

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THE MONTH THAT LOOKS TWO WAYS

WITH a face looking either way, January, the middle month of winter, holds Autumn with one hand and Spring with the other; a queer empty sort of month, when Nature seems to let things alone, and, between the balanced attractions of either season, to stand, in cold neutrality, aloof. The impatient Spring may hazard a week of untimely warmth, and the sparrow, ever ready to be tempted, turn him, uxorious, to domestic joys. But Winter jealously supervenes, and the sun hangs crimson in a frozen sky, and the sparrows, married in haste and repenting at leisure, sit, too cold to care for

appearances, ruffled up and contradictory on opposing water-pipes, scandalously apart, and drearily recriminate in chirps. One week the crocus, generous bulb ! with a heart all too large for waiting, pierces the soft earth with its green needle-point of leaf. With the next comes back the Frost, and alas ! for the crocus. But January looks on and watches, and does not interfere. It is the month that waits upon the others, the narrow isthmus of two seasons. Like the rhododendron of the Himalayas, it clings on its bough-tips to the ruddy memories of a summer of flowers that is past, while about its roots it gathers, in rustling heaps, the leaves where the pheasant and the barking deer shall nestle in the chilly days that are coming ; or, conversely, like our own brave English holly, that holds out scarlet signals of a passing winter, and yet, remembering what nest it holds, keeps its leaves green and close for the nightingale of coming summer.

Ay, the month that looks two ways !—one face of it sad with Regret, the other glad

with Resolve. A resting time, the " breathing hill " of the year of pilgrims.

I have called it an empty month, but it is only so in the seeming. Underground all the roots are resting ; even the grass, which one would think might be glad of something to do, does not grow ; it does not even take care of itself, is untidy and unkempt ; under the hedges and in odd corners it revels in a mediæval, Merovingian raggedness of growth. The trees and bushes stand about in a brown study, and the nests in them—" What more dreary cold than a forsaken bird's nest filled with snow ? "—are all to let, and dilapidated, tilted up on one side, or sodden flat, the hedge-thorns spiking through them, and dead leaf and empty snail-shell where the pretty eggs have been. Under the hedges the field-mouse and hedge-sparrow go nervous and uncomfortable, for the thawing twigs drip upon them, and the leaves are noisy under their feet. In the grey sky the rooks are blown about, uncertain of their objects, for the grubs are so deep under the soil that it seems hardly worth the birds'

while to settle on the bare fields; the larks, gathered into companies, drift in aimless fashion from farm to farm; but the robin, with his sun-ripened breast, sits above you on the medlar-tree, the master of the ceremonies, cheerily whistling the New Year in, and, if you care to listen, there seems a blither lilt in his voice than when, a week ago, he sang the old year, "with all its cares, to rest."

A billow of ivy overhangs part of my garden-wall, making a rare shelter against inclement skies for such of the winged insect folk as have overlived the year—a large-eyed, melancholy fly, its body ringed with yellow and brown, transparent with emptiness, a thing of sad lemurine demeanour and dreamily torpid; a tortoise-shell butterfly, with wings as tattered as any Crimean colours, but holding here and there traces of its autumnal glories; a blue-bottle infirm and old, hoary with anxieties, that moves wearily under the burden of its days.

And not insect folk alone. The possessive sparrow does not scorn the thick, close foliage of evergreen, for often as I pass down

the garden path I hear little sleepy noises thrown out from under the eaves of the ivy. Protests perhaps at my approach ; or perhaps only conciliatory, apologetic intimations of presence, as deprecating dispossession or disturbance. A wonderfully snug retreat it makes too, this solid overflow of green-stuff; dry, even dusty, in the wettest of times; weather-proof against all the watering-pots of all the rain-compellers—of Odin the merciless drencher, or Zeus Ombrios, of Pluvial Jove, or Indra Parjanga, he who floods the enormous Ganges, drowning even the crocodiles where they swim, and rolls the Indus, Father of Waters, swollen with the pride of its five-fold tribute from the North, imperious to the sea.

And the snails are here too, all in a bunch, pretending to be only knobs on the wall, and living, as bears do, upon themselves.

Now, I have always held the snail in respect as a model to travellers. He is your true "old campaigner." You can never cut him off from his base, for he always takes his base along with him. The objective point of the

small strategist is always, more or less, on his back. He has no lines of communication to be harassed and to be kept open when the enemy is hovering round ; runs no risk of being caught straggling, or without his baggage, belated, or at the mercy of sudden storms. He marches with his zereba ready made for any sudden Arab on-rush, his laager for Zulu surprises. In Afghanistan you shall always find his sungum with him, in Burma his stockade. Indeed, the forethought of this compendious little beast, with its industrious ambitions, is very enjoyable, I think. So too is its integrity. Other nomads and gipsies are sudden in their flittings, precipitate, evasive, and spectral. Their apparitions and evanishments are jerky, zigzag, bothering. You never, so to speak, get nearer them than the ashes of their last night's camp-fire. It is quite different with the snail. He proceeds, by preference, in a right line, and, unless circumstances beyond his control should compel obliquity, he visibly apologises for digression by writing all along his path, "This is the way I have gone."

So conscientious is he that he cannot even bear the suspicion of dodging, but puts you up all the way a continuous sign-post, so that you cannot miss him: he unwinds a bobbin as he goes to his bower: sprinkles crumbs along the path to his cave. Follow up his directions and you will come upon the little pilgrim, either upon the road or resting in his tracks—unless, of course, some hungry thrush or blackbird has anticipated you. And why should folk-lore always deride this sober-sided little person?

> "Snail, snail, put out your horn,
> Father and mother are dead,
> Brother and sister are in the back yard,
> Begging for barley bread."

In every language in Europe there are rhymed instructions for beating snails "black and blue," and flouting them as friendless orphans. It is very queer. However, here in my garden they are safe enough for the present. The sparrows do not understand them, and as for the old blue-bottle he is so much occupied in pitying himself he has but little thought for his neighbours.

And we have the lark with us, and the robin, and the wren, delightful birds all three, and our own into the bargain. I am no nightingale enthusiast. Just as operatic stars visit us "for the season," so the *maestri* of the feathered choir come over for our May and June. It is too hot in Egypt and Palestine; the food they prefer is scarce there. So they come to England to take advantage of our cool, deep-shaded hollies for their nesting, and of our exquisite English summer. As soon as their brood are on the wing they fly away with them back to the east and the south, and somehow I cannot help suspecting that they tell them as they go how perfidious the climate is in this England of ours, which is always so glad to see them, always so hospitable, and gives them of its best. Of course I like to listen to the nightingale, its ear-amazing melody. This bird is the crowning glory of our English May, a delightful parable and poem.

Indeed, I even go so far as to think that it is almost solemn that two little brown birds should have such a charge committed to them

as the hatching and rearing of a whole nestful of nightingales, and I delight in the dignity of the father which prompts him to cease his singing, as conscious of great responsibilities, as soon as the eggs are pipped. To lighten as it were the anxious hours of his brooding mate, he sits close by, flooding the woodland with overflow of song—

> "Divine melodious truth,
> Philosophic numbers smooth,
> Tales and golden histories
> Of heaven and its mysteries."

But as soon as the little ones leave their olive shells, he lays by his pipes and turns to helpful work. A lesson to genius.

It is a delightful bird, this sweet sequestered nightingale, whether at rest, cloistered "among cool and bunchèd leaves," or busy singing its heart out to the listening night. And yet, and yet, and yet—it only comes after all to see our English daffodils blow, and goes when the petals of the roses are falling. So I miss it less, this dainty migrant, following the swallow summer from clime to clime, than I should do, I think,

"the pious bird with scarlet breast,
Our little English Robin."

Every one delights in Robin as a winter bird. For myself I like it best in its pious aspect, the bird that "with leaves and flowers doth cover the friendless bodies of unburied men," or else—the ever-enchanting intrigue of it—as the lover of "Jenny" Wren. And the wren, what a bewitching little morsel it looks, when in the leafless publicity of winter it hops about in the empty bushes or perches itself, wee dwarf in feathers, on the wall.

Yet within its small person, so tradition alleges, it holds necromantic potentialities of a very serious kind, and on one occasion at least was the abiding-place of Beelzebub himself. Poor little mite! you do not look like it, skipping in and out the old pea-sticks, and suddenly stopping in your elfin antics to trill a roundelay.

And the robin up in the medlar-tree listens. He is lord of the garden croft; but he turns his shapely head—how the round black eye glistens!—and waits till the wren has finished,

and then gives a stave of his own. What a gentleman he is too, this robin of ours, always elegant, always self-possessed. You can never see without respecting him. His every gesture is in good taste, and musicians say his song is singularly correct. Most punctilious as to his honour, he is ready to draw his sword at the first hint of insult, and when with his equals, his hand is perpetually clapped to his side, a veritable little fire-eater among his peers, attacking with the light-hearted dash and pursuing with the gallant recklessness of a Cavalier. And yet, when the etiquette of robin-hood is not infringed, he is a delightfully well-bred little person, coming into your presence with an unassuming, self-respectful independence that is very engaging, and leaving, when he has said what he has to say, with the same ease of gentle bearing, the same unaffected demeanour.

How different is our sparrow! Thoroughly British, too, but not of the Elizabethan gallant or the Royalist type. For the sparrow is a bullet-headed, opinionated, self-assertive Briton of the "average" kind, and dreadfully

vulgar; given, too, to grumbling in all weathers, though living (the London citizen of his kind) in the foremost city of the world, a freeman of it, and availing himself, with an extraordinary presumption, of all contemporary privileges. The telegraph-poles and wires might have been put up for his convenience, the vast domes of our railway stations erected to suit his tastes, the omnibuses and tramcars run for his special convenience in locomotion, for he roosts on our wires, nests in the vaulted roofs of our stations, travels on all public conveyances. But this assertion of his rights has endeared the small brown bird—deplorably grubby though he often is—to the British cockney. He is, indeed, a British institution, and a supporter of the British arms too—not in the way that the lion and unicorn may be, but in this, that he follows our armies into every field. Wherever our conquering camps are pitched, there the sparrow takes possession of foreign soil. He flies with our battalions, and, perched on our flag-staffs, chirps his satisfaction in a full-fed, matter-of fact sort of

way that is strongly national. Zululand now knows him, and he is familiar in the Soudan; he is at home among the mulberries in the Candahar bazaars and out on the peach-dotted plains before Cabul. Nor is it only the commissariat waggons of war that he follows, for he goes abroad, a symbol of civilisation and the commercial conquests of peace. Following "the course of Empire westward" the British sparrow has invaded America. Ten years ago it had spread as far as Omaha, on the skirt of the great prairies, and, sailing round the Horn in our merchant vessels, had occupied San Francisco on the Pacific, and spread eastward to Salt Lake City. I looked out for it in my travels, and made notes of it, and I found then that there was a strip some thousand miles wide, running north and south, which the sparrow had not crossed. But by this time he has crossed it, is pecking his food in Cheyenne, and travelling by the Union Pacific across the levels of the Platte. An excellent little fowl, and a hardy, in his own way genial, and in every way strongly British.

In the month of January, with his brave little feet planted so firmly in the crust of snow, his plucky little head ruffled by the keen snow-wind, the chirp still so full of heart, he is a lovable bird. He is waiting for his small dues of crumb ; let him have them. By-and-by the frost will be gone, and the wind blow warm and sweet through the bee-beleaguered limes, and there will be birds enough in every bough.

For January looks forward to the month of daffodils and green-tipped hedgerows.

And looking backwards, my memory flies to those days in India, where the New Year finds us living under a blue sky, with the gardens at their brightest, and in the morning just that touch of sharpness which tempts us northern folk out into the air, and which shrivels up our Aryan brother, making his limbs shiver under the many-folded blanket in which he creeps about his duties, and his teeth chatter as he sits by the stream, plying his neem-twig toothbrush with "a face on him," as the Americans say, like the ragged edge of despair. And from the road beyond

the wall, where the villagers have taken out their pots and pans to the travelling tinker-man, the chink-chink-chink on the metal reaches my ear.

And suddenly there grows up before the mind the peepul-shaded walls of a many-templed city in the East, and all up and down the street, screened from the sun, January though it be, sit the artificers in brass plying their little hammers, engraving the glittering lotahs with processionary monkeys, peacocks, and fiercely whiskered tigers. And the chink-chink-chink of the engraving needles upon the sharply resonant metal fills the air for a mile round with a myriad of cicada-points of sound that thrill on the ear with a rhythmic pulsation—a perpetual cadence of little insect-notes, as unlike the voice of serious human toil as well can be. Just such sounds do the belated travellers in fairy-books hear when they find themselves on the hillocks where the gnomes have their smithies, and the fairies' anvils ring to the strokes of elfin hammers.

Looking back! What a far-off city it

seems that Benares which I know so well, lying to-day—New Year's Day—steeped in clear sunlight, and the water-carrier crying down the street, selling to thirsty folk as he goes.

THE FAMINE IN MY GARDEN

A FROST overnight, and in the morning a thaw. The February sun so bright that the poor old flies come out and bask in company on the ivy-bloom—the veterans of a year, content in the evening of life to sit still and feel warm once more. Will you laugh at me if I say that there is something very pathetic in this last convention of the little creatures, doomed to die to-night, who have met together "morituri," to salute, for the last time, the Sun?

How few they are, these survivors of the countless hosts of summer, and how feeble they look, burly blue-bottles and "hoverers,"

with big, bulging eyes, as they creep, hand over hand, on to the centre of the tods of ivy-bloom and sit there—you can almost hear them puffing and wheezing after their exertions—to thaw their half-numbed limbs. A wasp, one of those selected by Nature to outlive the winter and found new colonies in Spring, comes upon the scene, self-assertive and bad-mannered as usual. She has scented the aromatic honey in the ivy flowers, and is making the most of the brief time, scrambling greedily from bunch to bunch, and upsetting off each the poor old dozy fly that was sitting on the top, thinking out the end of its life. How unfeelingly robust the busy insect must seem to those melancholy "centenarians" of a twelvemonth, those philosophic invalids, silently sunning themselves once more before they die.

Ivy-bloom is Nature's last roll-call of the flies. To it muster the battered remnants of great armies of winged folk, and it may be that they think summer has begun again, and looking round and seeing that every tuft of flower is occupied, may imagine that all the

rest of the garden is just as full of their kinsmen as the ivy is, and as the garden used to be when the sun shone every day. And who knows? Perhaps these old people deceive themselves with the hope that the feebleness which they feel all over is only "passing," and that by-and-by they will be just as they used to be, glossy in coat and strong on the wing, and—the joy of it!—with noble appetites for the honey of flowers. And dreaming that they are going to be young again soon, they fall asleep in the sunshine, and while they sleep the merciful frost overtakes them, and they dream themselves one by one off the ivy-bloom, and drop, from leaf to leaf, to the ground. Only the wasp is left. She has filled herself up to the neck, like a bottle, with honey, and, while there was still light to see by, has crept away under the thick ivy, and deep down into the middle of the thatch, where her folk had their nest this year and whence next year she will come forth to start her own. So that this self-assertive, pushing wasp is really, if you think of it, an assurance of coming

Spring. Had she, like the old flies, sat still and got frozen when the sun went down behind the firs, you might have said, "There is an end of it. Winter is coming now." But the wasp has kept herself alive: nothing final or conclusive has happened; she is there, snug and happy, a link between the old year and a new. So you must not say "Finis": for it is Springtime that is coming, not Winter. The wasp knows that. If she did not she would die like the hoverers with the big eyes and the blue-bottle that looks so stout, but is really only the husk of a fly. So think as well as you may of the wasp. For she is a gracious reminder of gentler days that are coming, days that are good for the blue-bell and anemone, and when the sun will glitter again on daffodil-trumpets for the bees to blow.

Has it ever occurred to you what an amazing experience this surviving the winter ought to be to a blue-bottle? Is it not, as far as the fly is concerned, *the end of the world*, itself surviving? Where has the sun gone to from out of the sky? Where too the

green earth, beautiful with flowers and the grace of leafy trees? Where all the insect peoples, the nations of winged folk? This blue-bottle has actually outlived its year. It has seen "the greater light" founder in the snow-storm, fields and forests shrivel up in catastrophic frost, the air desolated of its myriads by reason of bitter cold. And it is left alone. Not another blue-bottle, so far as it knows, in all the universe! Alone, in a miserable immortality of decrepitude and solitariness.

On the night that the world was overwhelmed in Arctic horrors, it happened to be sleeping in a keyhole, and so in the general overthrow of the firmament was overlooked by the destroyer as he went, and here it is, as wretched as any of those Struldbruggs that Gulliver saw in Luggnagg.

Do you remember them? Gulliver imagined them to himself as the happiest of creatures, the sages of the cities, encyclopædias incarnate, placed by their vast age and the assurance of perpetuity beyond every sentiment of uncharitableness, universally reve-

renced for their immeasurable wisdom and beloved for their mild benevolence. And then the wretchedness of the reality! Toothless, deaf, blind, decayed, without the sense of taste, imbecile, dead in the eye of the law, unable from the changes of language during successive centuries to converse with their kind, even if their addled minds and complete loss of memory had permitted them to articulate, they crawled about in the enclosures in which they were kept, objects of public odium and contempt. Will it come to this with the February blue-bottle? When the Spring flies are abroad in their glossy, vigorous youth, will it be a Struldbrugg to them? See how infirm it is, how unlike its volatile and nimble kind! When it creeps out to sit and warm itself in the patch of winter sunshine on the brick-wall, you may push it with your finger, and it will not take alarm. It may fall off in helpless protest on to the bench below, and you can pick it up and put it back on to the brick it fell off. What is the meaning of this apathy? Perhaps the thing has been stunned with the

stones that misfortune has flung at it. Affliction has emptied its wallet at it; the phials of disaster are dry. So have poets and moralists described men and women without number, benumbed and deadened by the repeated blows of grief and careless in the lethargy of despair. Once on a time when the hammer fell, sparks flew out in hot quick remonstrance. But the hearts of them are chilled, dead, blackened, and hard.

It is true the thing is only an old, very old blue-bottle, but what of that? Lower your own standards to its small dimensions, and in its way it is as authentic as those Elder Gods whom Keats saw lying outstretched in the valleys of defeat. Has it not survived the shock of the meeting years? And with the slender thread of its own life bridged across from the past to the future? You can blow the fly away with a breath, and yet it has had experience of all the solemn epic of a year, sojourned with the Frost-giants in Jotunheim and survived. It has seen Ragnarök, the last twilight, and is still alive.

In its own tiny way, then, it is very

reverend, this grey atom that has lasted out its epoch. Has it not presumptuously trespassed upon a geological age to which it does not belong? It is a prehistoric relic, an old-world beast that has lingered into the present; the Hermogenes of flies; the Nestor of blue-bottles. So a happy new year to you, Master Struldbrugg, and if that gout which (if I am not mistaken) makes your little padded feet so lumpy does not go to your heart, you may live after all—who knows?—to see the sun shine on the crocuses yet, and when the old machinery inside you suddenly falls to pieces, at every point simultaneously, like Wendell Holmes' *Wonderful One-hoss Shay*, I hope your inconsiderable fragments may rest, as those of a patriarch should do, in honourable peace.

And next morning falling snow, and a bitter wind from the north, that whirls it round and round in the open fields, and drifts it up in the lanes, burying the fieldmouse in his winter nest in the bank, and, to the great bewilderment of the travelling rabbits, levelling the ditches with the road. Follow bunny's

tracks up and you can hardly help laughing when you see what happened when he got to the snow-filled ditch. How deep he plunged in and what a fuss he made in getting out! Lucky for Brer Rabbit, that Brer Fox was not lying low, or there, in the ditch, would have been the end of all his misbehavishness. But he got out all safe and went on, and here, further along, you see is where he crossed into the hedge-row in safety, a sheltered corner with no treacherous drift.

And the snow still falls till it has covered up the snowdrops, and the winter aconites which the soft mild weather of the early year had wheedled into bloom, and goes on falling till everything has been made beautiful. The laurels and ivy are deeply coped with snow, their broad leaves hold it well, but the japonicas are only outlined in white. The yews, drooping long feathers of snow to the ground, are beautiful beyond words, and the oak's stiff branches straight-stretched before it are spangled to the tips. The leaves of the box and barberry are every one of them fringed with loveliest lace, and the birch, the

lady's tree, stands like a bride in her veil. The firs are wonderful, weird, and fairy-tale-like—what might not easily happen at Christmas time in a forest of fir trees !—and beautiful, above all, are the great elms like frozen fountains. Every tree, every shrub, takes the snow to its own personal adornment as it will, or as it may, and the loveliness is such that those who see it aright feel thankful to Pan. And under the trees lie stretched the levels of the earth bewitching in the purity of white, and thus in his ermine imperial Winter stands confessed.

But alas for the little folk of my garden ! Under a few trees, yews and cypresses, Wellingtonias and deodars, the brown earth is still bare. Here the pheasants scratch and the squirrels make hysteric search for nuts—nuts buried in the merry Autumn days when they revelled in filberts and sunshine, and the cracking of shells and the tapping of tit and nuthatch were the loudest sounds in the orchard : when blackbird and thrush and rabbit feasted on fallen fruit, and the red admirals floated to and fro among the dahlia

blooms and sipped the juices of apple and pear and plum, and tipsy bumble-bees lay about among the flowers sleeping off the effects of the linden wine.

Those happy days of warmth and plenty are gone for a while, and the present is all snow and famine. Puffed up into balls the birds sit all forlorn and hungry under the shrubs, and sedately melancholy the pheasants urge a desperate quest for food underneath the laurel and box and holly. The squirrel does not care, for he is up in a silver fir eating off all the tips of the branches, and the bullfinch does not mind, for the buds on the cherry-trees are plump and without number. The rabbit too, though perplexed, is not dismayed, for he delves his way up out of his burrow through the overlying snow—his exits look like the blow-holes in the ice where seals come up to breathe—and issues upon a grassless world it is true, but with "fine confused feeding" before him—veronicas and violet leaves, honesty, sweet-williams, all sorts of flower-garden fare—and, as his footprints in the morning show, he frisks

about and foots it featly with his kind. What distances these creatures travel in a night! coming and going upon their tracks till they become a labyrinth, and arriving at their objective points—the Brussel-sprouts that stand up like little palm-trees from the desert white, and the large round heads of winter cabbage dumplinged over with snow—by such oblique approaches, such cautious circumbendibuses. Perhaps these other foot-marks, round pads, five-toed, that go alongside theirs may account for some of the rabbit's circuitous excursions and sudden alarums. For the cats are abroad these snowy nights.

But, except the squirrel and the bullfinch and the rabbit and the mice that go to sleep when they find it cold, all the other little burghers of the garden are miserable. So relief-works are opened, not on any sliding-scale of misery, or with allowances computed by prominence of skeleton, but on the good old blundering, demoralising, principle of indiscriminate charity. And it does not work very well: for there is the sparrow.

It was no less nor worse a person than Martin Luther who said the "sparrows should be killed wherever found." But this is no time to talk of killing. The snow lies a foot deep on the ground, and the frost rings true to the skate and means to last. So let us try and forget what Luther said—perhaps in his haste—about "the bird that the Hebrews called tschirp." But they have to be cheated, outwitted, circumvented, and generally bamboozled, or the relief-works would be a mere mockery and a farce. For as soon as the food is thrown down the sparrows are in the middle of it, and not eating as other birds do, with a peck and a start, a crumb at a time, but gobbling, *wolfing*. They think of nothing else, never exchange a remark with one another, never look about them, but eat, eat, eat, till all is gone. It is only then that the blackbird and the chaffinch, who have been all along aware that a meal was in progress but have hesitated to share it, come timidly forward, only to find that every crumb has been swallowed. The new-comers hop about

the relief-works, picking up unconsidered atoms here and there—it is poor gleaning after the sparrow has reaped—while the sparrows sit idly scratching their heads or, perched in the trees around, watch for the re-opening of the door. At the first sound of the handle turning, the song-birds and the birds of beauty are off, and the sparrows are back.

So it goes on all day. You can no more fill a sparrow up with crumbs than you could Jumbo with buns. A robin is soon satisfied, and, satisfied, goes away. A sparrow is nothing if not exceeding, and its excesses somehow seem to "sparalyse" the appetites of all other birds. Besides, it has not the remotest idea of good taste or manners. It has neither self-respect nor gratitude. So, though its little graceless necessities must be duly respected, its excesses of appetite may be becomingly, and in a Christian spirit, muzzled.

One plan is to mix oatmeal with very fine stale crumbs and ostentatiously scatter it about, pretending that you are spreading a

banquet, on as many sides of the house as possible, and over as much ground as possible. Then when the sparrows are all greedily at work at the scanty provender, go off with a basket of solid provisions, scraps of fat, heads and tails of fish, broken bread, sliced apples, bacon-rind (and, reader, if you are cutting it off for the birds, do not pare it too close, let your knife generously slip a little), maize, dog-biscuit, everything and anything, and dispose of it, under the shrubs and in corners where you see the birds have been scratching, not in meagre driblets, but with a free hand in a few places. Then go innocently back to the house, and about an hour later have more oatmeal and tiny crumblets scattered with great display for the sparrows. And thus you may keep "tschirp" under your windows, quite content, thinking he has everything to himself, while far away, out of ken of the voracious little vagabond, the birds you wish to serve are keeping themselves alive upon ample and varied fare.

For it must be remembered that the country sparrow does not suffer from "incle-

ment" skies. It does not matter to it what "the skies" are like: its food is there all the same. With other birds the case is vastly different. They are literally starving, and but for your relief-works would die. As it is, many do die, simply from timidity. And here comes in the only good that the sparrows do in times of famine. They guide the shyer and less sophisticated birds to the food that is offered them. If it were not for the sparrows collected upon the pathways and snow-cleared spaces, the blackbird and thrush, the chaffinch and hedge-sparrow, the tits and nuthatches, might never find out the charity provided.

Robins need no telling, for they come at once; but can anything be more provoking than their behaviour? They pick up a tiny crumb, perk their tails, flick their wings, attitudinise, take fright and fly away; come back again for another tiny crumb, behave absurdly again, and go off. Meanwhile the sparrows go on stuffing without a word, or even a look for anything else but the food before them—"In the name of the Prophet

—*crumbs!*" The hedge-sparrows, with nervous twitching of wings, hop about selecting apparently the tiniest morsels they can find. The courtly chaffinches come with a gay step, chirping to each other to give and take confidence, but eating nothing, moving obsequiously out of the way of every gluttonous sparrow, and pecking only with apologies. Suddenly comes a general stampede. A blackbird, determined, come what may, to get something to eat, descends upon the scene, picks up as large a piece as it can see, and flies, with a nervous squeak, back into the shrubs, and for the rest of the day spends its time in being chased by, or chasing, another blackbird.

So, reader, you who love the birds do not bring them all down to an equal necessity of accepting too publicly your outdoor relief. Do not insist upon their coming to the door-step and the window-sill for food. Some of them are very nervous and sensitive—made of tender stuff. They shrink from the common feast, and, until the pain of real starvation beats down their shyness, will, from

the shelter of the shrubs, piteously watch the robust ones dividing your alms among them, but will not, these small gentlefolk in feathers, intrude any claim upon your kindness. So pretend that you know nothing of their necessities. Affect an innocence even of their haunts, and, out of your own good taste, as it were, do not urge them to the ordeal of joining the mob before your windows. So will your bounty not be a misery to these little people. Take your benevolences out into the shrubberies and the orchard, and, as you pass, scatter the saving morsels wherever they may most quickly catch the eye—under the bushes, where the earth is brown, round the feet of the trees, where there is still grass green—and the birds that you love best will eat in peace, gratefully sharing in your charity now sweetened to them by seclusion. They eat now not as paupers, but as the little neighbours of a great lord, each of them in its own home, as it were, and twice thankful, for the snow-tide help, and for their own escape from the sharp discipline of public relief.

There are no conditions that I know of that give the looker-on so authentic an insight into the characters of birds as their behaviour during a famine. Of the sparrows I have already spoken. But it is noble to see the robin tourney at him and peck him full on the middle of his grey noddle ; to see the hedge-sparrow ruffle itself up, and hear it tilt with a squeak straight into the burly braggart ; to see the tiny marsh-tit, its head feathers all on end with pluck, drive at him. The sparrow seldom retaliates except upon his own kind. Even the polite chaffinch, always ready to give place, and never coming forward without a "By your leave," gets out of patience with the sparrow and dabs it on the back when it hustles it. But the sparrow has a fine street-boy sort of revenge upon them all, and, from observation, I am almost certain that one trick which it plays is deliberate. The birds are all feeding, ten or twenty sparrows to one of any other kind, and suddenly they rise all together. *Whir-r-r !* All the other birds are frightened and fly to long distances and there wait for a

catastrophe that never occurs, or some danger to pass by that never threatened, and lo! the sparrows are all back among the food again. They had only flown up into the tree overhead or on to the wall behind, and had hardly alighted before they returned. But the other birds are too sincerely perturbed to come back for a long time; some of them never come back at all.

These panics among the sparrows are so causeless and so advantageous to themselves that I am convinced they are a ruse. A blackbird among them is a nuisance: he bullies them. So up they get—*whir-r-r!*—and where is the blackbird? Gone so far and alarmed so thoroughly that he will not be back for an hour at least. But the sparrows are all there again within five seconds, and going on with the crumbs just where they left off. Dogs, we know, practise this "swike" regularly and of plan prepense. One dog has a bone which another covets. The boneless dog suddenly rushes out of the room barking excitedly; the other follows him. Back comes first dog and carries off the

bone. Enter second dog. *Tableau.* Crows do the same in India. A kite is feasting, and they come round it. There is a sudden panic. Up starts the kite, and lo! the feast is gone and the crows with it. The same trick, I believe, from observation during wintry weather, is practised every day upon the more timid tenants of our gardens by "the bird that the Hebrews call tschirp."

Next to the sparrow, the most interesting visitor is the marsh-tit, a very common little bird, but by most people mistaken, from the similarity of headgear, for the "blackcap," which is only a summer visitor and does not stay with us in winter. This tiny bird is very fearless, respecting only its cannibal cousin the great tit, and, if it has made up its mind to get the bait, disregarding the dangers of the trap. You may catch the same marsh-tit over and over again, the little captive coming and going at each imprisonment with the same cheery little cry. It perches on the food with an impudent "*Chee-chee-chee!* I'm small, but I won't be imposed upon!" and deliberately picking out the largest piece,

flies off with it. It has hardly gone before it is back. "*Chee-chee-chee!*" and away again with the largest crumb it can find. And so it will go on as long as any food large enough to be worth carrying off remains. And the sparrows tell off small parties of threes and fours to pursue each tit and pick up what it drops.

Why does this bird carry off so much food that it does not want? No other English bird does it. The crow family, of course, will hide morsels for enjoyment later. But there is no analogy here, for the marsh-tit has not the smallest idea where it puts its food, nor does it care where it goes. If I place a dozen large crumbs of bread upon the birds' table outside my window, a single marsh-tit will carry them all off in three minutes or less, and deposit them in twelve different places, none of them twenty yards away from the table. Its only idea is to secrete as much as it can, but where it secretes it does not matter a tittle to the tit. One piece goes into the handle of the ivy basket, the next into the wistaria over my window,

a third into the laurel hedge, a fourth into the holly bush, and all the rest into a great cigar-shaped yew. Into this yew-tree the bird drops its crumbs with as much confidence as if it were a safe-deposit or a money-box. That the pieces of bread all fall out at the bottom of the tree makes no difference. The tit has got rid of the piece : that is enough for it. And back it comes for some more. Its only idea is to get all the food it can *out of sight.* "Clear the table" is its one notion.

Its conduct here is nearly the same as the squirrel's, which, when the nuts are falling, carries them off at the rate of one a minute by the hour together ; but of this I shall have more to say later. That the squirrels ever find any of the nuts again, during the winter, I do not believe, as I see them every day searching for them, but never yet have I seen a squirrel go straight to a nut. The pheasants and rabbits unearth them in quantities, and then the squirrels come by their own again, but, as I have already said, I do not believe they know where the nuts

are which they buried. They find them as they buried them, fortuitously and at random.

With the marsh-tit it is exactly the same. So long as it has removed an atom of food it is content; what becomes of the atom does not concern it in the least. If when flying away with it the morsel drops, the tit does not pick it up, but comes back for another. "As well there as anywhere else," it says.

It is particularly fond of carrying off maize. Six grains a minute is leisurely work for this absurdly active little bird. Now it is a large hand that will hold more than 200 grains of maize, yet that one tit carries off a handful in an hour with ease. Half a dozen of them, therefore, will make away with enough maize in an hour to feed as many pheasants for a day. And what do the tits do with it? They are very fond of pecking out the softer matter at the sprouting end of the grain. Now, maize is a very awkward shape to hold, and the consequence is that nine times out of ten the grain slips out of their claws at the first peck, and drops to the ground. But as a matter of fact the marsh-

tit as often as not flies off with the maize with no intention of eating it but merely of hiding it. And this it will do anywhere, in an ivy stump, a crack in a wall, a fork of a branch, or its favourite "safe-deposit" yew tree. The behaviour of the coal-tit is in marked contrast. It too carries off food, but for the sole purpose of eating it, and though it drops again and again it pursues and recovers it, often finishing on the ground the meal which it began at the top of the tree. The squirrel hides food in summer, and it is plausible to suppose that it does so to eat it in the winter. But why should the marsh-tit hide food in winter? Surely not in the hope of eating it in summer. The point is a very interesting one as going to weaken the "provident" idea of the squirrel's laying by.

Another point that has perplexed naturalists from the first is, in miniature, raised by this same little bird, the marsh-tit.

How does the Vulture discover its food? is a question periodically asked, and as regularly answered with a "nobody knows." Audubon, for instance, says by sight; Waterton says by

smell; and where two such observers disagree, it is not likely that anybody else will venture to decide.

But how do our English tits discover meat? When the answer to my query is given I think the solution of the vulture problem will also have been found.

Opposite my study-window, I fasten with wire a bacon-rind or piece of fat on to the posts that support the verandah, or on one of the strands of wistaria that stretch across from post to post. In either case the meat is out of sight of the tits. The ground is plentifully sprinkled with birds, for it is plentifully sprinkled with crumbs. But what happens? As soon as I come in, the other birds, disturbed at their repast, return to the crumbs, but the tits *go straight to the meat.* As I have said, they cannot see it. And even if they could see it, what would a strip of bacon-rind or a piece of fat suggest to a tit who had never seen such an object before? Later on, noticing the tits are enjoying themselves, the sparrow's keen eyes are turned up again and again to see what it is that the others are

eating. Curiosity tempts them to fly up and examine the morsels which excite the titmice to such enthusiasm, but they can find nothing of sufficient interest to keep them away from crumbs, and so after a second's perfunctory survey of the surroundings they return to the ground. Then the tits come back, and just as with the vultures, the news of the "carcase" spreads with astonishing rapidity, and to travesty Longfellow's lines:

> "Never stoops the soaring titmouse
> On the bacon-rind or suet,
> But another titmouse watching,
> Wonders what he's got and follows,
> And a third pursues the second,
> First a speck and then a titmouse,
> Till the place is full of titmice."

How do the tits find out the meat? The robin seems to be the only bird that shares the faculty with them, and it appears to me that it distinctly marks off these two birds as carnivorous and possessed of a "meat-sense," for which our own senses afford no better explanation than they do of the bee's "honey-sense."

Of the other birds who come to the relief-works near the house, there are none with very marked individuality of behaviour, and, on the whole, they are disappointing. It is pleasant to see the little folk at food, but the manner in which they accept your alms, their complete want of confidence in your intentions, is depressing. Except the hedge-sparrow and the robin, I know none that really gratify you by their demeanour. Before you are down in the morning all kinds of birds, as the footprints and queer marks in the snow reveal to you, have been round your doors. Here are marks to fit all birds—jay, rook, missel-thrush, wood-pigeon, hawfinch, jackdaw, starling, woodpecker. But they do not come to the meal. And where are the yellow-hammers and larks, linnets and green-finches, wrens and wagtails? They are all in the garden or the orchard or the meadow during the day, and sad as the fact is, though they come up in the early morning to the house and lawn, they will not approach when you are there to help them.

Yet, if you take the food further away,

behind shrubberies and in out-of-the-way corners of the grounds, the news spreads wonderfully quickly that the almoner has been abroad, and your chopped up fat rolled in bread-crumbs and pieces of crust and maize are all gone when you next go out with a fresh supply. A clean-swept space on a frozen pond makes an excellent feeding ground ; the food lies there conspicuous, and you can often get a good view of a strange visitor. In such a place I saw a spotted woodpecker swallowing fat-pills, and helping itself about on the ice with both tail and wing. When rising off the snow, the woodpeckers strike the snow heavily with both wings; you can count the ten quill-marks with beautiful distinctness. And so, too, when flying down to settle on the snow, you can trace the long scrape, sometimes for a foot or more, of their eight or nine tail feathers.

If your gardener has any manure, or leaf-mould heaps that he can turn over, any collections of small wood for kindling that he can shift the position of, the starlings

will be very grateful, and when they have finished with the insects will gladly empty egg-shells of any scraps and eat soaked dog-biscuits, which are filled with shredded meat.

Here, too, will come that dearest of birds, the wren. What a little Christian life it leads, the wee retiring bird, and I know nothing in all the story of the famine so pretty as the wren's bright carol of gladness for a meal enjoyed. Sometimes it stops eating to sing. This may be, it is true, only a war song, a challenge to some other wren that you cannot see, but that does not matter. The canticle is sweet and repays you for all you do for the other unconfiding birds.

Oddly enough too, that other saint-like little fowl, the hedge "sparrow," as it is so wrongly called, enchants you with snatches of song, feeble winter versions of spring melody it is true, but very pretty, while it is all agog for battle. The pair that are feeding together—I know no other bird but the chaffinch that is so regularly seen all the

year round in pairs—become aware by some bird's freemasonry of the approach of a third, and it is absurd to see how the little wings twitch and the tail fans in and out, till all its feathers are in a nervous flurry, and then as soon as the stranger appears, down go both heads and, squeaking in a high key, the combatants tilt at one another.

The robin, too, the "pious" bird, is very quarrelsome, and it exasperates one to watch him wasting the precious hours of food in hunting another hungry robin up and down and round and round, till the sparrows have cleared the board. The blackbirds, too, are very annoying in the way that they snatch up lumps of bread and fly off with them, only to be chased about for the rest of the morning by other blackbirds, while a sparrow makes a solid meal off the morsel fallen meanwhile under a shrub. But relentless as they are in pursuit, the curious fact is that they seldom fight. If the pursued turns, the pursuer stops, perks up his tail, and being promptly charged by the other, becomes in his turn the pursued. But woe to both when the missel-

thrush comes. He is pitiless in pursuit, and I have seen them pass my window time after time in the course of a morning, the storm-cock hard on the "heels" of the blackbird. And when they overtake them what happens? For myself, as I have often said before, I believe the missel-thrush is a cannibal. At any rate, I attribute some of the dead blackbirds and thrushes that one finds about the grounds, to his cruel beak. He watches for birds for hours at a time like a bird of prey and attacks them like one. I have often stopped a chase which I knew could only end one way.

When the missel-thrushes fight they lower their heads and utter sharp mouse-like sounds and, inapplicable as the phrase may seem, look singularly snake-like. It is interesting to note the different expressions of anger among birds. Some I have already referred to. The great tit makes itself long and thin, raises some head feathers, and dashes with incredible *élan* at the foe. The marsh-tit ruffles up all the head and neck feathers till it looks as if some very little bird had

borrowed a bigger bird's head. The robin merely flicks its tail, droops its wings, and "clicks." The woodpecker, as I saw it on the ice, where it was at a disadvantage, drew back its head on to its back in a most surprising way, and erected all its crest-feathers, making itself really a fearsome and reptilian thing, as the starling, who had no malicious intentions, seemed to think, for it skipped off nimbly to one side with a "Bless my soul! who'd have thought it?" sort of expression that was very comic. So, reader, though I was disappointed with the birds, and would have been glad if they would have trusted us all a little more, I was glad to see that not a scrap of food, wherever it might be put, was wasted.

And the rabbits? Basketfuls of apples, some beginning to "go," some "going," and some already "gone," were taken from the apple room, and the gardeners culled out all the waste from their stores of potatoes and parsnip, carrot and turnips, and one particular place in the orchard was spread with Bunny's viands; and after the snow had lain a week

you should have seen the place! It was trampled as hard as ice by the soft feet of the hungry folk; and in this way, with a single half-barrow load of mangolds, a compact was made with Brer Rabbit, that if he was fed in the orchard he should not feed himself in the kitchen garden, and Brer Rabbit faithfully kept the compact.

And there is one more last word that must be said for the sparrow—though the skies should crack our pates, let justice be done even to the sparrow—and that is this, that they are models of punctuality. Do you suppose you could keep a sparrow out of bed by asking him to sup with Lucullus? Try, and you will find an empty place at your table when you come to sit down. Nor Apician delicacies nor Gargantuan feasts will keep "tschirp" up after sunset. It does not matter to him that there is no sun to set. If it has not set, it ought to have done so, and he is off "to bye-bye." Crumbs can now be thrown out fearlessly. For no other bird obeys Phœbus his routine, and then the feathered things whom the sparrow has robbed

and hustled all day triumph for a very brief space, while the sparrows are quarrelling for places in their evergreen dormitories. But soon they, too, go off. What mysterious mandate, unrecognisable by us, tells them that the "day" is done? The snow illuminates the scene, making a bright twilight of its own. But no. Nature has whispered, "It is time for bed, children," and away they go, some noisy, some quiet, and the rest of your good things are left to be eaten in the morning.

AFTER THE FAMINE IN MY GARDEN

WHEN there was snow on the ground and famine in the garden the birds flocked to my food, but the thaw came, and not one of them all has ever been back to say "Thank you." It may be that the blackbird and thrush now singing from the fir-tops are grateful, and that the short, bright chants of the robin are canticles in acknowledgment of a timely kindness. But I wish they would sometimes come back to the tables that I spread for them when they were in need, just to show, now that they are not hungry, that they still look upon me as a friend. But they will not have it so. If I go out, the black-

birds break cover with hysterical cries—how meek they were when the ground was iron—and long before you can get near them, the tits (they used to eat within reach of my arm in the bitter days) affect a ridiculous alarm at my presence.

The air is soft, the sun is shining, and the winged folk have all gone back to their routines of life, and, happily, without any remembrance of miseries past. Out in the paddock the rooks are very pompous and self-satisfied. For a fortnight they had not enough spirit among a whole flock of them for a single caw, but now they are joyously clamorous, convening at their Diet of Worms with effusive congratulations, and flying homewards at evening with much discourse. The starlings are with them—and how they eat! The rations of porridge and boiled dog-biscuit that during the frost were served out to them, unsavoury, doubtless, but life-preserving, are forgotten now, while they revel in grubs; and the missel-thrushes, so alert to-day to take fright at your approach, would not believe it if you told them that a

fortnight ago they drove the sparrows away from the crumbs under your very windows.

What a pity it is that the birds have no memory in warmer weather of their desperate confidence in man in winter. What a charm it would give to life in the country if they could only recollect that you did not harm them when they came round you in the days of trouble, and understand, when the roses are in bloom, that you are still as harmless and friendly as ever. But the wild things, unfortunately, never recognise a particular human being as a whole. They will come to know a person who is always dressed in the same way or doing the same thing, or they will learn a call, or become accustomed to a regular routine. But their sight does not permit them to discern the same individual in two disguises, nor can they, like the dog, afford to wait till you are close to them, to acknowledge your identity; and no one, except a Thoreau in his wilds or a Francis of Assisi, can spend his years in uniformity of garb for the reward of the confidence of the little folk in fur and feathers. By going

round the grounds in a particular way, and with certain regular formalities, I once established in a country place a sort of general understanding with the creatures about me, notably the herons, the wood-pigeons, the game birds, rabbits, and squirrels; but if any day I wore white gaiters over my shoes, they refused to believe in me. The moving feet of a man are what birds and small beasts on the ground first catch sight of. Those in the air or on trees first detect his face (it is wonderful how conspicuous "flesh-colour" is among foliage) or the touches of white about his clothes. So the would-be observer of wild life should dress like a game-keeper, wear muddy boots, and paint his face "khaki." Above all, he should avoid white. See how conspicuous a little patch of it makes those singularly wary birds the bullfinch and the jay, and note how instantly your own eye catches a single white feather in the wing or tail of a particular bird in a whole flight of sparrows.

To-day, in the first exultation, as it were, of escape from the constraints of winter, all

the birds seem to be fairly revelling in their freedom to range, and the sudden alternation from universal snow and piercing wind to a balmy atmosphere and mellow breeze. Happy creatures, to take the days as they come, rejoicing in sunshine and plenty, and forgetting at once the frost and famine! Everything seems to be in motion, excited and eager. The linnets sweep in twittering wisps from plough to grass and back again from grass to plough. The larks, as you watch, keep rising and settling as if too full of good spirits to stay still. The restless starlings, the hindermost perpetually flying over the rest to get in front, are travelling hurriedly across the meadow. Woodpeckers cannot be content with any one tree, but flit looping in their buoyant flight from trunk to trunk. The dead leaves in the ditches and under the trees are all twitching and fluttering as if they were alive, but it is the tits that are at work, moving about like mice among the brown foliage and tossing the leaves one by one aside, resuming with all the freshness of a new attack their interrupted campaign against

the insects. And look at that wren that is with them. The tiny thing is all agog with revived energy, skipping about from spot to spot excitedly, and suddenly hopping up into the hedge to let off some of its spirits in irrepressible song. The robin, glad of the gardener's return to the flower beds, flies from the spade-handle to the wheel-barrow, keeping its bright black eyes all the time on the mould, and darting down from time to time to seize the torpid creatures turned up to the surface. And it, too, cannot contain itself for glee at the going of the frost, and flying into the tree overhead unloads its heart in a merry roundelay. Lord! how fast the little songsmith sings. He must out with it or he will die.

Far off, keeping company with solemn rooks and sedate starlings—and it must be said for these birds, they never lost their high opinion of themselves or of the virtues of deportment at the shrewdest pinch of hunger and cold—are the wood-pigeons; much too distrustful, now that the snow has gone, to come near the house. How different a fort-

night ago, when the snowdrops, "fair maids of February," were quilted over, and the polyanthus dared not show its pretty petals.

With dejected aspect and melancholy gait, their feathers all ruffled and awry, see then the unwilling ringdoves come to the place of alms. How changed from the broad-shouldered, plump-breasted birds that carried their portly selves about under the beeches, what time the mast lay thick, with such gravity and self-approbation, looking like dignitaries of the Church sauntering in some Cathedral Close. How exquisitely rounded their contours, how beautifully sleek their surfaces, and how glossy. But during the frost they came, poor birds, to beg, their summer airs and graces all laid aside, regardless of appearances. How humbly and thankfully they seemed to eat. There was no sun shining then to make rainbows on their breasts or to necklace their throats with opals.

On the privet bushes the berries are still glistening, quarts upon quarts of them. Why have the birds not eaten them? They all like them. Why, too, have they not eaten

the berries on the yellow hollies? Not a red one is to be found; but the yellow-berried hollies are untouched. Why, again, do birds that eat berries refuse, when starving, to eat buds? Surely the buds of cherry blossom and plum, peach, apricot, and nectarine are as pleasant and sustaining as the harsh fruit of ivy and holly and privet. How is it that in hard times the blackbird and thrush do not turn to them instead of the crumbs upon the garden path? The pheasants walk about, picking up scraps of green here and there; but why do they not debauch in the orchard, where there is nearly an acre of currant and gooseberry bushes all prematurely in full bud? The ways of birds are past understanding. They devour the red holly berries before winter comes and when worms must be plentiful, and yet, when starving, leave both hips and haws to rot in the frost.

The owl is abroad early. Poor bird, it has been a sorry Lent with him I fancy. Mice are not in plenty when the snow is deep on the ground, and when they do come abroad they seek their food where they can find it

without wet feet. But now that the snow has gone they are afield with the sunset, and the owl sweeping round the stacks takes toll of their number. The wasp, too, is abroad again ; not brisk as when the wall-fruit are ripening, but dull and slow flying. Kill it if you like. Every wasp killed in the opening year is as good as a nest destroyed in Autumn. The bees have waked up and are very grateful for saucers of syrup. There are no flowers but the Christmas roses for them to search, crocuses, winter-aconites, and squills, snowdrops and hepaticas, and the honey-pots among them are few. It is very pathetic to see how assiduously all day long they besiege the same patches of bloom, the poor hungry bees.

At the end of our orchard is a deep broad ditch. On the farther side grows a rare old untrimmed hedge of hawthorn and crab-apple, cherry and hazel, with dog-rose clusters interweaving to give everything a closer neighbourly feeling and make them all, so to speak, "connections" of one another. In this tall and tranquil hedgerow the bull-

finches build every year, and, every year too, the turtle doves, that come all the way from Cairo to swing on our clematis, and to rear their golden couplets among the briar-entangled nut-trees. The squirrel and the dormouse planted this hedge, and though I call it old it is really the new one, for once upon a time there was an ancient growth here of holly and laurel. The roots of them are there still, but they died down, and the hips and haws, the nuts and cherry stones and apple pips that the little planters had dropped or buried, sprouted and flourished, scrambling up from among the old mossy stumps and roots, and racing each other into the sunshine. And to-day they are all of a height, full grown, and the creepers run level along their tops and hang down all their lengths alike so that there is no more contention in the hedge, but everything grows at its ease, each with its fair share of air and light. And they all of them have the same secrets of bird's nest and mouse hole and humble bees' honey-cellars, of hare's form and rabbit burrow.

And on the near side of the ditch is a shrubbery of laurels out of which there grow in a line five walnut trees, and the boughs of the walnuts arch over the ditch and meet the boughs of the cherry and hazel coming from the other side. And under them the deep ditch runs, and it is the highway of all the creatures of the fields. For half the year it is always dry and beautifully shady. No human being except myself ever goes into it. But there is not a thing in fur in all the neighbourhood that is not familiar with it, using it to cross unseen from the woodlands and pasture on one side of the orchard to the woodlands and the pasture on the other ; for at each end a commodiously ample drain-pipe leads from the ditch into the fields, taking my visitors by a covered way out of the grounds into the outside world. And the birds, too, come there, for at the end of the ditch even in the driest weather there is a pool in which some water is to be found, and so hither travel partridge and pheasant and wood-pigeon and all the host of lesser folk to quench their thirst or to bathe. More than

once I have disturbed the nightjar where it sat asleep in the shade, and have seen the woodpecker busy on the bank at an ant-hill which the tell-tale trail of the tiny colonists across the path on the other side of the hedge had betrayed to their long-tongued destroyer. I often take my camp-stool and ensconce myself at the bend of the ditch, between some overhanging sprays of sallow and an elder bush, and travellers both from right and left pass by me without suspicion of my presence.

Such a happy lot of little folk they are too. And they look so strangely pretty in the shady ditch—the wood-pigeons especially. They come up from the water waddling in an affected manner and telescoping their beautiful necks at every step. One always walks a little behind the other, and it is very funny to see the precision with which they keep step, planting their wide-toed feet down flat exactly in time. And so they go by, with a prodigious affectation of caution, but all the same quite innocent of being overlooked.

They are only birds of the year, these young people, and as the old ones have another nursery to attend to, they are shifting for themselves. And very well they do it, for before they parted company the old ones told them all about the vetches and the clover tips and the fields with all kinds of weeds with juicy buds, and told them too about young turnip-tops and the pods of the field-peas. So they are fat and self-satisfied this couple of pigeons, and come promenading along my ditch as pompous and conscious as if they had just built a chapel and endowed it.

But I could tell them something that would disconcert them if I chose. For one day sitting where I am now, there suddenly, spectrally, appeared in front of me a fox. I had expected a cat, for I heard a long way off a greenfinch give the alarm, *shee-eep! shee-eep!* and a whitethroat, knowing nothing of the cause, began chittering and chattering, and then the blackbird saw the fox and cried *prink! prink!* and by-and-by as Reynard reached the ditch the old wren in the bank

scolded him at the top of her voice, and the other birds all came up and scolded too, and though I could see nothing, I knew that something was afoot that threatened danger to the birds, and was coming nearer and nearer to me. And then right from over my head, within an arm's length of me, a blackcap began, like a little fury, to tell the intruder what she thought of him, and the chorus of protest began to pass by me, in the arching hedge-tops, the laurels behind me and the clematis opposite.

"A cat," I said to myself. "One of the cats from the farm."

And lo! all of a sudden, right in front of me, its eyes fixed full on mine—the fox.

And where it stood it sank down, as if it were going through the ground, but it kept its eyes on mine, sherry-coloured eyes, full of a terrible fear, and the ears fringed inside with white were towards me, open to their widest, and the fur on the head stood up close and straight making the face look quite round, with the whiskered nose pointing out

at me from the middle of it. So low was it crouching that its hips stood up sharply on either side, and so close was it drawn up that the fur of the neck made a roll on its back. And while I watched it, the eyes never blinked, the ears never stirred, the nose never twitched. But I became aware that it was moving, the pretty little feet underneath the motionless body were at work gripping the ground hard and the body glided past me as if on wheels. And then, as if it had breathed a sudden relief from fear, the head turned, and with the brush laid straight along the ground, the fox, attended by its noisy detractors, crept up the ditch to the drain-pipe and disappeared into it, taking with it, so it seemed, all the clamour of the birds, for as soon as the fox's tail was gone there was peace in the ditch.

Only the whitethroat, fidgeting about among the roots of the nettles, and still knowing nothing of the cause of the turmoil, chittered and chattered as if she had suffered or were about to suffer some grievous personal wrong. But had the fox

met those plump young wood-pigeons by the way, there would have been short shrift for the one and cold roosting that night for the other.

By the way, how much too little importance we attach, when speaking of the lives of beasts of prey, to the enormous difficulties that the watchfulness of birds and their intelligence of each other's speech throw in the way of the flesh-eaters. And yet, it may have been these very circumstances that decided so many carnivores to hunt by night. All day long they found themselves pestered by birds and their intended victims effectually warned of coming danger, but as night began to fall, they discovered that the bird-voices became fewer and fewer, and catching their prey unawares more and more feasible. So they gave up hunting by daylight altogether.

For quadrupeds understand the cries of birds. The rabbit, be it never so young, bobs under cover the instant the blackbird sounds its tocsin ; the squirrel skips up the tree ; the leveret raises its head and cocks its

ears preparatory to flight. Everything in the spinney is at once on the alert and tip-toe; and I have seen a cat, when thus betrayed by the birds, express its rage as clearly as possible; seen it bounce out from the line of currant-bushes it had been creeping under and stand out at full height on the path, wagging its tail in anger, and staring after the vanishing bunny, exactly as the tiger does, or the cheetah, when it is baulked of its chance. In a jungle no dangerous beast can stir for long without some feathered sentry challenging its passage, and the best thing it can do then is to get into hiding and go to sleep there till the birds are in bed.

In my ditch there are sentries in abundance at either end, and a cat need not hope to surprise a meal there by stealth. For everything all round it is shouting out at the top of its voice, cat! cat! the moment the creature appears, and so puss, hugely disgusted, has to make off. And it is very funny to see a cat, when found out by the birds, put on an affectation of innocence, walk in the centre of the way as if the idea of conceal-

ing itself had never entered its head, stop to wash its face or take a roll on the ground, and in every way try to convey the impression that it is quite indifferent to the disturbance going on round it, and in no way connected with or responsible for the hullabaloo. But its little heart is, all the same, bursting with fury and eagerness for revenge, for the movement of a frog in the grass, or even the sudden rustle of a falling leaf electrifies all the unconcern out of the small beast, and it turns savagely and swiftly in the direction of the sound. But by-and-by its opportunity comes, for the birds are all asleep, and the rabbits are abroad, by their families, nibbling their perilous way along the edges of the copse and the hedgerow. Poor birds! poor bunnies!

But all this is of other times, when the roses on "triumphant briars," as Bottom says, were abloom and the swifts were shrilling high up in the blue. There are no flowers on the briars now; here and there a miserable rose-hip, pecked to pieces by the hungry hawfinch during the past fortnight of famine, and in the dull grey sky there is only the rook

fitfully ejaculating its commonplaces of courtship and house-keeping.

And here, as I pass, a word about the rose-hip. Do your know that in the spacious days of great Elizabeth the sweet-briar was called the "heep," and that ladies made of its berries a delightful confection, for which, says Gerard, "the tooth is set in rich men's mouths." The sweet-briar, as it happens, has a very large berry, of which the skin is curiously thick and singularly pleasant; a conserve of sweet-briar must therefore have been very nice to the taste and, as our old herbalist says, rather costly, for sweet-briars do not grow in such profusion as to make their fruit common.

The whitethroats are in Egypt—they have vested rights of "occupation"—and no doubt are scolding the sacred mongoose of the Pharaohs with the same indifference to propriety as they scolded my Hampshire fox. Gone, too, is the nightingale that lived here, gone to Greece perhaps, or the rose gardens beyond Damascus, the shy, slim, brown bird that sang at high noon, either of sun or of

moon, regardless of the opinions or the manners of other birds.

My ditch a fortnight ago was frozen over with ice which a cart could have stood upon, and knowing how all our small neighbours frequented it, we made it and called it the soup kitchen. Here it was then, unbeknown to the sparrows, we spread ample banquets for the starving birds, and here that I often saw the shyer birds, emboldened by the quiet of the spot, come for food. The hawfinch was always here, and the jay. Here, too, on the ice, enjoying the scraps of fat, was the woodpecker. Then came the warmer weather and the ice went, and with it all the birds, and my ditch was a ditch indeed, for "February fill-dyke" filled it up to the brim, and the passengers from the spinneys to the meadows found their highway closed.

And so perhaps it came to pass that I was able to catch "Bunnykin." In ordinary times he could have come and gone by the hidden way of the ditch. But the melting snow had filled the ditch level to its brim, and he had to come round by the orchard.

It was a very young one, so young that it did not even understand what either "hiding" or "running away" really meant. It had seen its mother do both, and countless generations of bunnies had seen their mothers do exactly the same. When they hid themselves they sat down very close to the ground, and when they ran away they made a short, rapid dash, and then came to a full stop. But this bunnykin had not yet realised the fact that if it wished to hide there must be something near in which to hide. Its mother, when it sat down very close, was in tall clover or meadow hay, or in cover of some kind, and when she sat down she became invisible ; so, too, whenever she ran away, it was always in the direction of a hole or a furze bush or a hedge, or something where she was out of sight, and where by stopping very suddenly she misled the enemy into thinking she had gone ever so much further on. But our poor little bunnykin had not grown up to this yet. When it tried to hide it sat down very close, it is true, but on the middle of the path and most pathetically unconcealed. When it ran

away it was only down the same path a little way, and then it came to a full stop without even a blade of grass to screen it. How it escaped the cats I cannot imagine, but it did, for I saw it twice and the second time I caught it. I took it up to the house and put it into the great aviary in the shrubbery; for when it saw me coming it hid itself—the pretty wee fool—by crouching down as flat as possible on the close-shorn turf, and when I walked up to it it made a spasmodic little hedgehog sort of dash down the path and squatted again as if it were out of sight. So I picked it up for its own good, knowing that it was not wise enough yet to look after itself, and made a prisoner of it till its babyhood was past, and then we let it go in a spinney; and as soon as it was let go it ran off as if it was never going to stop, and I am not sure that I ever saw it again.

But there was one rabbit that we all called "Bunnykin," which used to come on to the lawn almost up to the drawing-room door and eat the campanulas; and now and again one or other of us would catch a glimpse of

a rabbit near the aviary where, at intervals, the gardener's boy had been told to shoot all refuse garden-stuff, a barrowful at a time, aged cabbages with turnip and carrot tops (here and there an unconsidered rootlet among the foliage—oh, joy for Bunnykin !) and overgrown parsley and lettuces that had run to seed, a veritable Ali Baba's heap of treasures ; and we always said this rabbit was "Bunnykin."

But by-and-by came a day when we found on the garden path fragments of rabbit fur and two little hind-paws, and Prin, our great Persian cat, came home with two little fore-paws, and carried its trophies into the kitchen to the delirious enchantment of two pug puppies which were there in a box. But we all felt that these were the sad relics of "Bunnykin" betrayed to death by over-confidence, so we chided Prin becomingly, and mourned for "Bunnykin." And the pug puppies kept faithful to those fore-paws till they were so grown up that they scorned their box ; but in case they should ever "unremember" the rabbit, as Tots said, we

christened them Bunkins and Bunnywee. And Tots, sitting in one of her silly little sentimental moods, cuddling the pups on her lap and talking to them, said queerly, "We tried to be good to Bunnykin when he was a baby, and so when he had gone dead he said to Prin, 'You may take my 'ickle paws to the pups to play with. I don't want them any more.'"

What a very helpless little mite a young rabbit really is whose mother is dead, unable to say a word in its own defence and with nothing that may protect it but its baby-beauty. As it goes out foraging for itself, a responsibility absurdly disproportioned to its size, its every step must be a terror to it. With what deference it treats the blackbird pecking at a fallen apple with such furious energy. "I hope he won't peck me like that," says the bunny. And here is a robin right in front of it, perking up its tail at the tiny grey passenger and chirruping defiance, and the bunny gives the impudent red-coat a wide berth, but lo! a squirrel in the way, making fearsome noises with nuts. And the

bunny lays low, and 'lows he'll wait till Brer Squirrel done eating nuts. And there at the corner is a thrush hammering snails on a stone, as awe-inspiring a sound to the bunny as Grumbleking grinding bones to make his bread to Jack. Another bird is tapping hollowly at a tree, and a creature down in a hole is rasping away at something. Very suspicious noises these, and threatening. And poor bunny's ears are twitching all the time with fright, and it hardly dares to nibble a mouthful lest "something" should overtake it.

When you pick it up, it lies on your hand as still as a dead thing, with ears laid along its back, and paws tucked in, and only its fast-panting sides—"drawing its breath as short as a new-ta'en sparrow"—to tell you that your pretty captive is in an agony of fear. So treat it tenderly. A drain-pipe half filled with hay makes a sumptuous "burrow" for it, and with a little heap of bran and parsley and lettuce leaves at the open end the bunny finds life more comfortable than when buccaneering in the orchard. For the creatures in the aviary are all friends,

and it is not long before Bunnykins finds it out, and, though never familiar with the pigeons and the golden pheasants and long-haired cavies, he is no longer afraid for his life, and all his neighbours 'low that Brer Bunny is very 'spectable, and with no mis-behavishness.

And, who knows, perhaps, he tells his companions about life "out of doors," its incidents and excitements, and be sure that if he did, he did not forget to tell them about the dreadful ailment so incidental to rabbits, which I suppose they call "bang." "It is a very common ailment," he would say, "and dreadfully sudden." What causes it we do not know, but all at once you hear *bang*, and one of us stops running. Sometimes he lies quite still, sometimes he tumbles head over heels, sometimes he seems to be unable to run and only creeps. And what happens afterwards we cannot tell. Enough that he never comes home again. And, would add the bunny, "there is a very bad form of bang from which you seldom recover. We call it bang-bang."

"BEFORE THE SWALLOW DARES"

"AND take the winds of March with beauty." Perdita here speaks of daffodils—"the flowers Proserpina let fall from Dis's waggon"—and men and women ever since have taken the name upon trust and are agreed that she meant the yellow narcissus, the flower we call nowadays the daffodil.

Yet, oddly enough, I do not know of any Elizabethan who speaks of it as a yellow flower, except Ben Jonson. One calls it white, another silver-white, a third purple. Ben Jonson himself says "chequ'd and purple-ringed daffodillies." Again, why

should Herrick complain of the daffodil as being fugitive and "weep to see it haste away so soon," and beg it to last, at least for a day? The flower we call by the name is by no means quick-withering. However, whatever it may really have been, the daffodils of Shakespeare are the daffodils of to-day, and though it does not invariably anticipate "the sea-blue bird of March," the punctual swallow that wisely knoweth her seasons like the stork, it comes in the sweet of the year, and is, perhaps, the most welcome of all the flowers of Spring.

The primroses and violets are at their best to salute the new arrival: where there is elder or dog-rose, privet or wild cherry there is a brave green show of returning April: the sloe-blossom lies on the hedges in patches as when "maidens bleach their summer smocks." In the gardens, the crocuses are in full bloom and the squills, the hepaticas and coloured primroses, when the daffodil joins them; and some snowdrops and "Christmas roses" have lingered to see them. The almonds are in blossom and the

nectarines, and the daphne with clustered bloom on its leafless stems, and in the intervals of sunshine the bees are abroad making a prodigious humming over very little honey. The sulphur butterfly is out, too, hurrying along in the hope, perhaps, of meeting with relatives, but stopping as it passes to see if the daffodils have any nectar in their cups. Its mealy wings are bran new, with the bloom of their first freshness on them, and the poor old tortoise-shell that comes flickering unsteadily along looks very shabby in its last year's suit, all frayed and threadbare with use. And the veteran, knowing nothing of the ways of Spring, sits upon the ivy, to sun itself, just as it did last Autumn when there used to be a gay company of winged things feeding on the austere-looking blossoms, and the ivied wall, their club, was the best-frequented spot in all the garden.

Down in the meadow by the water "the faint sweet cuckoo-flowers" are out, and in the warm corner of the copse the first bluebells are just showing their colour, "sweet as the lids of Juno's eyes." But the cuckoo

itself will not be here till April is well begun. Precocious individuals will, no doubt, be "reported," as usual; but they will not be "on every tree." Yet whenever it comes it will find "cuckoo-flower" blooming,—whether

> "When daisies pied or violets blue,
> And lady-smocks all silver-white,
> And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
> Do paint the meadows with delight,"

or, later, when the flos-cuculi, the "ragged-robin," adorns the summer banks in June.

The lines are sweetly pretty, the picture is complete, but its components are hopeless, and therefore for all time a delight to the critical trifler. But flower-names know no rules and shift from one blossom to another with the centuries. The "daisy pied" was once the primrose, or rather one of the "primroses," for several of our earliest blossoms have borne the name of "the first flower," and Primerole and Primula were complimentary names for pretty women. So, too, "lily" meant any flower that was espe-

cially beautiful, and "honeysuckle," one that was sweet. I remember when I first went to Western America being struck by the same generic use of specific names:—"robins," "sparrows," "bugs," "flies," "primroses," and so on; the fact being that natural history was there being sifted down "far West" by exactly the same process as in Elizabeth's days in England. It is odd that nobody ever called the blackthorn a "primrose," for if any plant thoroughly deserved the pretty praise of Perdita, it is, surely, the brave and fragile flower that challenges "the black winds of March"—the "blackthorn winter," as they call it in the country-side—and, when other boughs are bare, has the courage to deck itself in bloom in defiance of lowering skies.

And how is it that the poets' violets are always scented? Less than two hundred years ago the snowdrop was called violet, and in a florist's vade-mecum, too; so when we talk of old-world love for modern-world flowers we must go cautiously, as "violet" may mean snowdrop, "lily" mean honey-

suckle, and "primrose" the daisy. I recollect that when I first learned this it seemed to me as if the world had suddenly narrowed very much, and as if the sympathies and fancies that we had always cherished as having been English "from the beginning" had all at once dwindled down to a very contracted period. It seems somehow to be only waste of sentiment to dwell on, say, Chaucer's pretty touches of nature, if we do not know what he is talking about. What was the "popinjay" he was so fond of listening to and observing? The glossary says "parrot," but when were parrots common in English woods?

Only the other day I noticed a writer in a magazine using the phrase, "the unlucky parrot," when talking of the folklore of birds. But the quotation, I happen to know, comes from the poet of the "Purple Island," and the complete line is "the unlucky parrot and death-boding owl," and the bird intended is obviously an English species. Now two centuries separate Chaucer from Phineas Fletcher, yet both talk of "parrots" as

birds that every country bumpkin knew all about.

An Elizabethan, writing about dogs, says such and such a one is good for hunting lobsters—he meant the stoat or ermine in its summer fur; but an incautious person, coming upon such "lobsters" in literature unawares, might fall into some strange mistakes if he went about to comment on the accomplishments of Elizabethan dogs.

Now is the time when the stoat is returning to its ruddier coat, and the squirrel, too, "time out of mind the fairies' coach-builder." The blackbird's beak is already orange, and the bullfinch has put on his rosy vest. March, when fine, is a month of great interest, usurping, as it does, upon April's privileges. The squirrels are still together by their families, but in another month will have scattered, each couple starting on the year's life independently. It is a charming sight to watch a couple of squirrels on some old wall, where, in a hole underneath the ivy, they have chanced upon a field-mouse's hoard of beech-nuts that were put by in the

Autumn—the pretty way they sit up and eat, and the delightful good-humour with which one gives up to another the half-eaten nut which is asked for. I have seen two squirrels sitting together, the one nearest the hoard taking out acorns and beech-mast, the other helping itself every time it had finished with a morsel from its companion's paws, and never troubling to go to the hoard itself. Every time it took anything the other made the funniest little sound imaginable, but easily translatable into "Oh, bother! But, never mind, take it," and from first to last there was never the semblance of a squabble.

When squirrels bury their food, do they do it, I wonder, with any thrifty sense of provision for the next year, as something put by against hard times? The amount of eatables they carry off and secrete is prodigious, and yet in the Spring you will see them creeping about the tree-trunks looking for chance insects, rummaging at the roots of nut-trees for fallen nuts, or among the dead leaves for old fir-cones. If food is offered them, they come to it with alacrity. But why should

they put themselves about so much for a meal, or run the risk of accepting treacherous charity, if they know of larders of their own well stocked with provisions? At Virginia Water I once laid out on a board a handful of nuts in the sight of two squirrels with whom I was on excellent terms, and the rapidity with which the little creatures made away with the whole of them was astonishing. They had only to run about six feet to reach a soft piece of bare ground, and in this, one by one, at random all over it, and not together in any selected spot, they buried all my nuts. When every one was out of sight the squirrels crept about for some time all over the ground with their noses to the mould, giving one the idea that they were sniffing it, as if to assure themselves that other squirrels coming that way could not detect the buried treasure. When they were satisfied, they skipped up into a tree, and, as their custom was, lectured me for being so ill-mannered as to sit and watch them. It was my custom to sit in the same place daily, and though I never failed to have squirrels for companions, I never

detected even a gesture that led me to think the small creatures knew of nuts being buried in the ground upon which they were romping, or sat munching the scraps of biscuit that I threw to them. Now, in February that bare piece of ground was thickly overgrown with the yellow-flowered celandine, and it was impossible for the squirrels to have found their nuts.

Other animals put away food, but they do it in a way that shows a positive idea of foresight, for they store it as close to their winter-homes as possible. The dormice make, so it is said, their larders close to their winter sleeping-nests, and I have myself found the husks of grains and seeds that they had eaten in waking intervals in and about their nests themselves. But the squirrel seems to have only the instinct to hoard without any guiding intelligence. It will keep on travelling backwards and forwards from the nut avenue to the spinney for a whole morning, going each time with a nut and coming back without one. But if you follow it you will find that it does not go to

the same one spot every time. It buries the nuts here, there, and everywhere, and always with such an expression of feverish haste as gives you the idea that all it is thinking of is to get rid of the nut on hand as quickly as possible and to go back and get another. But their nests, in which they sleep out the winter, were never, in the cases I refer to from personal observation, within at least a hundred yards of their feeding-grounds, and it seems incredible that they can ever make their way to and distinguish, in the bare and leafless winter-time, with the ground strewn thickly with sodden foliage, the spots where, when everything was green, they scattered their provisions. And even when we find hoards in the hollow of a tree, or a hole in a wall, it is evident that the animal which made the hoard, be it squirrel or field-mouse, has forgotten the place, for who has not found these mouldy stores, evidently never needed by the owners or forgotten by them?

I remember once in the roots of a tree coming upon a prodigious accumulation of food-stuff which had obviously been collected

in at least two, if not several, different years; so that I am half inclined to think that the provident instinct of the squirrel—supposing it to have been a squirrel—inherited perhaps from ancestors who lived in an England that was as arctic in winter as Canada, has degenerated into a miserly and unreasonable passion for accumulating acorns and nuts, beech-mast, cherry-pips, and laurel-kernels, that it will never make any use of. But it is a very delightful little animal, and of all the symbols of approaching Summer none more positive or gay.

The hedgehog is now abroad again after its winter sleep. It lays up no stores against the Winter, for it never wakes till Spring is come. I knew one quite well last year. Its winter nest was in a hollow at the roots of a very old laurel which grew in a hedge. I was going to have it stubbed up and came upon the "urchin" fast asleep, so I let him and his laurel-tree alone. The nest seemed to me only a collection of the nearest leaves, with some scraps of moss that had got mixed therein in the gathering; but inside them he

was certainly so completely asleep that handling did not disturb him. On St. Patrick's Day I saw him abroad; but how had he got rid of all the leaves that were stuck on his back when I found him on that frosty day in January? For when I picked him up half his nest seemed to come up with him; but here he was as leafless as possible and as cheerful. Had another hedgehog combed him out?

It is a curious little animal, for it will come straight towards you along a path, and even go over your foot as you stand motionless in its way; or you may walk behind a hedgehog for ever so long without its detecting your presence. I used to sit quietly by its run along the bottom of the hedge and listen to it puffing and snorting to itself, and watch it rooting among the leaves for chrysalids and woodlice, which it ate with a loud munching noise that was irresistibly comic. I put pieces of apple in its usual pathway, and tiny scraps of meat, and either the hedgehog or some other creature made away with them punctually.

At one time it used to be generally believed that the "urchin" sucked cows that lay out in the meadows at night, and that they climbed fruit-trees, bit off the fruit and then, climbing down again, rolled upon them, carrying off the prizes on their spines. It is quite possible there are plenty of people who still believe these things, for I know myself a Hampshire shepherd who believes that horse hairs turn into eels that are poisonous to cattle, and that a shrew-mouse running across a limb will give either man or beast the "cramps."

By the waterside, where the willows grow "aslant the stream," and the bees are so busy among the palm, you can see the water-rats diving to the bottom to fetch up the shoots of sedge and flag which they eat, sitting up like little prairie-dogs on the platforms by their strongholds. It is a pretty little animal in all its movements, and, except for such damage as it may do by burrowing into banks, a perfectly harmless one. And to-day sitting, as I saw one, beside a tuft of primroses in full bloom, it looked a very charming

little person, and nibbling its crisp salad a delightful touch of innocent wild life.

Another little winter sleeper is abroad and foraging—the dormouse. The sun is beautifully warm, and he goes about with the same engaging little loitering way he has when it is Midsummer and there is food in abundance. But to-day he is content with the unfolding croziers of the ferns; and great, no doubt, would be his satisfaction if he could come upon a nut with its shell softened to his weak teeth by snow and frost. It is one of the few animals that are "tame" as soon as caught; a delicious little philosopher whose religion is one of peace and rest—its ideal of a perfect life, nuts ready cracked for it, and, between nuts, sleep. It would not do, perhaps, for men to live up to a doctrine of doing no work between meals; but with the dormouse it is different, and I think the furry little Sybarite is to be much commended in having resolved existence into the simple formula of eating when it can, and sleeping when it cannot. I know, of course, that "life is real, life is earnest," and all the

rest of it, and that sluggards ought to go to the ant, but somewhere about most of us there is a sort of lurking sympathy with the dormouse, who, when the day is not sunny and food is not in plenty, simply rolls itself up and goes to sleep inside its own fur, compared to which bedclothes are mere sackcloth and ashes, and in a nest so exquisitely soft that a baby's cradle is by comparison all potsherds and flints.

In the bird-world there is little sense of rest in March; on every side there are signs of returning life. While the hedgerows were only faintly green the hedge-sparrow had already been busy with moss and hair, and the pretty nest, one of the prettiest that a bird makes, held its beautiful eggs. How seldom one hears the hedge-sparrow's song spoken of, and yet it is wonderfully sweet, a charming "descant" to the robin's bolder lay.

The missel-thrush, too, that strange bird so shy of itself that it will be seen as little as it may, and yet so confident of its nest that it piles it up in most conspicuous places, one of the boldest of builders, and often leaving

pendent streamers of wool or hay to attract the eye. It will come into the orchard, and within reach of the hand of passers-by build its nest and lay its eggs, and yet never have been seen at work. It is a beautiful bird, and the easiest of all to bring up by hand, its natural courage making it bold to take food where others refuse, and its hardiness helping it over difficulties to which both the blackbird and thrush will succumb. These, too, have already built, and even hatched. But they choose, where they can, the shrubbery of evergreens, or the thickly-ivied wall. Nor is there any reason why they should not be early, for their food is abundant, and the earth-worms, now at the surface again, are everywhere in evidence.

Birds, it is said, cannot count beyond one. Why is it, then, that the blackbird and thrush, when they are feeding their young ones, never go to the nest with only a single worm in their beaks? Though they may not be able to count, they seem to know that it is no use taking one worm back to five hungry nestlings, and, albeit ignorant of addition, appear to

have made a shrewd guess at the principle of short division.

The wood-pigeon, too, has nested, the wariest of birds that then becomes the most stupid—that having young ones in its nursery, must needs throw the egg-shells down on to the ground, to tell everybody of the fact, and that sits cooing to its mate on the same bough that holds the nest. What exquisite plumage it is in just now, and how beautiful its voice in the woods! It is among Shakespeare's oddities that he never mentions the ringdove once nor its cooing. But, then, he never mentions the woodpecker, nor the kingfisher, though he lived his youth among woods and by streams. None the less the purring of the culver is a poem.

And here, again, as to names of birds that we all know, and think have been always known: what were the blackbird and the thrush? "The thrush replies; the mavis descant plays," says Spenser. So the thrush is not the mavis? "The throstle" and "the mavis eke," says Gascoigne. So the throstle is not the mavis. "The woosell near at hand

that hath a golden bill" (Shakespeare's "ousel cock with orange-tawny bill") and "upon the dulcet pype the merle doth only play," says Drayton. So the blackbird was not the merle.

Is it true, as some have surmised, that the golden oriole was once common in England? It has an "orange tawny" bill, and its note is exquisite. However, it is a stranger now, though still classed as "a British bird."

Other strangers are with us in March, and "before the swallow dares." For the chiff-chaff is already everywhere crying out his name vigorously from the tops of trees, but perpetually moving on, in quest, perhaps, of a mate; and the pretty lisping note of a sylvia may be heard from the hedge where the hazel catkins shake out their mellow dust with every puff of wind that blows in this "roaring moon of daffodils."

But look up at the elms how they swing and sway, and at the rooks that, just as if they were hung in the air on strings, swing and sway above them. It is a grand old bird the rook; one of the very best of our birds.

Have you to be up in the morning early? The rooks are before you, and as you ride along, the bright eye of day just showing through the grey, they are passing overhead to where the men are busy in the fields. They are the agricultural labourers of the birds, following the peasant in his work, whatever it may be, and, like him, returning when the day is done to the same place, with the same companions. The farmer has no better friend than the rook. I have seen acres of potatoes black with rooks, and, walking along the furrows, have seen where their strong beaks had been at work, and yet the crop of potatoes has been magnificent. Up in the morning before the dew is off the grass, before the lark has left her "moist cabinet," and when probably the only bird-voice to be heard is the robin's, tipsily carolling, as if homeward bound from a jovial supper-party, the rooks are hard at work, scrutinising every foot of ground for the early worm or the night-enjoying grub that has stayed out too late. As soon as the men are afield the rooks are there, waiting for them and for the plough

and the harrow ; and there is no appeal from the inquisition of the rook. He holds his sessions where he chooses, and they may look for summary procedure, beetle, grub or caterpillar, that comes before this rural justice. In their wicker nests, high up in the topmost elms, there are already young ones, here and there, and in all the rest are the full complements of eggs, and life is almost at its busiest, for they have often far to go for food, and, while one is away "marketing," the other sits upon the eggs. Not that I think a rookery particularly "edifying" as an object for contemplation, and certainly not more exemplary in its "moral," than the beehive of which we hear so much, and of which the inmates are slaves for all their lives, and wholesale parricides on occasion. But the rook is, all the same, the most human of all birds, and the most English in its character.

The jackdaw, its companion, and now, too, very busy, is rather a *gamin*, but its voice is delightfully in sympathy with long undisturbed repose, and most significant of antiquity, and of the statelier forms of peace.

All through the year they keep near, or pay visits to, their old nests, as the rooks, but scarcely any other birds, do, thus showing an appreciation of "home" which is almost altogether absent in the bird-world. The result is that their nests become enormous, and, as a schoolboy, I have stepped from nest to nest, and often sate on a nest while I blew the eggs.

That Spring was over thirty years ago, but the jackdaws, it may be, build there still, and if they do, there must be a continuous roadway along the boughs of the firs. When I had nothing else on hand, I often used to go there to rob the jackdaws' nests. But not only for that: on the way there was a hollow in the Downs, littered, and in places heaped, with "aerolites," balls of metal that, when they were broken, smelt of sulphur, and were beautifully rayed in prismatic colours. Then there was a little landslip on the crest of a wave of the chalk, in which we found sharks' teeth. Besides, on the road that went past it was to be caught *V. antiope* and a "hair-streak," found nowhere else in the neighbour-

hood. In a word, it was an excursion that always yielded a satisfaction of delights—"out of bounds," of course, but when "impositions," all ready written, were to be bought from other boys with birds' eggs, what did impositions matter to the successful bird's-nester? And of all our delights, the jackdaws' grove "never failed to please." We, one sworn companion and I, used to reconnoitre the grove—it was of dwarf firs—and, assured that there was no enemy in view, would go in on all fours like weasels. The branches grew close to the ground, and, let it be never so sunny outside, the grove was always in a dim religious light amounting to absolute gloom. Not a ray of sunshine ever reached the ground, which was strewn, feet deep probably, with "needles" from the firs, the softest, most sumptuous carpet boys ever crawled upon. The trees were planted in straight lines, and we used to lie down and look along the ground to see if any keepers' feet and leggings were visible. But all we ever saw was rabbits sitting up to look at us, and jackdaws parading up and down; over-

head was the deep foliage of the firs, made denser in places by the huge platforms of jackdaws' nests. On all fours we used to crawl along, picking up as we went squirrel skulls or jackdaws' heads, beautifully bleached, and, I remember, empty shells of the great "Roman" snail, till we found ourselves under some specially large agglomeration of nests, and then up to it we went. The jackdaws immediately affected by our spectral appearance through the boughs from underneath of course made a great to do, but in the general clamour of the grove their expostulations went for nothing, and we used to make ourselves quite at home. Sitting on the platform, we would find round us, all within arm's reach, perhaps a dozen nests, each furnished with eggs, and, taking our drills and blow-pipes out of our pockets, would proceed to blow them as we sate there, for as every boy knows, eggshells are easy to carry when the eggs are not—and as for us, had we not the whole afternoon before us? No keeper could find us, even if he walked below us where we sate, and in the con-

tinuous babel of jackdaw voices the few outraged parents who were aware of our presence gave no cause for suspicion. So there we sate, in the fir-trees, at our ease, blowing the eggs which by-and-by would be paid away to other boys for the impositions which we should have to produce for not being in school to answer to our names at the roll-call.

And having so many to select from, what curious and beautiful eccentricities we used to get. I can still see one of them, as I first saw it lying in the nest, a perfectly round spotless marble of, apparently, green jade. And—the rascality and delight of it!—we put the lining out of a hedge-sparrow's nest into a wren's, and therein put our jackdaw's marble, and so sent all the other bird's-nesters of the school temporarily idiotic trying to explain the bewildering combination. But at last one day they beguiled my chum into a study, and there privily tortured him till he made confession. For the which we had our revenge by-and-by, in the matter of the owl and the meat on a string. But that is quite another story.

That Spring is many, many years away in the past, but Spring this year seems just the same as it was then. That sulphur butterfly going by now is precisely like the other that, as a schoolboy, I threw my cap at, the daffodils are still the same, and now as then

> "from the neighbouring vale
> The cuckoo, struggling up the hill tops,
> Shouteth faint tidings of some gladder place."

THE FIRST NEST OF A ROOKERY

It is one of the compliments that Nature pays the dweller among tall trees that rooks shall come and tenant them. Chief among the honours in her gift is to send herons to your groves; but then there must be a lake or mere hard by, or long reaches of water; and the estate must be so large that no public ways can intersect the solitude with noisy lines of traffic. With the heron a certain etiquette must be observed; its taste for peace must be studied, and the place of its sojourn fenced round with sacred quiet.

Not so the rooks. Having honoured one of your trees by selecting it for their abode

and built their nests in it, they take everything else as it comes. They do not haggle with you as to observances, or split straws over the ethics of reciprocity. They have made their bed and intend to lie on it. The bargain is struck, "and there's an end on't." They did not come in a hurry or by mistake, and now that they have come they are going to stay. It is a robust philosophy this of the rook's. He does not expect more than he gets but, content with very little, he protests against any nibbling at what he has. Though your tenant, at your pleasure, he is also your neighbour, and never allows you to forget that in the country there are neighbourly obligations on the one side as well as on the other, on yours as on his. He is perpetually reminding you—whenever he sees you, in fact—that you are to let him and his household alone; that you and yours may make any disturbance you like anywhere else, but that his tree is his tree, and you will please to let it alone, and respect such privacy as a tree top affords. When he catches sight of you far off he passes the remark to his wife,

"There he is!" and she replies off-hand, "So he is!" And there the matter drops. But should you come under their tree, the conversation assumes quite another tone, and if we could only understand what birds say we should know what rooks think of the vulgar manners and lack of taste of those who go poking about the ground floor of a place that is already inhabited up above by a decent couple.

I must confess I have a solid admiration for "the honest rook," as Prior calls it. Something like the dog among quadrupeds—which by nature is just as gregarious as the rook—it has attached itself to man. And though it is still persecuted by that mutton-headed minority of yokel-farmers which kills hedgehogs and owls and other useful creatures, and though the owners of rookeries once a year carry fire and slaughter among the burghers of the airy cities in the elms, it never swerves from its preference for the neighbourhood of human beings. There is no such thing as a "wild" rookery. They are all attached to a house, even though, as at Peveril, the house

itself is gone. Their sunset flight is always towards the abodes of men; their sunrise flight towards his fields. If better understood they would be called "domestic," and as such might be protected by law. As it is, those who know them best think of them as the "agricultural labourers" among the birds.

And, how they toil. All other birds, even the conscientious starlings, seem to make holiday half the time, relieving their snatches of work with long spells of play. But who ever saw idle rooks? When they sit swinging on the tips of trees they are on sentry duty for their comrades in fields below. Nor, when we see them assembled in that curious parliament which they sometimes hold in the meadows, are they idle. They are obviously most seriously busy, about something. Why or wherefore these black republicans should thus convene is a puzzle yet unsolved, but the rooks evidently know what they are there for, and when the business before the meeting is despatched they all go their ways: not standing upon the order of their going, but going at once and all together. Sometimes

the convention ends with the putting to death of one of their number, and eye-witnesses of such executions assert that the whole affair had the air of a deliberate judicial process. At any rate, they were not idling. Nor when at evening, the light failing even the rook's crepuscular sight, the colony joins in strange good-night evolutions in the air before going to bed, can the reproach of idling attach to them, for this parting frolic may be the hard-worked bird's one relaxation, like the hard-worked man's rubber at whist. No, the rook, I fear, errs, if anything, upon the side of making life a "demnition grind," and, like that very terrible insect the honey-bee, one of the few miserable "moralities" in nature, looks too much upon the graver side of existence.

Many writers have described the rookery established, but, so far as I know, nobody has yet described the commencement of one, the coming of the first pair, the building of the first nest, and the rearing of the first family, nor written of the original "natives" of the new rookery, the Deucalion and Pyrrha of

the peopled shade that is to be, the founders and *Patres* of another "black republic" of the future. And, turning to Seebohm's great work on British Birds, in which the article on the rook commences with the words, "Few birds are better known than the rook," I am interested to find that I can add from personal observation several missing links of knowledge and suggest some new readings of old facts.

One Bank holiday on April 3, I noticed a small party of rooks "prospecting" in a clump of trees about a hundred yards from the house, and, watching them, saw that several of the birds were pulling off, or tugging at twigs. The clump was composed of various trees, beech, elm, and Spanish chestnut, all of them very tall but "weedy," from being grown so close together. But on either side was an elm of truly venerable proportions, a century or more older than the intervening growth. That year (1896) these elms seeded with amazing profusion, and on April 3 were as green as if they had already broken into leaf. The others, except for the buds that studded

the twigs, were as bare as in midwinter. Yet it was the young lanky beech-tree without a sign of green upon it, and not the "immemorial elm" of the rooks' proverbial preference, that the birds chose for their home. The reason, I take it, was one of pure heredity. Rooks, as every one knows, build in elms for choice, but when they build the elms are quite bare. Now, the birds of which I am writing were a month later in their housekeeping than they should have been, and the elms being fledged with green struck them as unsuitable, and so they chose the barest tree they could find—the beech.

Why were they belated? I cannot say. Perhaps there had been a quarrel in one of the rookeries (one half a mile, the other two miles away) and they had been expelled; or perhaps the keepers, who had been shooting rooks—the weather, that memorable year, was tropical, and the poor birds, hard pushed for food, were doubtless glad of partridge and pheasant eggs—had shot their mates, and these may have been the unpartnered birds from both colonies which, having no home affections in

common, had compounded by starting afresh in a new place. This I fancy was the reason. For when I first saw them there were five birds, and it is unlikely that so many would be expelled from one rookery for misdemeanour all together.

A very little observation sufficed to show that there were two "pairs" and one "odd one," hereinafter spoken of respectively as "the pair," "the idiots," and "the outsider."

The pair evidently meant business, for they carried their twigs all to the same spot and were very much in earnest as to the way they laid them. The idiots were just as busy, but did nothing with their twigs when they had got them. They often selected those that would not come off, and after struggling with them like lunatics, sometimes even hanging on to them by their beaks only, and flapping as they hung, would pick up some ridiculous little scrap and parade about with it, climbing about among the branches very much like magpies or parrots, and eventually dropping it. While these absurd under-studies of "the pair" were thus fooling their time away, the

others were hard at work, and on the fifth day the first egg was laid in their finished nest.

The *modus nidificandi* was interesting. First of all, they laid a platform as foundation and then built up the sides in skeleton, as it were, to the full height the nest was eventually to be. Being clear against the sky, and the tree only forty yards off, I could watch them working inside their wicker basket with the greatest accuracy. The male brought from the paddock pieces of moss and tufts of grass, which he dropped into the nest and flew off, the hen, with laborious industry, working the material into the platform and sides. By degrees the wicker skeleton began to fill up and, at last, for three-quarters of its depth the nest was made quite solid. But all round the rim several inches of thinner lattice-work were cleverly left so that the bird, while seated on her eggs, could command a view "from behind the purdah" of all the country round her. On the fifth day the first egg was laid, and on April 12 the hen commenced to sit in earnest.

The idiots meanwhile had never placed a single twig in position, but continued at intervals to struggle with branches and to fuss about with odds and ends in their beaks. As for the outsider, its time had been passed in making overtures of assistance to the pair and of affection to the hen idiot, overtures that were in either case most unceremoniously repulsed. It repeatedly took twigs to the nest, but only got assaulted in return for its proffered contribution; and at other times when it approached the growing edifice with, I am convinced, the best of intentions, a dab on the back from the bird on guard sent it off.

Every book tells us that the members of a rookery are all thieves alike, and that no pair leave their unfinished nest unguarded lest other birds should steal some of the material, but that when the nests are quite finished and the eggs laid, suspicion is unanimously abandoned, and by common consent the greatest possible confidence in each other is reciprocally established. All this may be as it may. In the present case

the outsider had no nest of its own for which to pillage sticks, and so, I suppose, it must have been hereditary suspicion of visitors while the nest was building which made the nesting pair so cantankerous, and the solitary bird had to suffer for amiability misunderstood. With regard to the idiots the case was different, and the male bird had the gravest ground for his suspicions of the outsider, who often fed the female and was unmistakably paying court to her, showing her how wide he could fan out his tail, how high he could raise the feathers on his head, how gracefully he could bow, and altogether what a very fine and attractive rook he was. The hen idiot did not actively discourage his attentions, but the poor outsider was so often dropped upon unexpectedly by the male bird and buffeted off the premises by him that, at last, he found the situation unendurable and left the place altogether, as much, no doubt, disgusted at the humdrum respectability of the pair as at the selfish affection of the idiots ; and I am not certain that he ever came back.

The hen of the pair was by this time sitting on her eggs, and at all times of the day such curious things happened that, after much puzzling, I came to the conclusion, from what I considered absolutely accurate observation, that rooks were polygamous and polyandrous! It must be remembered that all rooks are very much alike to the human eye, and that in their swift and silent movements when nesting it is extremely difficult to keep the different individuals correctly assorted. But, on the other hand, the note of the male is very easily distinguished from that of the female, the former being *core*, and the latter, *car*, so that, with my four birds, there was no difficulty as to the sexes, while as to the two males of the party, the one belonging to the pair was distinctly marked by having lost several feathers out of each wing, and being therefore a ragged, shabby-looking bird when flying. So, weighing one against the other, I had fully made up my mind, after many hours of patient watching, at sunrise, noon, and sunset, and after many pages of careful note-taking

on the spot, that the hen bird of the pair had two husbands, and the male idiot two wives.

As an example of the incidents upon which I founded the belief that I had made a discovery, let me quote from my note-book: "Bird sitting on nest. Visitor arrives; hen darts out at him: he makes a show of retiring, but only a foot or two, and immediately comes sidling up again; out she darts again, and again he pretends to be rebuffed; eight times the performance is repeated, but the last time the hen, instead of waddling into her nest again, perches on the edge of it; the visitor wheeled round the tree once or twice, then dropped down on to the nest by her side and fed her." Now, who was the visitor? The male idiot? Certainly not the male of the pair. And here is how the note goes on: "Visitor then flew away; hen went back to nest; suddenly, with a deep *core*, up comes the mate of the pair; hen, with an eager *car*, hops on to edge of nest, and, with open beak and flapping wings, begs for food, and her mate feeds her." Now what had

happened? Obviously the hen had been fed by two birds within three minutes. The first she had received at the point of the beak, but without uttering a sound (this silent attack of the hen, inconceivably rapid, too, is always disastrous to inquisitive strangers, some of them being actually knocked off their perch by her swift and unexpected attack), but eventually she accepted his food. Her own mate she received as usual with a joyous cry, and at once asked for food.

Take another incident: "All four birds together; the idiots courting or wrestling with unbreakable twigs, the outsider perched a few feet above nest eyeing the sitting hen; suddenly and without any warning her mate flies at him and sends him about his business; then goes off himself; the idiots follow; hen now alone; back comes a bird and proceeds to feed her; all of a sudden a third bird descends upon them while in the act of exchanging food; there is a great scrimmage for half a second, both apparently feeding her at once, and then one bird flies away; the other follows, and this is the

mate." Now, who was the third bird? Was it the mate arriving just in the nick of time to catch his wife taking food from another male? Such, and there are a score of them on my notes, were the observations upon which I theorised, and not, perhaps, altogether without some justification.

But one morning, when watching as usual, I saw something happen. It was the key to the whole problem, and gave me a lesson as to the difficulty of certainty in facts of natural history that, at my time of life, I little expected to have to learn. My notebook records as follows: "*Wednesday 6th*, 7.30 A.M. Hen sitting; her mate arrives; feeds her; she flies away; idiot hen, sitting in adjoining tree, goes to nest and sits: mate of the pair flies away; idiot hen left in possession." *Two hens incubating!* "Twenty minutes later male of pair returns; feeds sitting bird and flies away; twenty minutes later hen of pair comes back and takes the place of the other hen on the nest; the latter flies away. *Correct all previous notes by above.*"

Here was a lesson in observation indeed. One single straightforward occurrence had explained away the whole of a fortnight's note-taking! But if I had lost one "discovery" I had made another. Rooks might not be polygamous, but two hens were incubating the same clutch of eggs, and two husbands indifferently were feeding the bird, whichever it might be, that happened to be sitting at the time. So much for my suspicions of the monogamy of rooks.

But why did she repulse the other male eight times before she accepted his food? Perhaps because it was his first time of feeding her, and she required to be pressed very hard to do so before she would take food from a stranger's beak. Delightful rook! And wherefore the scrimmage on the other occasion? Simply because the second comer, the real mate, wanted to feed first. What more natural? However, the fact is established that hen rooks will combine, at first, for incubation, and their mates for feeding the sitting birds, and it is a fact, I venture to think, of considerable interest. Subsequent

events went to prove that the eggs belonged to one pair only, and the co-operation of the second pair must therefore have been quite disinterested and without any view as to resultant nestlings.

For, extraordinary as it may seem at first, this community of interests ceases when the young are hatched, and the pair, when they most need help, are then left alone. But, after all, an explanation suggests itself. If two birds continued to divide a mother's duties between them after the brood was hatched, the young birds' ideas as to relationship, discipline, and all the duties of life would be disastrously confused.

And here I found that for the first six days after they are hatched the young are fed by the mother alone. The male brings the food from the field and feeds the mother. She retains the food for a while and then transfers it to the young, the food being thus doubly peptonised. After the first week or so the father feeds the young direct as well as the mother, who now joins him afield, but only for very short intervals. And with

regard to this a very interesting fact became apparent. The young, when the father approaches with his gruff croak, never utter a sound, even though he perches on the nest with food. But the coming of the mother, even though she is silent, is the signal for clamorous joy. I think this a very pretty touch. It arises, of course, from their first experiences, when the coming of the father meant nothing to them directly, but the return of the mother to them meant food. And so to the end they receive the one with silence, it may be with mistrust, "even though bringing gifts," but the other always with rejoicing confidence.

In the return of the parents to the nest I was witness on several occasions of a beautiful sagacity on the part of the old birds. Passing rooks, seeing a nest, would sometimes loiter about the grove. Both parents might be away, but on the instant they become aware of the loiterers, and, should the latter settle, they start at once flying at panic speed homewards. One flies high in mid-air, the other skims the meadow-grass, and, as they reach

the grove, the latter shoots swiftly up the side of the trees, almost perpendicularly, and, totally unsuspected, dashes in like a fury through the side boughs upon the intruders who, utterly "flummoxed" by this attack from beneath, rise into the air in confusion just in time to meet the onslaught of the other bird. It is a splendid piece of concerted tactics, and, as it deserves to be, invariably successful.

While she is sitting the reception given by the hen to passers-by, or visitors, seems very capricious, but no doubt the bird understands much better than we do the manner of rook it is that she is addressing. For instance, a most inoffensive-looking fowl comes flying overhead, and says "*quah*" to her as he passes, when out she darts, and turns his slow march into double-quick. The next minute another rook, for all the world the exact facsimile of its predecessor, flies by and says "*quah*" to her, and she never budges from her eggs. Sometimes she will let a single stranger even stop upon the next branch without any outward and visible sign of pro-

test, and a little later she comes hurtling out of her citadel like a bird demented at a party of pilgrims who have apparently no intention whatever of stopping! But, after all, it is not for "the likes of us" to lay down rules for rooks.

The language of the rook is curiously self-explanatory, almost humanly intelligible. When the father returns with his crop full of food, and something in his pouch besides, he can only croak in a thick mouth-full way, and he perches. She at once assails him with importunate clamour—*car! car! car!* crouching like a fledgling, and with open up-turned beak and quick-flapping wings, begging for what he has brought. His behaviour is human to the point of absurdity. He has brought the food home for her, and for her alone. But do you think he is going to give it her, even though retaining it gives him great discomfort, simply because she asks for it? Not he. His coming home full of provisions is not to be taken every time as a mere matter of course. He wants to have a fuss made about it first, and to impress upon

her what a good, kind, provident husband she has got, and so, with his crop full of wire-worms and vegetable oddments, and a cockchafer in his pouch, he hops about from one point to another, making the hen follow him as best she can, flapping and screaming and begging at the top of her voice. Sometimes he flies away without giving her anything, and circles in the air, the hen following him, and clamouring loudly all the time. On occasion he even alights, and feeds her on the ground. Once I saw him go several times round a ten-acre paddock, so closely followed by the hen that their wings kept striking together, before he let her have what he had expressly brought home for her. Isn't this all funny?

What usually happened was this. He would come home with a gruff "Here I am," and up she would scramble, and begin crying at once, "Give it me; give it me." And then he would look as solemn as a savings bank that knew it was full of good things but was not going to part with any of them. And while she importuned him he would

stare straight ahead, as if he had only come home to think, saying every now and then, "Stuff and nonsense." But she wouldn't be denied, and in the end, with much gurgling and choking, the transfer is effected. But this does not satisfy her; she has a suspicion that he is keeping something back. Isn't there something more in the other pocket? And he keeps sidling away from her with a "Don't make a fool of yourself"; but the hen, scrambling after him, cries "Give it me; give it me." "Oh, bother!" says he, preparing to fly, and "Give it me; give it me" goes on the importunate hen. "Then I'm off," quoth he, and as he rises she stops in the very middle of a "give it——," and begins to preen herself! And, as she does so, she interjects remarks in an explanatory soliloquy, "Just as well to get all I could"; ruffles herself up, and adds, "No harm in asking, anyhow"; scratches her head vehemently, "Believe he kept something back all the same," then hops meditatively back to her nest, and settles down with a pretty liquid note *kiloop*, translatable by—"So far *good*."

I soon translated the rooks' vocabulary. They have several words, and their meanings alter according to the intonation. The matter-of-fact affirmative *core* of the male as he comes flapping homewards at his ease becomes lord-and-masterful when he is at home ; changes to the interrogative when he espies another rook in the sky, to a note of urgent warning as he catches sight of a human being near the nest, to the gravity of remonstrance and reproof when bothered by his wife. But it is always *core*, though with varying pronunciation. The hen says *car*, and whatever the emotion of the moment may be that prompts variation of accent, the word is still *car*. But when with her mate she has a confidential *cul-cul-cul-cul* like the sound of water bubbling in a hurry out of a small-necked bottle, and on occasion each uses the liquid note *kiloop* already mentioned. This is expressive of complete happiness, and, however boisterous or emotional the preceding incident has been, the hen closes it, if settled to her satisfaction, with a quiet *kiloop*. Sometimes she utters it

on the wing when flying with her mate, and on one or two occasions I saw both for perhaps a quarter of an hour together sitting side by side *kilooping*, ducking their heads and fanning out their tails, at such utterance. In addition there is the *quah*, the commonplace of formal salutation, the "how-d'ye-do" of the rooks, the "*ka-wah*" of conflict or hostile pursuit, a dissyllable capable of many inflections, the *croak* and *krahk* of the homeward flight at sunset, curiously expressive of "Wish I was in bed" and "Come along; don't waste time." These last are the words with which, as Bunyan says of the pilgrims, they "feel for each other in the dark," and keep their company safely together, and so as not to get out of the habit they always, even when it is light, keep in touch with one another by constant ejaculations. And there is one note more to which I must refer—the curious *creak* of the rook. Coleridge speaks of the birds flying "creaking" overhead, and elsewhere I have read in a commentary on the poet's lines the phrase, the rook's "wicker" wings—an excellent expression—if

the creaking is really made by the wings. I confess that I have myself always thought that it was the wing that creaked, but during my observation I repeatedly heard the noise when the birds were sitting motionless.

The rooks' household is awake before sunrise, and the father spends most of the day in searching for food and in journeys to and from the nest. Twice a day, at least, he remains on sentry over the eggs, while the hen goes abroad "to stretch her legs," but I have never once seen him actually sit down upon them. My rook certainly did not, and on three occasions only did I see him go inside the nest at all, and then, though he may have been keeping the eggs warm, he was very busy with his beak all the time, arranging the eggs apparently, and doing some odd jobs about the floor and sides of the nest. When returning to relieve the hen he flies up to the nest with "It's only me, my dear," and sits down and says gruffly, "Now go and have a fly." Out she tumbles with a shrill *car* of "all right," and shoots down like an arrow into the paddock. He gets on

to the edge of the nest and fusses about, or if a stranger passes jousts with him in mid-air. In less than a minute she is back with an "All right?" "All right!" he replies, and then she waddles into the nest and he flies off. Several times, too, during the month I saw the male drive the hen out of the nest rudely. She complained, but as soon as she was out set to work at an elaborate toilette. This points to an instinctive appreciation of compulsory sanitation. When she has quite finished she pops back into the nest with a sharp, "Now get out!" and settles down. Satisfied that everything is all right for a while the male spreads his broad wings and sails off.

Every now and again the male takes a rest in the tree, perching near the nest and keeping up the most vigilant scrutiny of the ground below, of the trees around and the sky above, his head perpetually moving as this, that, or the other attracts his attention. The longest period I have known him to remain thus was two hours, the fact being, I fancy, that "some one with a gun" was afield. But I am inclined

to think, from watching them, that the male is given to sound the alarm without always having sufficient cause for it, and that the hen has found out that he need not always be taken very seriously. Perhaps he will espy a labourer crossing the field, and he is up at once, shouting, Fire, Thieves, Murder, Help! The hen slips quietly off the nest, joining him where he is wheeling above the tree-tops and crying, Begone, Be off, Avaunt! to the assassin, bandit, or ghoul his uncommon vigilance has discovered; and on seeing the inadequate cause of his immoderate conduct, she remarks drily, "That all!" and returns to her eggs. Sometimes the male visits the nest just to see apparently that all is well, or to make some mysterious confidential communication. At any rate, I have seen him fly silently on to the nest, give his wife a tap with his beak, as much as to say, "Just come up here, I want to tell you something," and when she has complied with his request and is by his side he finds he has nothing more to say, and flies off, leaving the hen to go back pensively to her eggs.

I have frequently referred to the silence of the rooks' comings and goings, and considering how noisy a rookery is, the expression may require explanation. But it is a fact that the rook is singularly stealthy, appearing at the nest so spectrally and vanishing so suddenly that I found it very difficult to follow its movements. While building they scarcely ever exchanged a remark, and it was only under excitement that they became clamorous.

The hen's life was a very monotonous one, for from the day that she began to sit until the young were about ten days old she virtually never had any change of scene. Though relieved by the female idiot it was only for very short intervals, while the exercise which she took daily under her husband's directions was of the most perfunctory kind. The comings and goings of her mate, whom she often flew out to meet, and the hunting away of passers-by were the only excitements of her day. Except on one occasion. That was when a fracas took place in an adjoining spinney, and she heard her mate in angry altercation. Up popped her head; she listened for a second

and then was gone. A minute later both came back, very full of conversation, and long after she had settled back to her duties, he sat swinging on the tip of the tree making what I should say were uncomplimentary remarks about certain other rooks and recovering his own composure.

Whether the male slept at home or not I could not be certain, but, strange as it may seem, I think he went to the nearest rookery to roost. At any rate, on two nights, after seeing him leave the tree at about six o'clock and fly due east in the direction of the rookery, instead of south-west, where his journeys for food always took him, he never came back. For, at intervals, up to half-past nine, I went out and made demonstrations on the open space before the tree, always taking a gun with me. Had he been there he would certainly have announced his presence. But there was no sign of him. So I take it he slept at the rookery, keeping open, as it were, his rights to a roosting-place among the community, which his family might by-and-by require and of which in the winter they might avail them-

selves. But the loneliness of the hen bird, hers the only nest within half a mile, must have been very trying, especially during the stormy nights that followed her commencing to sit, when the tall, lithe beech-tree whipped its neighbours to right and left under the fury of the gale, and bent its head so low that if there had been young birds in the nest they must surely have fallen out. I fully expected in the morning to find the nest gone, but its foundation had been well and truly laid, and there it was, as compact as ever.

After the eggs are hatched she is not so jealously on guard, often leaving the nest to perch close by, and when the young are about ten days old she confidently goes away to feed. Strangers pay inexplicable visits to the nursery, keeping respectfully distant, and are no longer molested as dangerous. Is it conceivable that these can be visits of congratulation? They are certainly meant and accepted in a friendly spirit, and, remembering the extreme sociability of a rookery (after the eggs are hatched), it is really no absurd stretch of the imagination to suppose that a kindly curiosity tempts the

passers-by to step in and look at the isolated family. During such a visit I have seen both parents fly away, leaving their young at the mercy of the visitors.

At first the voice of the nestlings is a mere feeble exclamation, resembling no note; but in four days it is very like the jackdaw's, rapidly develops into a caw, and before they fly the difference of sex by the voice can be distinctly distinguished.

While their parents are absent they awake periodically, clamour, and fall asleep again; but the first sound of the mother's voice, and she always calls out to them that she is coming, arouses every little inmate of the nest. Of the father they take no notice. I have seen him come to the nest, and, finding the mother away, rise high into the air, circling round and round. Then he settled, and carefully scrutinised the shrubbery below. Satisfied that she was nowhere near, and tired of waiting, he went up to the nest and fed the brood. And all this time they never said a word. The father then sat down to wait, and it was, I thought, a charming incident

that as soon as her distant *car* was heard, every little voice was uplifted in a chorus of joy. After they were about a week old they were often left alone—the severity of the weather may have been the cause of this—and only the mother came back with food. The male had, no doubt, given her in the field his contribution towards the household, and she returned to the nest with the result of their joint labours in the iron-bound and sun-cracked soil. What a toil it must have been! But the youngsters were well fed, and just a month after they were hatched they found their wings strong enough to leave their birthplace.

There were only three of them—and no addled eggs in the nest—so that the supplementary incubation by the second hen might really have been an amiable concession on the part of the mother to the maternal cravings of a barren bird, rather than the expression of any necessity for such co-operation. The idiot—as I have called her throughout—had, perhaps, when she lost her first mate, been compelled by hunger to leave to their fate a

nestful of hard-set eggs, and though she and her second companion could not resist the spring-time instinct of twig-collecting and the formalities of courtship, they neither of them really had any serious hopes of "keeping house" themselves. So they did the next best thing and helped their friends to keep theirs. And it is very curious that both the males should to the last, until, that is, the eggs were hatched, have considered that the auxiliary hen was deserving of as much attention as the mother. Though she was never on the nest for many minutes at a time she was regularly fed by them. Her mate made no pretensions of any part-proprietary rights in the nest, and beyond helping to feed the hens, never gave himself any airs as the husband of the "understudy." In fact, he consented to be snubbed. But the hearts of the idiots, as I have had to call them, were in the right place, and they did their duty by their neighbours.

On the last day of May two of the young birds flew from the nest, and the third one took flight on June 1. I was standing,

watching it restlessly skipping from nest to branch and from branch to nest, the father sitting cawing overhead, when suddenly, as if at some preconcerted signal, both flew away together. I went quickly to an opening between the trees and watched their flight. The father was making for a poplar on the other side of the meadow, about 200 yards away, and the young bird, flapping vigorously but irregularly, was following bravely. But the distance was too great, and just as the father reached the tree and curved upwards in his flight to settle on it, his offspring gave up the struggle, and slanted down, with outstretched wings still beating, into the tall grass. And for hours afterwards the parents were calling to the youngster to get up and try again. That he did so eventually and succeeded I know, for I saw all three young rooks, next day, perched in a row upon the poplar; and, later on, the old pair came back for a last look, for many months, at their nest, and with a slow, subdued flight circled once or twice over the beech-tree, and then, the rites performed, sailed off, sliding down

on the wind to where their young ones sat, with an air of placid self-content, as became a reputable pair of rooks who had brought up a family decently and launched them respectably upon the world.

I had the nest afterwards examined and the materials were twigs, leaves, moss, and grass. There was no "lining of mud or turf." In spite of the extreme drought of the weather the rooks, if they had wanted mud, could have found plenty in the pond, at the bottom of the paddock which their nest-tree overlooks, and at which they drank; and I am therefore inclined to believe that "mud and turf" are not essentials to a rook's nest. Owing to faulty architecture the young must have had a narrow escape from a tragic end, as it was found that the side on which they perched had completely given way, and the nest was on such a slope that it was impossible for them to sit except on the upper edge. All the thin twigs had been put into one side, all the thick into the other.

During the September gales the nest was blown out of the tree, only a few sticks

of the foundation remaining to mark the site of the first nest of my rookery.

In the following March the rooks came back, and with them five other pairs. Six nests were soon in progress. But the beech tree had been deserted. Two of the nests were in a slim but lofty elm next to the beech, two in one of the elms, and two, to my surprise, in a Scotch fir next to it.

SUNSHINE AND RAIN

A MEMORABLE Spring and Summer.* February closed the Winter tempestuous and bleak as it should do, for "all the moneths of the yere hate a fair Februeir"; and then came March, windy, but warm and dry, and the first week of Spring saw all the flowers in bloom. "A peck of March dust" was once, if proverbs may be believed, "worth a king's ransom," but this year it went a-begging down the lanes in clouds, and nobody made their fortunes by it. Thereafter, four rainless months of tempered sunshine, ideal weather for health and pleasure. The farmer too began the year

* 1893.

with rosiest hopes. Never had crops started more bravely, nor had hay weather more to its liking. But under the unbroken sunshine that followed these promises melted away.

June came to a close with hardly grass enough in the meadows to hide a lark. The ox-eye daisies were all dwarfed, and the cornflower, that had to be two feet high last year to show its blue stars above the swathes, lorded it at a few inches over the creeping trefoil and stunted kingcups. The thrushes and blackbirds and starlings, out foraging in the pasture for their young, could look across the whole field by standing on tiptoe; and as for the partridges, they showed above the grass and clover as bison or eland might do above the yard-high pasturage of the prairie or the veldt. The weasel found it uncanny going and a profitless quest to cross the meadow, for the field-mice had proved the ground too hard to tunnel in and were off to the ditches and the shady spinney-banks, where the moss grows thick. Besides, there was a hawk hanging in the cloudless sky, and what weasel so bold as to launch himself upon the bare field with the windhover's eye

searching the surface? So he kept to the herbage under the hedge.

Even this was scanty, for the campions, pink and white, that should have been beautifying the banks, were sun-smitten, and the stars of Bethlehem, for want of water, were ghosts of their proper selves. The hedgerows, indeed, were curiously barren of flowers, but the shrubs and trees, in their foliage, bloom, and promise of fruit, were wonderful. Not for many years had the blackthorn, may, and guelder-rose flowered so profusely or set such quantities of berries, while the horse-chestnuts, sycamores, and other trees had crowded the Spinney with bloom.

So, too, in Orchard and Garden. The fruit-trees were loaded with blossom, and their promise had held good, and St. Swithin had blessed them, and Frankum's Night passed without malign interference of witches. So the harvests of the orchard promised to be prodigious. The hazels and filberts were laden with ripening nuts, and if all the walnuts upon the trees grew full, surely the boughs would break with their burdens. The sunny months of March

and April brought nothing but good to the trees, for their roots, deep-searching among hidden waters, were independent of rainfall and throve magnificently; and though in the country it is a proverb that fruit will not set unless the blossom has been rained on, there were bumper crops of cherries and bush fruit —raspberry, gooseberry, currant and strawberry. There were but few plums, and among the wall-fruit the morellas dropped nearly all their fruit. But the peaches, apricots, nectarines, and greengages were laden handsomely, and trees that had not borne for several years were this year in full fruit. Had April ended and May begun with heavy rains, it would have been an *annus mirabilis* for the farmer also; but as it was, the Spring and Summer will live in memory as a marvel of unbroken sunshine and gracious English weather.

In years gone by I have camped out in many countries, but until this June had never slept in the open air in England. There are many people who, when they go into camp, think it correct and necessary to "rough it." But there are others, and I am one of them, who

have had enough of roughing it, and who keep as many comforts about them as they can, and as long as possible, and who only begin to discard superfluities when they are compelled to. So I say that camping out in England is better than camping out anywhere else in the world. To begin with, there are neither snakes nor mosquitoes, and, to go on with, you can keep in touch with all those details of civilisation, the elegances of existence, which collectively constitute "comfort" in its completest rotundity.

It is at night especially that the superiority of "roughing it" at home is most pleasantly indisputable. But the opportunity does not often occur. This June was the exception, with the temperature over fifty every night, and no dew. So I took my bedding down to a charming spot, where a rustic summer-house marks the end of the orchard and the beginning of the woodland, and here I turned in. Snug under my eider-down I lay, with the sky and its young moon hardly visible through the dense foliage of an overhanging walnut tree, and with a beautiful stretch of green

sward before me. And before I blew out my lantern there came a tiger moth to it, its "deep-damasked wings diamonded with panes of quaint device;" and as I put my head on the pillow a white moth, probably one of those "with ermine cape" that Tennyson watched, went fluttering across the grass—a venturesome excursion for so conspicuous an insect when the night-jars are abroad. In such weather as we had this month the night-jars are a-wing until midnight, and the sward in front of me was a favourite meeting ground for them.

The spinney and the shrubbery are carpeted with dry leaves, and in the wonderfully still night air nothing can be on foot without betraying itself. The mouse makes as much noise as a rabbit, and as for the hedgehog out hunting, its footstep sounds like a man's. In India how these rustlings and stealthy creepings would arouse you! But here there is nothing more ferocious to expect than a fox. A whitethroat in the ditch is wide awake, and scolding something that has passed her nest, perhaps a water-rat, and every now and

again from the spinney comes a cry of alarm from wakeful birds, as the hares go by from the clover field to their homes. In other weather, when the ground is damp and a breeze is stirring, the steps of the wild things are hushed, and the birds sleep on; but to-night a spirit of unrest is abroad; for the twigs are as brittle as glass, and the leaves so dry that they crackle even under the weight of a travelling caterpillar. So the birds with their young broods perched beside them are uneasy in their slumbers, and mistake the friendly bunny for an enemy, and the rustling of the shrew mouse for the approach of a "wikked sucke-egge wesel."

An owl comes up from over the paddock, and dips under the walnut boughs, and flies over me where I lie. I see the faint shimmer of its wings as it beats along the side of the orchard; and as I fall asleep a bat comes to keep away night-wandering gnats from me, and I hear the crumple of its wings as it passes backwards and forwards above me.

. . . . .

It was a pheasant crowing that awaked me. He was only six feet off my head, and I could feel the strong puffs of air as he clapped his wings after crowing. As I sat up he caught sight of me. "Well, did you ever!" he said as plainly as a pheasant could, and crouched down. What a lovely creature it is, the pheasant we all like to eat. I remember reading in some poet—Cowper, I think—a contrast between the pheasant as a type of "Christian humility," and the "self-applauding" peacock as a "sumptuous Pharisee." If the poet had only known! In India I have seen the peacock, quite as humble as the pheasant, slip away into cover with a modesty and self-effacement that were eminently Christian, even in a heathen fowl. And here in England, by getting out of bed early, I have seen the pheasant "self-applauding" in the most grotesque manner. Thinking that no one but his own wife was looking on, he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

"Ye meaner fowl give place,
I am all splendour, dignity, and grace."

It makes a great difference in a bird's demeanour whether it is going to be shot or not. The jungle peacock and the covert pheasant are equally "humble" when the sportsman is afoot. And when they are retained as pets and ornaments there is not much to choose in sumptuousness and pride between the peacock on the terrace and the pheasant on the lawn. But to come back to the particular pheasant crouching under the walnut tree. I remained quiet, and the bird, thinking that it had eluded observation, slipped out of sight into the undergrowth, and for ever so long after I heard it nervously clucking to its wives. To take its place came a rabbit, which washed its face so much and so hard that I was afraid it might do its features a mischief. So I coughed—ahem!—and Bunny vanished.

It was only five o'clock, but the bird folk had evidently been up long before. I could hear the cherry trees all a-flutter with plundering blackbirds and thrushes. Young birds were at breakfast in all directions, and at no other hour of the day have I ever heard a

garden so full of bird-life voices. A long experience had taught them that at that early hour the pleasaunce was all their own, and, innocent of my presence, they deported themselves with a natural freedom which was very engaging. There was no hurry about the feeding of the young ; no hurry in the toilets of the elders. A squirrel came down on to the grass to pay its respects, but the birds were very distant and discouraging in their behaviour. Wherever the squirrel went the birds decamped, and very soon "the small creature that sits in the shadow of its tail" (as the Red Indian calls it "for short") had the lawn all to itself; but, bored at being alone, it skipped up into a tree, and, discovering me, launched out into uncomplimentary remarks.

Sleep was out of the question, for, one after the other, in quick succession, the guests of the garden came out before me. A turtle dove, that had come all the way from Syria to build its nest in a filbert tree in the orchard, brought two young ones, and, oddly enough, chose an almond tree for their perch. She

had filled her crop with clover tips and plantain seeds, and in the most leisurely way possible fed her nestlings before me. Did she think me, lying there on the ground, a Syrian or an Arab on his charpoy, and, remembering how the Moslems revere the "bird of the tamarisk," imagine that she was as safe with me as with them? And did the almond tree remind her of the land she had left?

A family of tits, a score all told, flitted and gossiped in the nut trees opposite, and on the porch of the cottage sat a wren with seven little wrenlets all of a row, sitting on the bar below. She knew my appearance was unusual, and did not hesitate to say so, and a bullfinch came to see what was the matter, and agreed with her. This aroused a stupid old greenfinch to the situation, and he passed on the alarm to a blackbird, who cried chirk! chirk! and flashed out of sight; and then the missel-thrush took fright and screeched. In a twinkling every bird was gone; and the sun was bright in the sky. The labouring man was already in the field, and a robin,

coming home late from somewhere, was carolling in the pear tree. It was time for me to go. I had spent a night in the open air, but I could not conscientiously say that I had a good night's sleep.

And so July came and passed. Before its time the purple scabious, easily over-topping the dwarfed barley, was in flower ; the yellow bedstraw (one of the most beautiful and long-lasting of wild flowers when put in a vase) was in full bloom, and the hedges had been hung for a fortnight before their time with the white convolvulus, and festooned with the tufted vetch. The horehound, which should not have been in blossom for another month, was already going to seed, and the yellow flowers of the avens had dropped, and its points were all tipped with spiky seed-balls. A few familiar plants had not flowered at all, the early orchis, for example, or only very poorly, as the ragged robin, the stitchwort, forget-me-nots, and the bladdered campions. But the rest have done well, in spite of no rain, and notable among them were the meadow-

sweet, the knapweed, and the teazles. The foliage of the trees is everywhere unusually full, but the signs of early autumn colouring are already showing in lime and chestnut. The trees have been affected curiously, but not alike. Some, as the ash, poplar, plane, and lime, have seeded or set their seed very well. But the oaks have no acorns, the beech-trees no mast, the horse-chestnuts few chestnuts. The supply of wild birds' food threatens to be very scanty. The mountain-ash and elder are heavily laden, but these are eaten up long before the pinch of winter comes, and are not important "crops." The hollies have no berries; the hips and haws are dropping off the hawthorns and the roses with the drought, and there is no fruit on the yews. The privet is thickly set, but the blackberry harvest will be very poor.

This year St. Swithin was not at all certain of his own intentions, and used his watering-pot in a purposeless and undecided fashion. But St. Swithin has of late degenerated into something of an impostor. In his general moral aspect he still, no doubt, remains the

"rich treasure of all virtues" which monkish biographers assert he used to be in the flesh, and as good a "saint" as ever—though never having been canonised by a Pope he is really only a home-made saint; but as a barometer the venerable gentleman has of recent years been only so-so. Indeed, in the matter of rain-augury he has now fallen, in some parts of the country, far behind the woodpecker, and cannot, in Welsh estimation at any rate, compare for a moment with the Prophet Jones who, after an exemplary life as a minister, has left behind him in the Principality a reputation as an exemplary rain-predicter also. As a fact, it will be found that the greatest number of rainy days have followed when St. Swithin was dry, and this, too, in spite of the saint having selected for his purpose a season of the year when such prognostications had all the meteorological odds in their favour. I would not on that account impute to the respected monk any wilful intention of trifling with the public, but at the same time would point out that should any modern Zadkiel prophesy cold

weather for January if it were cold on Christmas Day, there would not be sufficient audacity in the prediction to make its fulfilment a matter for any great enthusiasm. Yet St. Swithin's prophecy was almost as safe a one to venture on, for it appears from published observations that when spring is dry summer is as a rule wet, and that when the spring is wet the summer is generally wetter still; so that any day will do for reckoning the forty days from as well as the 15th of July, or better, and it does not much matter either whether we reckon backwards or forwards.

This saint, when on earth, which was scarcely a thousand years ago, was an ecclesiastic of recognised ability, Privy Councillor to two kings, and tutor, it is said, to Alfred the Great. But he seems to have had a most unwholesome liking for the wet, for when he died he was buried, at his own request, out of doors, so that the sweet rain might fall upon him, while some chroniclers say that he was buried "beneath the eaves" so that he might constantly be dripped upon.

Under the rain-spout he lay accordingly for nearly a hundred years, when St. Dunstan, who seems to have had an unconscionable habit of meddling in other people's affairs, covered his burial-place with a shrine, at which St. Swithin was so incensed that he caused a violent thunderstorm to burst over the heads of the company and to continue for forty days. And it was for this that he was made the Pluvial Saint of England, and July, his month, the month of augury.

Yet if one date is to have the same weight as another, there is not a single month in the year that is not as rain-making as July, and besides St. Swithin there are eight other saints who claim the watering-pot. Each month in turn, as well as July, has been supposed to influence the weather of its successor, and these at any rate, Saints Matthew, Paul, Simon, Jude, Medard, Gervais, Martin and Goddieve, can claim equal powers. Moreover, observations of the rainfall have exposed St. Swithin's incompetence so completely, that if we must have an Aquarius in our calendar, why not try one in a later

month, say, St. Simon and St. Jude, who are two sloppy saints that fall together in October? If it does rain after that, it can hardly make November worse than it is, while if it does not, it will mend the month.

But St. Swithin christened the apples; not heartily, but still sufficiently; and as all the other rustic rites which the proper culture of pippins demands have been complied with, the owners of orchards await the harvest of the trees with assured complacency. St. Barnaby sent the groves fair weather when the trees were in bud, and St. Dunstan let May pass without a blight. For it should be known that the pious blacksmith in his unregenerate days speculated in a brewery and made a corner in malt, intending to hold the market, and that Beelzebub came to him and offered, if the saint would sell himself to the Prince of Darkness, to blight all the apple-trees in the parishes round, so that there should be no cider in the country-side, and beer be more than ever in demand. Dunstan, it is said, agreed to this scandalous arrangement, and his purchaser straightway

set forth and blighted all the orchards, for which reason St. Dunstan's Day is held to be a critical one for the trees which are then in full bloom. But, as I have said, this year passed without harm, and so did Frankum's Night, when the three witches, in vindictive recollection of the abominable proceedings of one Frankum—who dabbled in witchcraft himself, and tried to steal a march on his neighbours by his incantations and spells—are said to go round with a malevolent "pepper-box" and sprinkle mildew, smut, rot, canker, and every other noxious thing they can, upon the trees with the young fruit just reddening.

Ripe fruit, all doctors allow, forms a healthy food for young and old, and it is pleasant to know that the apple does not suffer from their special commendation. Do you remember how, when the Pilgrims were at the Inn, the party had apples set before them, "and they were very good tasted fruit"? Then said Matthew the boy, "May we eat apples, since they were by such that the serpent

beguiled our first mother?" To which Gaius replied, in one of those appropriate couplets of which the sententious old innkeeper showed always so curious a command:

> "Apples forbad, if ate, corrupt the blood;
> To eat such when commanded does us good."

Upon which Matthew the boy changed his ground and went on to explain that the reason he "made the scruple" was that "a while since he had been very sick when eating fruit." It is not often, fortunately, that we meet a boy who argues about the propriety of eating apples that were given him. But with August passing, the season of green fruit is—let the guardians of the groves be thanked—nearly over.

August is the month of the lapwing and the hedgehog, as September is of the partridge and squirrel. All Arctic folk call August "the lapwing month," and here in England too the bird is much in evidence, "scattering o'er the heath and singing its wild notes to

the listening waste," ere the guns get to work and while the destinies of grouse still admit of peace in solitude. It has a weary voice, "piping o'er the lea," or "crying along the purple moor," and it flings itself across the sky at sunset as if it had no aims left in life, a homeless, hopeless bird.

The Scotch have never forgiven it for the part it innocently played in the betrayal of Covenanters to their enemies. The persecuted worshippers used to meet for prayer in the most secret valleys, on the most unfrequented hill-sides, just where the plovers had their haunts and nests, and as long as the intruders stayed, the birds kept complaining, flying to and fro above them. The soldiers sent out to harry the conventicles soon got to understand the meaning of the birds—just as in South America the hunters know where the pumas are feeding by the wheeling of vultures above them, and in India the leopard may be tracked by the clamour of monkeys around it as it moves. So Scotch poets have nothing but reproach for the beautiful bird "of ill omen," which

"Hovering o'er the panting fugitive,
Through dreary moss and moor has screaming led
The keen pursuer's eye; oft has it hung
Like a death-flag above the assembled throng
Whose lips hymned praise."

Another little wild rain-predicter is the "urchin," the "prick-backed" hedgehog, "that doth foreshew ensuing storms." Yet the hedgehog, I take it, is a very pleasant little beast. Poets do not like it because it is prickly. They call them "ugly" urchins and "thornbacks dull." Why ugly and why dull, I cannot say. They have very pretty, intelligent faces, the little ones especially, and the only dulness that I have noticed in those I have caught and kept as pets was their sleepiness during the daytime, though if kept without food all night they were often as brisk as possible in the morning. They dislike the sunlight, but on cloudy days, or towards evening they were always abroad, and if their box is thoroughly shaded, they seem to make very little difference between day and night.

Their docility is astonishing, and a very

little handling is sufficient to teach them to like being scratched between the fore-legs or stroked between the eyes. Nor when among friends do they curl themselves up. I used to carry them about on my hand open, or they would lie across my knee open when I stroked their backs, and I am half inclined to think the curling up is a procedure that is uncomfortable, and only resorted to from caution. Young ones cannot do it, and old ones, when ill, lose the strength necessary for contracting the skin. When disturbed asleep they are found curled up, though I have often seen them lying quite quiet at full length as if asleep; but when torpid during winter they are also found in a ball. But has any one ever seen a hedgehog, when it was peacefully at its ease, roll itself up? I have never caught one in the act of curling up, except when it had just been alarmed. And how do you account for it that when you take a hedgehog out of its nest it often has a leaf or two cuddled up inside it? Surely no animal deliberately settling itself to sleep in a ball would do so with such uncomfortable things as dead

leaves and sticks in the middle of its body. Who would think of taking their boots into bed with them when they wanted to be snug? They never remain rolled up more than a quarter of an hour, and, as a rule, if they are left alone they uncurl in three or four minutes. When rolled up their respiration is regular and in deep, long-drawn breaths, but you can tell when their alarm is over by the breathing becoming rapid and fluttering. As soon as the eyes come up above the fur they are opened; then comes the nose, twitching nervously. The little creature gives a start, and then gets on its legs by a series of short cautious jerks, and when fairly on its feet takes often a very careful survey of its surroundings before making off to cover.

They recognise no danger from the presence of man, and when escaping will crawl over your foot or squeeze through between your heels. If when it is on your foot you stir it, the small thing's puzzlement is very comic. But the disturbance does not alarm it. It accepts it doubtless as of the nature of an earthquake, and humbly concluding that

little hedgehogs have nothing to fear from seismic convulsions, goes on its plodding way without any symptoms of panic. Still more odd is the fact that you may walk close behind a hedgehog as long as you please, and it will not take fright. If you are standing still in its path, the hedgehog will keep straight on and go over your boots. But if you cross its path, or come unexpectedly upon it at very close quarters, it will make a short, sudden rush of about a yard or more in a very stupid way, often on to an open pathway or the turf, and there curl itself up. From all which I conclude that, though its eyes, ears, and nostrils are so well developed, it has really no quickness of sight, hearing, or smell. It relies entirely upon its power of contraction and the knowledge that when it is in a ball it is safe.

I never saw them fight, but when in company they were in a continual state of explosiveness, puffing and snorting in a most delightful way. At the distance of a few yards it sounded as if some small steam-engine were at work. When they meet and touch

noses each snorts and starts back, again advances, snorts and retires, until eventually, giving one another a wide berth, they pass without touching. Sometimes one would make a rush under the other, upsetting it, and the puffing then would be prodigious. They must puff or burst. But they did not fight. This manœuvre, I take it, is a hostile one, and certainly not without its merits, for if the one that charges under the other erects its bristles as it goes it must make it very uncomfortable indeed for the one above. But I never saw any retaliation nor any use made of the teeth. When at peace with each other they do not seem to be incommoded by each other's spines, but crawl over one another as unconcernedly as if their backs were velvet. In their movements, when wild, they are very noisy, treading heavily, eating their food with a great deal of munching, and going through their toilet with loud lickings. They have no real taste for fruit either ripe or unripe, but will nibble it, and as for plantain roots ("the hedgehog underneath the plantain bores," Tennyson notes, in

"Aylmer's Field"), said by Gilbert White to be a special favourite of theirs, I never found them to eat it in captivity. That they eat eggs is beyond doubt, but how they do it I could never discover. I have seen them roll them about till the eggs got accidentally into a corner or against some obstacle and then attack them, but without any results, with their teeth. Next morning, however, the shell was there smashed up into tiny fragments, but no vestige of the contents.

Now hedgepigs are of the nature of things that cause places to be bewitched. They are very occult. Some time ago ("Leave out the date entirely, Trim," quoth my Uncle Toby) my friend Anthony Partiger confided to me, smoking very slowly as his wont is when about any matter of moment, "that he had a thought that his garden was bewitched." Why? Because, said he, the tulips bought for double all turn out single, and the hyacinths guaranteed "mixed" are all a livid white. "The candytuft comes up chickweed and the lobelia groundsel, and instead of the 'warranted finest lawn-grass,' I have sow-

thistles and fool's-parsley." "But these," said I, "are mere details." "Not a bit of it," he replied, "they are circumstantial evidence."

I was delighted at the turn affairs were taking, as I had long had a whim in hand which I knew not how to gratify, so knowing Tony to get more confirmed the more he was contradicted, I pooh-poohed the idea of witchcraft. But he overwhelmed me with his "reasons," and ended up by asking me, which was not to be disputed with any honesty, if I had not seen that the shrubberies were haunted by whining hedgepigs and the spinney by death-boding owls; and went on to tell me how only last week a brindled cat (much given to mewing at midnight) had spirited away the tabby of the house and taken its place. By this time he had become so positive that the place was bewitched that I did not hesitate to agree with him, and said, "We can soon put the matter right." "How?" he asked. "By planting," I replied, "a small garden of such things as witches cannot bear, and setting out in another

part another garden of such things as they take most delight in. The one will serve to conciliate the more malignant, and the other to terrify the weaker-minded." "We will do it," said Tony, "and let us plan it out at once."

And so, while it was raining, we did. Of course the first garden, that which was to scare the witches, had to be a pentangle; and as there happened to be a poplar tree upon which there was mistletoe growing—witches dare not come near the mystic plant—just where there was a space of ground suitable for our purpose, we made it one point of the pentangle; and at each of the others we set, on paper, an elder and an ash tree, a hazel and a mountain-ash, the four most potent trees against evil spirits that there are. At the foot of one was to stand bracken, of another St. John's wort, of the third vervain, of the fourth foxgloves, and against the poplar was to be trained black-briony. In the centre of the garden were to be white lilies and sweet-briar (which Satan hates), and the rest was to be overgrown with ground-ivy,

roots of anemone and pimpernel being thickly set in amongst it. And against the poplar tree was to be nailed with cross-headed nails a board with the old prayer upon it:

"From witches and wizards and long-tailed lizards,
And creeping things that run in hedge bottoms,
Good Lady, deliver us!

"That should greatly conduce," said Tony thoughtfully, "to the profligation of witches."

And then we designed the other, though the rain had stopped, and the young speckled robins were out on the path, and the red-admiral sat sunning its wings on the holly-hock opposite. In a corner of Tony's garden was a little pool in which lived newts and frogs (to which witches were ever partial), and over it hung black alders, the favourite tree of such as ride on broomsticks. What more suitable and convenient for the hags' pleasure ground than this corner? And when we came to examine it we found the pipy hemlock growing there and a noble plant of hellebore, all hung with green bells. Surely just the place,

"By the witches' tower,
Where hellebore and hemlock seem to weave
Round its dark vaults a melancholy bower,
For spirits of the dead at night's enchanted hour."

"They have been planting here already," said Tony, "and this is no doubt their rendezvous."

"We shall please them then all the more if we beautify the place with some more noxious plants."

"We will make it abominably charming."

"First of all, nightshade. You cannot have too much of that. Witches make their tea of it, and use the foaming juice of aconite for cream. There is plenty of that, too, in the garden, the beautiful blue 'monkshood.'"

"Too good for witches," said Tony.

"Hush! nothing can be too good for those whom you are compelled to propitiate. Then there must be henbane and betony, and we will give them a juniper bush, for without this they cannot send brides mad. Yews are here already, and the red-berried arums—'lords and ladies,' the children call them, but

in Worcestershire we know them as 'bloody men's fingers'—and we must add the mallow that softens men's bones and makes them cripples, and the clammy plantain that causes the black sweat in man. For the rest, Tony, do not trim the witches' garden except round under the yew where they sit, but place against the alder ready for their use wands of bay with a tuft of leaves at the end, and hemlock-stalks, and, if you have them to spare, an old broomstick or two.

'Some nags were of the Brume-cane framit,
And some of the griene Bay-tree ;
And mine was made of ane Humloke schaw,
And a stout stallion was he.'

You will then have done your best, and if at any time you find a dead shrew or bat about throw it into their garden. Witches have their whims, you know. And Tony," I added, "when you have done all this, I think, if I were you, remembering what you said about your flowers not coming up true to name, I should also change my seedsman."

"I was thinking," said Tony, "whether I should not do that first."

Raining again, in a soft warm shower! Listen to the garden talking while it rains, a patter of voices, quick, eager, multitudinous, full of hopes and projects of what they will do "now that it rains." How they will grow and shoot forth and bud and blossom! The roses only are weeping their pretty flowers away, drip, drip, drip, one petal at a time, and then, on a sudden, a whole sob-full. Pan has asked for them: they give them to Pan. And the sweetbriar is worshipful with fragrance, and like incense to Indra, "Lord of the Rain," goes up the scent of lavender and southernwood and thyme. The lilies, of great goodlihead, divinely tall, sway with a stately languid grace; the Canterbury bells are all ringing.

The birds are under shelter, but scarcely out of sight, for the rain drives out a multitude of flying creeping things. The thrush and blackbird make short excursions to see how the worms are coming out; the fly-catcher, as if on a pendulum, swings across an open space, intercepting the fluttering rain-impeded moths; the wagtail paddles

along the edge of the path busily feeding; the sagacious robin, comfortably under a bush, watches for the caterpillars that drop by long threads off the wet leaves and dangle in the air. The cat, too, sits dry under the clematis that grows against the house, but now and again one big drop falls upon her, soaking slowly to the skin, and shoots sudden tremors along her furry sides, little zigzag lightnings of cold shiver. And the drenched spider slings herself hand over hand up the line, and, cuddled up under a leaf, sits cat-elbowed watching the rain-drops strike her slanting web and catch in it—useless captives these.

The rain makes flat finicking patterns on the path, all specks and dots, like Benares brass-work, but becomes bravely confluent where, under an overhanging fern, it sweeps in mimicry of a torrent round the corner of the rockwork to the grating, where its tiny Niagara disappears. And, lo! the toad with its dandified swaggering crawl, its elbows out like a beau's, and resting every now and again to look about at nothing. Why not pick it up and cross its back with silver? It

brings good fortune. "He who is not fortunate must provide himself with a toad, and feed it in his house on bread and wine, inasmuch as they are either 'lords' or 'women from without,' or 'uncomprehended genii,' who have fallen under some malediction. Hence they are not to be molested, lest when offended they should come at night to spit upon the offender's eyes, which never heal, not even if he recommend himself to the regard of Santa Lucia." The "slow soft toad," as Shelley calls it, is a special favourite of mine. I like him because he carries a precious jewel in his head that nobody has yet found, and because he knows how to hatch cockatrices,* and because he eats gnats. He is a charming person altogether, "the full-blown toad," and never, perhaps, more so than in Spenser's immortal couplet:

> "The grisly toadstool grown there might I see
> And loathèd paddocks *lording on the same*."

* If it finds a cock's egg it sits upon it and hatches it. The result is a cockatrice, which by-and-by grows a crown on its head and becomes a basilisk, which kills by merely looking. A considerable beast.—P. R.

The worm, too, is now abroad, telescoping its way along the soft ground, and sucking down into its burrow all the leaves it can reach. When the thrush is asleep it will be busiest, this terrible little creature that is responsible for the disappearance of cities and for the undoing and unmaking of all that man sets up. But will it, when daylight comes, remember about "the early bird"?

And here see "the compendious snail" upon his travels. He pays no rent and fears no brokers. For, except when he is inside it, his house is unfurnished. There is nothing to levy upon:

> "Wherein he dwells, he dwells alone,
> Except himself has chattels none,
> Well satisfied to be his own
> Whole treasure."

It is Davenant who calls it the "nimble" snail, "hast'ning with all his tenements on his back." And why not? How fast would a squirrel go if it had to carry its nest on its back? Or the house-sparrow? And it is truly delightful, when looking at the creature, so apparently harmless, so much to be pitied,

to remember, as De Gubernatis says, that "the snail of popular superstition is demoniacal." And there is no doubt that in the folk-lore of every country the snail is treated as an accomplice of the Devil in all his wicked works.

And then the rain stops, and except here and there for a little puddle fast sinking into the ground and the glittering of the drops hanging at the tips of the leaves, there is no sign of the summer weather having broken. The sky is clear blue, and the sun is bright. The swifts are wheeling and screaming round the house-tops, and from fir-tree and elm the birds are singing. And look at them on the lawn, in the field, everywhere. Listen to the humming of the wasps in the trees. People stop and say, "Listen to the bees"; but if they will look they will see there are no flowers overhead for the honey-seekers. It is the wasps who are at work, crowding on the sprays of silver fir and spruce, and scraping together the resin which they need for making the paper of their nests. For the wasp is no more

an idler than the bee, and though it often finds a short cut to honey by plundering the laden workers of the hive, it is always busy, and terribly in earnest.

A majority think unkindly of the wasp. They cannot forget its sting. The prejudice is not an admirable one, as some prejudices are; race prejudice, for instance, which is the making of nations. But not this one against wasps. For it is really only a protest against a vigorous personality, against the assertion of individual power. In the human species there are wasps—strong-flighted men whom most fear, and many, out of sheer weakness, hate, for their robustness of mind and their intellectual aggressiveness. Such do not work in wax, nor store honey. Yet the workmanship of bees, as compared with that of wasps, is the workmanship of blind mutes imitating a pattern by the touch of fingers as compared with that of uncrippled and independent intellect. The life-history of the wasp, too, is far more worthy of self than that of the hive-folk. Sting? Of course they do, if the necessity arises, and often, grateful to Provi-

dence for the weapon, they make the necessity for themselves. Ought they to keep their talents wrapped in napkins?

No one likes bees better than I do. I have kept hives. But, after all, are they not the cattle and poultry of the insects? They are the sheep, while the wasps are the wild deer. The one represents Routine, the other a protest against Routine. What poetry is there in the lives of bees as compared with that of wasps—in the tame citizenship of the artificial hive, the machine-made honeycomb, as compared with the romance of the woodland comb-maker? Both bee and wasp need honey; but the latter, when it has not the leisure (or the will) to gather it for itself, goes after the former. "What ho, there!" it cries. "You bumbling fellow, in your jerkin of woolly brown, stand and deliver!"—and the bee does.

A pirate of the air? a highwayman of skyey roads and heaths? No, no; not at all. This is the way of courageous genius, that knows how to take the bricks which the diligent mechanical student has been piling up into

regular heaps in his brickyard, and to build beautiful houses with them. Left alone, they would have been piles of bricks, and nothing more, for ever and a day. But a better man comes along and bravely possesses himself of them. "You can go and rummage for more," he says to the toiler among the clay: "that is your life-work—to make bricks. Mine is to build with the bricks which you make." Of course the bee buzzes and says, "You mustn't; you really ought not. I want the honey myself to fill a cell with." The wasp replies, "Deliver, or you are a dead bee." Or suppose they argue more calmly. "What are you doing?" demands the wasp. "Going home with my honey-bag," replies the other. "What for?" "To fill a cell with." "Well, what then? When the cell is filled what shall you do?" "Shut it up and begin another," is the reply. "And then?" "Fill that up too and begin another." Imagine the generous fury of the wasp! "Oh, thou mutton-headed fly! And is *that* the end of life—to fill cells with honey and eat none? To sweat all the summer through and have no harvest of your

toil? Oh, thou gross one! Thou honey-grubber! Thou miser of honey-bags! Perpetually filling for others to void—and without the wit to see that thou art the sport of spendthrifts. Out of this! Give up your honey, or, 'od zooks! this rapier at the end of me shall rid the world of a numskull varlet." But, like the sturdy good citizen that he is, the bee often refuses to surrender; and then woe to him, the poor honest fellow in his fustian coat. For my gentleman whips you out his bodkin, and there is an end of the bee.

In short, there is a great deal to say about the wasp, and in its favour. Its soldierly ways, so "smart" and alert: the lancer in the field, a gladiator at need. When they go abroad it is with military motions—scouting, skirmishing, foraging, fighting. And the nest is a citadel. There is no "bumbling" variety of the wasp, no "bumble-wasp." They make very little fuss about what they do. Yet sometimes, when they go by, there is slung past your ear a sound like a tiny bullet; not like the bee's of "a full content," but an eager

racing voice that has an objective point before it. Thus they keep life from getting stagnant. Many insects would go to sleep altogether if it were not for the wasps, who are for ever reconnoitring other people's premises. Just as Nature keeps a hawk hung up in the air to teach the groundlings that "life is not all beer and skittles," so she always has a wasp on hand to repress the idea of perpetual gaiety among insects. It is the falcon of the dipterous folk. So, too, when it is not at work, there is a delightful idleness about the wasp; a thorough complete vacancy which is enough to send a honey-bee mad to see. But for myself I hold perpetual labour in abomination, and believe my hatred of it just.

The centre figure of the home-life of bees is of course the queen-bee, one of the chiefest wonders of the animated world. Volumes of facts have been published of the almost incredible life-history of this insect, of its creation artificially by the drudges of the hive, of its terrible life. A truly awful insect; a made-up monster, as it were, with a body complete

in all its parts, but no soul, no heart. Of the idolatrous devotion of the hive to this tyrant, literally of their own construction, endless fanciful prose has been written.

For a long time it was supposed that the sovereign of the hive was a male, "the king;" and I think this sentence from Pliny is worth quoting, "Hath the king of the bees alone no sting, and is he armed only with majesty? or hath nature bestowed on him a sting and yet denied him only the use thereof? For certain it is that this great commander over the rest does nothing with his sting, and yet a wonder it is to see how readily they all obey him." Virgil has a king bee, and he describes how his subjects defend their monarch:

"Onward they troop, and brandishing their wings,
Fit their fierce claws and point their poison'd stings;
Throng to the imperial tent, their king surround,
Provoke the foe, and loud defiance sound."

That the queen bee has a sting is abundantly proved every year by her using that weapon to kill her possible rivals; but it is one of the

curiosities of bee-life that, however irritated (and her subjects treat her with the scantiest possible ceremony on occasion), she never uses her sting against them. "Majestate tantum" (by majesty alone) was therefore a favourite motto of principalities and powers. Among others it was the motto on the breast of Louis XII. of France, "Père du Peuple." But the fancy was surely stretched to the snapping-point when the Maid of Orleans was given a queen-bee for her impress.

There, too, is the drone, with his big head, and his eyes meeting atop and giving him a queer, blank-eyed look. Watch him come out of the hive on a fine morning. How cautiously he pokes out his feelers to see if it be cold or not; how he stops up the doorway against the industrious neuters, who have been up and at work since daybreak; how he loiters on the ledge, elaborating his toilet, exasperating the laden folk who cannot find room to settle. And then he thinks of breakfast, and flies off with a slow, heavy, droning flight to the nearest flowers. Among these he spends his days, or goes off to court some queen out on

her nuptial flight and summoning her suitors. Then the season of courtship and nuptials comes to an end. But the poor drone does not know it, and comes blundering into the hive as usual, and goes to sleep full of honey and fatigued with pleasure. And the wretched awakening! The hive is all astir, and the voices of the workers are hot and hoarse. They are rushing about in all directions, searching out the drones from where they lie asleep, stabbing them to death, and dragging their bodies on to the sunny ledge, drop them over on to the ground beneath. The massacre does not take long. For the drones have no stings, and can do no more when the poisoned poniard slips in between their scales than shrill for mercy, which is never granted. So they die in the midsummer of their pleasure.

When the hive is over-crowded, the conservative party of the community secedes from the parent stock, taking the old queen with it, to found a new colony. As soon as the owner or a friendly neighbour hears "the murmuring sound of the swarming bees," he

comes out—the practice is still almost universal among the country-folk—and striking a key on a pan, or jingling the fire-irons together, "calls" the swarm.

It has been a busy year this for everything, for nearly all the birds have second broods, and the flowers are trying to blossom twice. The heat of May and June tempted them to flower, but they were only half-hearted, and now that July has given them rain they are making fresh growths. The bright blue stars of the chicory are reappearing; they had almost dwindled away for want of rain, and the wild campanulas have picked up heart of grace. The willow-herb, which in Canada follows the track of the forest fires, filling up all the black spaces along the railway lines—they call it the "fire-weed"—has its roots in moist places and is lusty and tall; and the foxgloves that have had shade are in the prime of their beauty. But the mulleins, the beautiful plants with soft downy leaves and noble spires of yellow bloom, the pride of the copse, are dwarfed, and so is the toad-flax that makes

the hedgerows lovely, and the pretty rest-harrow spread out along the ground brightening the waste corners of the fields is deeper in colour and much smaller than in other years.

This deepening of colour is very noticeable. Whole fields of bird's-foot trefoil have this July been fiery orange, while in other years children found it a morning's work to gather a handful of the darker flowers. The campions too were not pink, but rich rosy red.

The hawks are out of their reckoning, and beating the hedges they found none of the partridge chicks they expected. The birds were well grown in July and quite able to take care of themselves, and now, with August in its second week, they are as strong of wing as ever they were on the fatal First. What a charming bird it is, this bold little yeoman of our country-side, and in all the home-life of birds can there be anything more engaging than the partridge's care of her eggs and young ones? Live happily with your family while you may, little bird, for the day of your

trouble is close upon you, when the covey you have loved so well will be scattered, and even if you live yourself to call them to you, you will find your voice unheeded, perhaps by both mate and chick.

THE LOOTING OF THE ORCHARD

A NOBLE nut avenue down the centre. On either side an old orchard, with broad open stretches of turf between the rows of gnarled grey fruit-trees, all set with beds filled with standard roses. They are now in their second bloom, standing up to their knees in asters, violet and pink and crimson. A broad turf path—how beautiful they are, these green grass-ways of our old English gardens, as compared with the gravel of the new !—runs along either side, and the apple and pear, cherry and plum trees meet overhead all along. They make an aisle of beauty the whole year through, whether in

the full glory of bloom, pink and white; or in young leaf; or, as now, in dark foliage studded with bright-cheeked fruit; or in winter, when there is no green but the tufts of mistletoe, and the lichened boughs are traced out in snow. Always lovely, and the abiding-place of peace. No gardeners disturb it much. In the very early morning they go round the rosaries, trimming and weeding and tying up, and once a week the turf is cut close down to a velvet pile. While the machine goes whirring up and down the paths, and round and round the rose-beds, the blackbirds sit in the shrubbery, impatient of the interrupting of their looting; the squirrel, from his post of observation on the tall acacia, overlooks the operation and the nut avenue he wishes to return to, with ill-concealed annoyance at the intrusion; the purring of the doves in the surrounding spinneys stops for a while. Only the greenfinch lifts up its voice.

That Cowper should have spoken well of the greenfinch! Many is the time it has driven me from my seat where, quietly seated

with a book and a pipe, I had meant to spend my morning. The wretched bird, thinking that it, and it alone, has "discovered" you—*you*, sitting fully exposed to view on a garden seat—perches itself as near you as it dares, and commences its monotonous lament. Is there anything in Nature more exasperating than the note of the greenfinch when it is complaining? It will go on repeating the same one note till it drives you into a passion. If you get up and hurl a stone at it, it only flies a little farther off and begins again. And the most miserable note a bird ever uttered. You would think it was the wretchedest thing in the garden. And with it all an indescribable undertone of hypocrisy, of affectation, that robs its dolorous voice of all pitifulness, and makes its lament an intolerable impertinence. What have you done? Nothing but seat yourself down near its nest. Yet the miserable little fowl at once commences to tell all the garden of the intolerable burden of your tyranny, the monstrous oppression under which it suffers.

There is one method of self-defence if you

ever wish to sit on that seat with enjoyment, and that is to get up and walk across to the bush or tree the bird is on, find its nest and pull it out. It will at once go away and begin building another, where, perhaps, it will not be in your way. If it is, pull it out again, until the greenfinch has gone out of earshot of your favourite retreat. No bird, not even the house-sparrow, is so persistent in nest-building. For one thing, the edifice is what the poets would call "artless"; what we may call, without offending the greenfinch, slovenly. An untidy foundation is laid of fine twigs—by preference birch—and into the hollow are put flocks of wool, moss, and dead grass. A rough lining of horsehair is added, and the nursery is complete. It is begun and finished in a day. You will find an egg in a greenfinch's nest on the day after the foundation of the nest was laid.

The worst of it is, that this prolific creature, one of the very prettiest of English birds, is perhaps the only one that can claim no merit, beyond the plumage of the male. It is mischievous from its birth. Fed on flower-

buds and sprouting seeds, it grows up to devastate the fruit and ripening produce of the kitchen garden. It picks the tiny lettuces to pieces, nips off the fine tender sproutings of the spinach, and lays waste the peas just showing above ground in their first faint green. Deterred from these by netting, or driven from them by the pestilent voice of bird-scaring youth, it ravages the setting berries, and plays the Vandal (destroying what it cannot devour) among the unripe fruit. What does it give in return? Nothing, but now and again a glint of green and yellow plumage. It seldom eats an insect, never sings a note. It is, like all thieves, unsociable and evasive. But it builds with a fearless confidence that is absolutely wonderful. My host here, who is surely one of the tenderest of all men living towards the wildings whom his pleasure-grounds harbour and protect, has issued a ukase against all disturbance of birds. He knows their faults and their virtues, and he keeps open house for all. For all but the greenfinch. *Their* nests are piled up in an arbour a dozen

together, most of them with eggs. These go to feed a beautiful Persian cat with fur like a thunder-cloud. It eats eggs. And yet the garden is full of greenfinches to-day, and in the nut avenue alone there were, early in September, at least two nests with young ones. "They can hatch them now if they like," says my host, "for by the time they are grown there will be nothing left in the garden that they are not welcome to."

They are wonderful little birds, truly; accepting the destruction of their homesteads with an invincible indifference, and not repining by as much as a twitter at the dragging forth of their egg-treasures. And yet, when no offence is offered, when there is not even a demonstration of ill-will, they will sit whining, murmuring, drivelling, within a few feet of you, as if you were the cruellest, cat-heartedest wretch in the world. One thing is certain: when the greenfinch begins to complain you must either get up and go, or murder it. Albeit the woful cry is only uttered when they are nesting, and as a protest against your presence, yet they always

sit as near their nest as possible, as if to tell you where it is. But the head of the greenfinch is flat atop, and it has the receding forehead of the fool.

Far away, on the other side of the grounds, is a spacious kitchen garden, with walls where the peach and nectarine, apricot, greengage and morella ripen, and along the trim gravelled paths are set choice fruit-trees, prim little pyramid apples, and pears on cordons. In these the birds are allowed no possession. Gardeners are always moving about, and "the bird-boy" is busy with his recurrent maniac shout and strident clapper. Cats sun themselves upon the garden walls which are the highways of the mice.

But in this old orchard here the trees do as they please, and so do the birds. By-and-by will come a day when the household will come down to a man, and the boy, with wheelbarrows and baskets, and the orchard will be formally looted of its harvests. Only the winter pears will be left, and the medlars, the bullaces, and the damsons. All the rest will be wheeled away to the house, and the maids

will lay them out in the apple-room against the coming winter, and for the privy delectation of certain rats, who wot of the fragrant store and circuitously from the stables find their way to the fruit. So the old trees grow as they will.

They were originally planted in straight lines, and a foot from the ground may be said to be still all of a row. But above that they have leaned away to one side and to the other, taken queer fits and starts of growth, got knobs on them, and, to the everlasting delight of the nest-building chaffinch and goldfinch, are shagreened with grey lichens that lie flat like lizard's skin or are tufted all over with grey mossy growth, so that if you stroke the tree it is like stroking a goat's back.

Wise fruitmen and apple-prigs shake their heads over these old trees, and prod them, as they go, with their sticks, just to show how the scientific gardener despises aged vegetables. They talk about "canker" and "moss," and tell you for how much "a hundred" you can buy "good sound plants"—small precocities with no bodies and one huge fruit atop, like

a misgrown child with water on the brain—which are "excellent table-fruit and always marketable." Perish the markets! If it were mine, I would not exchange an acre of this shady orchard, with its shaggy trunks and mistletoed boughs, for a square mile of those prim miniature market-table prodigies that you can throw your leg over passing by. And as for a seat in the shade of them! A toad might lord it on his stool. But that is all.

Nor, apart from beauty, and to meet Goodman Apple-prig on his own ground, am I convinced of the superior value of his disciplined dwarfs. This old orchard, without any care except its biennial nourishment of manure, bears every year, without fail, apples enough, and pears, to satisfy the household handsomely, until what time the rhubarb and green gooseberry shall come to their relief. What will your scientific grower do more for you? Give you larger fruit? True. But go to California, where some of the largest fruit in the whole world grows, and you will find the beautiful painted bulk is all pith and

water. A single little warted English russet from the old orchard here has more fragrance and more flavour than a barrow-load of San Franciscan monsters. Children are very wise in some matters. Let them go up to the apple-room to help themselves—and what do they bring down? The largest fruit? Never —unless it be to roast.

Ah, then the joy of it! To sit on the floor in front of the nursery fire, the tall brass guard being put into the corner for the while —that alone a joy—and to watch the fruit twirling, each on its own bobbin-thread, and blistering, and fizzing, and dripping juice into the sugared saucers all arow beneath them. And the sleet is driving against the nursery windows, and outside it is dim and cold. And the nursery, how bright and fragrant! Next year, the children say, we will pick all the big apples with long stalks.

Oh, those beautiful old apple-trees! Look at them now: some with only here and there a red apple, others bending their branches almost to the turf. In the middle a wondrous crab: its every branch thickset with little

golden-orange fruit, exquisite in flavour, as close as figs on the banyan-boughs. Next is a wizened old pear-tree—a hawfinch built this year high up in its straight up-pointing boughs. Those boughs are now hanging to one side and another with weight of brown fruit: so hard that the blackbirds get tired of those that have fallen on the turf, and leave them to the wasp the excavator, and the ant the annihilator. Next is an old plum, from which the gardener picks for the children great lumps of clear cherry-coloured gum, with ants imbedded in it, teaching us how kauri was made, and how the old-world ants and flies got sarcophagused in amber.

And look at the chequered shadows that are thrown on the turf, dappling the path like a deerskin. Does not the view, looking down the line of quiet trees arching in the pathway, possess you with repose? It is here, lying in a hammock, you should read the "Earthly Paradise." Even the wind can hardly come here. On three sides the spinney shields the orchard; on the other, a tall hedge, beyond which the pasture slopes down to the stream.

To this enclosure, I really think, come all the birds of the parish. For miles round there is only corn-land and meadow, and the hedges are stubbed down so low that only the wren and the robin and the nettle-creeper can build there, or a chance chiff-chaff; and the trees that are left standing in the hedges are nearly all pollarded. So that between the garden I write of and the High Woods, lying like blue-green clouds along the uplands yonder, there is no sylvan refuge for the feathered folk. And they come here with the confidence of many years of protection, and behave when here as if the garden was their own. And so it is for most of the year.

They eat up first all the red currants, and then all the white. The house hardly ever gets a dish of either. But they cannot eat up all the black—there are too many of them; and one fine morning the small plunderers, assembled for the usual looting, are astonished by the appearance of a company of village children, who strip the bushes for the great jam-making. No house can have too much black currant jam in it in winter-time. And

how the children hasten to report the first symptoms of a sore throat, when they know it means a dose of black currant syrup sweetened with honey! And when the small village folk are trooping down the lane, chattering over their pence and their pottles of berries, going along, as children when happy cannot help going, in alternate steps and skips, the birds are in sulky convocation among the empty bushes, picking up the occasional berry that has fallen, the other that has been overlooked on the bough. But they are ill-tempered, and inclined to bandy *tu quoques*.

A thrush flattens itself upon the ground, stretches its head out as far as its neck will let it, and cries "Keek-keek" at another thrush. This aggravates the other thrush. The blackbirds puff themselves out, droop their wings, and spread and shut their tails like fans, and proceed to blows. The greenfinches open their beaks, and, with outspread wings, hiss at one another; and the robin,

"Always of an equal flame,
To fight a rival or to court a dame,"

falls in with the prevailing humour, and, spying another redbreast, flies full tilt at him, and thereby commences a feud which will last all the morning, with intervals of defiant challenge-singing from opposite apple-trees, and much pretty tournament work upon the turf, and infinite chasings of each other in and out the shrubbery. I know no other birds of ours that will keep up a quarrel at such a level of pugnacity, for such a long time, as two cock-robins. I never see this bird without remembering the delicious legend, universal in England, of the intrigue of the robin with the wren :

> "O ! Robin, joly Robin !
> Tell me how thy leman doth."

Nor, seeing the wren—surely the sweetest of our birds, with its charming song and its lovely plumage and fascinating ways, and yet so exquisitely funny—can I help laughing when I think of that scandal. Not that bird-society was shocked out of all sympathy, for when Redbreast is killed and Jenny follows his corpse in tears to the grave, "all the birds of the air "

"fell a-sighin' and a-sobbin'
For the sad, sad death of poor Cock Robin."

But the birds soon give up bickering over the gleanings of the black currant bushes, and abandon such exiguous pastures. The gooseberries are better worth their attention, and the cherries are softening into pink. Besides, all said and done, they had a month at the bush-fruit before anybody interfered with them; so that they have had their share.

As for the cherry-trees, they bear enormous crops, but not for the house. Every morning by sunrise the birds are there, and the boughs are searched for such fruit as have ripened sufficiently to be eaten, and all day long there is always a blackbird or two scrutinising the tree. For weeks this will go on, and then, once and for all, a ladder will be carried down, and the scanty residue of the crop be garnered. But, after all, there were cherries and to spare on the walls in the other garden. So no one begrudges the birds their month of the first-fruits, and in one way they have repaid it, for, near the cherry-trees and the plums, the

spinney is thickened with an undergrowth of cherries and plums, very beautiful in the early spring when in blossom, and at all times pretty. In the same way, a tall hedge of filbert-trees, on the other side of a ditch at the end of the orchard, is due to the field-mice, who stored up nuts in the bank, and forgot where they put them. After the cherries comes a long gap for the birds, for the strawberries and raspberries are not for them. Albeit, they sometimes get under the netting, and are caught, paying for the fearful joy they had snatched by captivity in the aviary. But the mountain-ash is in full bearing, and the hawthorn has reddened; and now, with October coming on, there is a feast of plenty. In many of the apple-trees there are some that are ripe enough for the birds, and the earlier pears are pecked upon the sunny side. The plums are everywhere soft, and the birds leave but few—the hornet and the wasp helping in the loot.

Have you ever noticed how very often wall-fruits are eaten behind, from the face near the wall? Sometimes they are quite

hollow, the fair skin only remaining. On trees, too, you will frequently find that, when two plums or greengages are growing together, they are attacked on the sides that are touching. This is not the work of the birds, but of slugs and winged insects. Even the bluebottles assist by sucking up their small portions of juice. It is wonderful how a fruit will conceal the secret of its emptiness, and will dissimulate. The original wound heals up all round, the edge of it hardening, and the stone inside remains attached to the stalk. But between the skin, still with its bloom on it, and the picked-clean stone inside, there is nothing. Tiny pincers have nipped it all away with exquisite precision, but without betraying their exploitation, and the fruit goes gravely on through the process of maturing, and, "over-ripe," drops off. You pick it up. It is a purple husk, with only a brown stone sticking to the skin, inside it—and a family of most comfortable earwigs.

But do not say, "Confound those blackbirds." Yellow bills had no share in the excavation. They are not cheats, whatever

else they are. If they prey on the damask cheek, they do not do it like the canker-worm, but boldly from the outside, where the fruit is easiest to get at. Look at that one now on the pear-tree. Its foothold is only indifferently secure, but it can reach the best pear of the bunch, and it is pecking it exactly in the middle of the rosiest bit. When the bird finds itself reaching the harder part, it will probably leave the fruit for another, and the hole it has dug in the pear catches the eye at once. There is nothing of the hypocrite about the blackbird. When he goes into a fruit-tree it is to eat the fruit. There is no pretence of prospecting for insects in the bark, or attacking only the diseased fruit. Not a bit of it. He scrambles about boldly on the outside of the tree; picks out the best apple he can see, and begins eating it at once. If he knocks it off in the process, he looks at it on the ground with head awry, and for a second or two argues with himself as to whether it were better to go down and finish the fruit he had begun or begin another. As a rule, he stays

where he is, and commences afresh; because on the ground the apple rolls about every time it is pecked, giving a great deal of trouble.

And here on the ground the ants and earwigs find it, and the red admiral butterfly and the gamma moth. You can always tell which the insects have eaten. They nibble round and round the seed-column, hollowing out the fruit and eating the rind, often with mathematical accuracy, in a circle; so that, when it is nearly finished, a pear looks so like a toadstool that you might pass it round for one. The seed-column is the stem, and it is capped by a circular umbrella, toadstool shape.

Birds, when they eat fruit, go straight to the middle, and pick out and eat the seeds; and, if you will notice it, you will see how many apples and pears are left half-eaten by birds. But their seeds are gone, which looks as if the feathered plunderers looked upon the seeds as an end in themselves, and the rest of the fruit a means thereto; upon the core as their objective point, and the pulp

only a necessary, though agreeable preliminary.

For bullfinches and chaffinches and bud-eating birds, it is often said that they injure a tree for its own good, destroying insects which would eventually have done more harm than they. This may be as it may be. But I never heard any one suggest that blackbirds and thrushes have any ulterior beneficence in mind when they visit an orchard. Nor do I think, if frankly asked the question, that those birds would hesitate to give a straightforward answer. There is nothing in their demeanour to lead you to suppose that they affect any more virtuous intention than the satisfaction of their own appetites. They squabble in the trees without any pretence of concealment, and if disturbed in their looting, only fly a short distance, and wait for your departure, in attitudes that are positively impertinent.

Is there no good in them, then? Are they marauders; nothing more? Do not think so. Come out here into the orchard after a shower, and see the turf dotted with

blackbirds and thrushes. Look at them hard at work among the worms. Was there ever such conscientious work being done before, without overseer? Tempted by the shower, the worms and snails are abroad, but the word has gone round, and scores of terrible little eyes are watching, little feet are fidgeting, little beaks are waiting. If you could only chalk the birds' feet and trace their course, you would find every inch of ground had been traversed, not once, but a dozen times. Every bird is busy at once, either watching or catching, and with such a single-heartedness of purpose as does you good to look at, and makes you forget the pilfered plums, and the brigandage among the cherries.

Or sit quietly on any of the seats: this one by choice with the tall foxgloves on either hand, and see them under the nut-trees, among the gooseberries. There is no fruit left, but how desperately hard they are working, these small fanatics! Every dead leaf in the shrubbery will be turned over in the twenty-four hours; all the borders of the beds patrolled; and the whole ground searched

for full-fed fallen caterpillars, hurrying off to find a soft burial-place wherein to turn to chrysalids. No, they are not mere marauders; for even in the sunny fruit-time, these first mellow days of October, they are doing good half the day, and by-and-by will come months of inclement weather, when there are no orchards but those of hedgerow and copse, and when all their time is spent in the incessant benefit of man.

Nor forget the three months of the year when these little tithe-gatherers make your gardens and your pleasure-places so beautiful with song, and "for their quiet nests and plenteous food pay with their gentle voice."

The nuts, too, are being plundered, and as you sit here between the screens of foxgloves, heavy with pods of seed, you can hear the squirrel plunge from one filbert-tree to another, and the tapping of the nut-hatch on the cobnut fixed in the deep-creviced bark of the acacias. If you were nearer you might hear the mice at work; small teeth rasping on the brown shells.

Under the nut-trees, one hot, still after-

noon, I remember hearing a queer, crisp noise among the leaves, and, following the sound, I surprised a colony of buff-tip caterpillars—forty feeding like one—all upon a small branch, and each with its leaf held by the edge between its feet, eating prodigiously, as if by contract, and with the same sound, in miniature, as rabbits make nibbling up a lettuce-stem.

The nuts are now full ripe : if you bend down a bough with a jerk to pick a bunch, the odds are that your hand grasps only empty husks ; the nuts themselves have slipped out, and are lying among the tinted leaves, a puzzle to find again. How handsome the husks of the great "filbeards" are, now they are scorched by the sun ! The "cobnut" husk has shrivelled back, leaving only the thick juicy calyx, and this even is mellowed into honey-yellow. The "soft-shell" has parted with its nuts, leaving its pretty husk still green. Is this last a common nut? I have met with it nowhere else, but once met there is no mistaking it, either growing or on the table. Its catkins are longer and

thinner than those of the filbert. The husk is very fine in texture, deeply fringed and incut, and not long enough to cover the nut, which, unlike all others, is highly glazed when ripe, and from its polish distinguishable at once in a plateful of others. The shell is so thin and soft that it can often be cracked between the finger and thumb; while the kernel, which is invariably as large as the shell will let it be, is as smooth-surfaced as a billiard-ball. If you look at a filbert or a cobnut, you will see upon the kernel the impression of the brown woody lining of the shell, but in the "soft-shell" this lining is itself so soft and keeps moist so late, that the kernel expands to its fullest size, and is quite polished. It is incomparably the best of all the nuts, and my host and his family know this so well that the children are not allowed to loot the soft-shell trees, and on the table they command, like the nuts of Avella of old, a respect which is never extended to their more imposing comrades with the longer beards.

The mice, who are curiously unintelligent,

judged by human ideas, as to nuts, have not apparently found out these admirable "soft shells." The nut-hatch is wiser than they, and so is the maggot's mother. How does this small weevil know which nuts are going to be good when she leaves her egg on the spot where the nut is to be? When the egg is laid the nut that is to come is merely a soft bud-like thing, and it may grow up full or may grow up empty. Does she ever make a mistake, and leave an egg inside a nut that belies its promise, and never has anything else inside it? How disgusted the small maggot must be when he hatches and looks round at the unfurnished larder in which, poor little wretch, it has been born only to starve to death. And if one could only convey to the maggot's mother the intelligence of what she had done, what distraction of maternal feelings should ensue, to think that she had shut her offspring up inside a shell which was too hard for her to get into, and too hard for her babe to get out of; the tiny prisoner helpless to escape, and she helpless to assist it; and all her own doing, too. But some

instinct no doubt guides the mother, for the nut-grub, as he is usually found, is a very pottle-bodied person, looking like one who has fared well all his life, and carefully abstained from doing any work between meals. Do you remember Southey's lines on the filbert?

"Nay, gather not that filbert, Nicholas,
There is a maggot there—it is his house—
His castle—oh, commit not burglary!
Strip him not naked, 'tis his clothes, his shell,
His bones, the very armour of his life;
And thou shalt do no murder, Nicholas.

. . . . .

"Enough of dangers and of enemies
Hath Nature's wisdom for the worm ordained;
Increase not thou the number! him the mouse,
Gnawing with nibbling teeth the shell's defence,
May from his native tenement eject;
Him may the nut-hatch, piercing with strong bill,
Unwittingly destroy, or to his hoard
The squirrel bear, at leisure to be cracked."

. . . . .

And then the poet suddenly bethinks him of the reverse of the picture of the maggot's life:

"Man also hath his dangers and his foes
As this poor maggot hath, and when I muse
Upon the aches, anxieties, and fears
The maggot knows not, Nicholas, methinks
It were a happy metamorphosis
To be enkernelled thus; never to hear
Of wars, and of invasions, and of plots,
Kings, Jacobins, and tax-commissioners,
And in the middle of such exquisite food
To live luxurious! The perfection this
Of snugness! It were to unite at once
Hermit retirement, aldermanic bliss,
And stoic independence of mankind."

It is a delightful piece of humour. Nor does it matter that the naturalist might object that no one could tell if a maggot were inside a nut or not without cracking it. The hole which Southey saw is only used by the maggot once, and that is when it leaves the nut for the first and last time in its life.

OF NUTS AND NUT-CRACKERS

If my host were to offer to make me a present of any one portion of his pleasure-grounds that I might select, I think I should prefer a request for his Nut Avenue. It is over a hundred yards long, and between the two rows of trees runs a broad turf walk.

Twenty springs have come and gone since that turf was laid, and thirty since those nuts were planted, and to-day the path is of wondrous pile and texture, and the trees, each of them beautifully symmetrical and of even size, some fifteen feet in height and twenty in depth, form a hedge so luxuriously soft in contour, so beautifully thick and cool, that

merely to look down the green aisle is reposeful to eye and brain.

A broad rustic seat, comfortably low, set against a thick hedge of laurel, and overshadowed by a walnut tree, stretches across the path at either end, and halfway down on one side is another seat cunningly set back between two of the filbert trees, and so o'er-canopied and curtained in with leafy boughs that from no point of the orchard can you be seen as you sit there.

Rabbits and blackbirds and thrushes only find you out when they come suddenly plump upon you, and as often as not do not find you out even then, but pursue their ways of pleasure or business, exquisitely innocent of being overlooked. Travelling along the line, the families of tits, reconnoitring the boughs —of all boughs, those of nut-trees are fruitful of insect life—come scrambling and in full talk into the trees above your head, and, without hesitating in their quest or abating their conversation, pass on, utterly unconscious that you have overheard them and have had them one and all within easy arm's

length. The bullfinch, shyest of birds, betrays his inmost self to you as you sit there. I have even known the highwayman jay to come and take up his wicked ambush in the very tree in front of me; and it was thoroughly satisfying to hear the chuckle of horror with which the would-be assassin flung himself out of the tree as soon as he discovered that a detective had his eye on him.

Here comes a squirrel along the path, on business bent. How strangely all its beauty of form disappears when the creature is on the ground. Like the swan it has its proper element, in which alone it looks beautiful. Running along the turf, with its front legs so ridiculously wide apart, it looks like some sort of bushy-tailed rat; its skipping is scarcely graceful; and when it goes sniffing round the roots of the trees—for insects, be it noted, as well as nuts—it is a very commonplace little beast. But attract its attention, arouse its suspicion by a low whistle, and how suddenly it becomes beautiful! It sits erect, its tail is flung up interrogatively along its back, its ears are cocked, its little fore-paws,

in the most delightful attitude of surprised attention, are held up, the tips of the "fingers" just touching each other across the snowy whiteness of its breast. Was ever anything more bewitching than its expression of annoyance? And not because it can see you, but because it cannot. It chirrups with irritation, and the tail flicks out a question at every chirrup. It looks all round to discover whence your whistle came, drops on all fours, runs a foot and sits up again, runs another foot and again sits up, chirruping "in anger insignificantly fierce," and flicking its tail every time it sits up, till on a sudden it catches sight of your foot.

Run away? Not a bit of it. It proceeds to scold you; draws itself up to its full height, and holding up its short fore-paws before it looks like a miniature kangaroo. And then, taking alarm all at once from your uncanny silence rather than from your presence, it leaps into the nut-tree opposite, springs from bough to bough, and, fairly facing you, tells you at the top of its voice, what it thinks of you and your mean

habit of hiding under a tree and coming frightening squirrels by low whistlings, and it emphasises all the hardest words it uses by stamping with its feet and flirting its tail about in a delirious tirade of flourishes. It is evident you are "no gentleman." And there it will sit, giving you the same bit of its mind over and over again almost as long as you have the patience to remain and submit to its aspersions. But suddenly, in the very middle of a rude sentence, it stops short, lies down flat across the bough, and, with the funniest caution imaginable, looks down at the ground beneath.

While you have been watching the squirrel up the tree, another, its mate, has come along the turf path, and is now sitting up on its hind legs under the tree, closely watching you. The scolding of the one above and the direction of its gestures told the other where you were, and there, within a yard of your feet, it sits looking at you with its bright eyes, and asking you how you like what is being said of you. But now that there are two together they soon tire of you.

They have found out all about you, and are not going to waste any more time over you. At any rate, you seem harmless, and so they commence to romp. And such romps! You get almost dizzy watching them as they flash round and round the tree and up and down the boughs. Surely no other creature living has such agility, such amazing powers of evolution, whirligig and fandango in so confined a space. And then they are off—splash, splash, into the leaves of the next tree—and so away, all down the avenue.

There have been harsh things said of squirrels, and I am afraid it is beyond dispute that they will kill little birds. They have been seen to do so. It has also been said that they will eat birds' eggs, but of this there is not at present any recorded eye-witness, and I prefer to hold the little forester excused. And for this reason, that my friends have an aviary, a beautiful piece of wired-in shrubbery, in which squirrels and birds live and breed. Greenfinches, hedge-sparrows, canaries, and bullfinches have all hatched broods this season, which could never have

happened had the squirrels been egg-eaters. Moreover, to test the squirrels, two thrushes' nests, filled to the brim with house-sparrows' eggs, were temptingly displayed near their "drey," for their special delectation. Into one of these a squirrel, no doubt in the course of a frolic, had incontinently and promiscuously jumped, with disastrous results to many of the eggs, and evidently such disagreeable consequences to itself that the other nest was carefully avoided. At any rate, it was never disturbed. From which, I think, it is "accurately well" evident that *those* squirrels did not make omelettes—except by accident. But they are great insect-hunters, and this is why you see them creeping along the branches, making such microscopic search of the bark, and why they are so fond of wandering about over turf, peering so closely into the grass.

Here, of course, they also find grass-seed and other minute food. It is very pretty to see them eating millet, for instance, for they pick up the tiny specks of grain with both paws at once, and crack each seed separately

and drop the husks. The rapidity with which they do this is delightful to watch, for nothing can be funnier than the spectacle of half a dozen squirrels round a little patch of millet or rape, bobbing up and down at the rate of about twenty bobs a minute. You would think they would prefer to eat off the ground, and save themselves the trouble of sitting up every time, just for the sake of an infinitesimal morsel. But not a bit of it. Up they sit, up go their tails, up go their paws—crack!—and down they go, down go the tails, and down go the paws. And as each squirrel is manœuvring independently, the sight of so many little bodies bobbing up and down, like the hammers in the back of a piano, and the perpetual flourishing and whisking of tails, is ludicrous exceedingly.

Few animals are so fearless of man as the squirrel. I have had them, caught one day and left unfed the next, absolutely dispute with me the possession of a plate of nuts. I would spread these out on the swinging feeding-tray, and rattle them together with my hands. The squirrels would at once

come down to the challenge, and sitting on the tray, make such ferocious charges, grunting as they did so, at my hands, that it was impossible at first to resist the impulse to snatch one's hand away. But these charges, like all their other expressions of anger, were "make-believe," the real object being simply to snatch up a nut and make off with it. That they relied upon the extraordinary suddenness of their charge and snort to disconcert the enemy, and thus let them get off with a nut, was indisputable, for afterwards, when I used to keep my hand where it was, they never touched it, but would simply dash forward, pick up a nut, and be off with it like lightning. The nut eaten, they would at once come down for another. And what a very short time it took them to eat one! In a couple of pulls, with the big end of the nut towards them, they unhusk it, and then, turning it small end upwards, adze a little hole in the shell, just sufficient to give their front teeth a firm hold, and then, by a sudden backward jerk of the head, they wrench off, or prise up, enough of the shell

in one piece, for the kernel to come out whole through the opening. Sometimes the hole is not large enough, and they then wrench off another piece. The kernel once out, they nibble through it, rejecting the inner skin, with amazing speed.

Of traps they have absolutely no fear. I have caught the same squirrel seven times during the afternoon of one day and the morning of the next. It had once been a prisoner in the aviary, but the rats got in, and by the hole through which the rats got in the squirrel got out. As it went no further than a fir-tree that grew outside the aviary, we set a trap for it—a wine-case with the lid made heavy by a brick attached, and a figure-of-four arrangement to which a bunch of nuts was tied. Down came Squg at once, gave a tug at the nuts, and down came the lid. Our prisoner was at once let go into the aviary, and made straight for the rat-hole (of which we, of course, then knew nothing), and got out. The trap being re-set, we departed, well satisfied with our success. Soon after the bang of the descending lid

again attracted us. Again the squirrel. "Why it's Squg!" we said, recognising our old friend and very recent captive. He was again put into the aviary. But why repeat the occurrence? Five times we caught him, and as many times he escaped, but how or where we were utterly at a loss to guess. All hands examined the aviary, and declared it perfectly safe. Again, for the sixth time, we caught Squg, and this time his exit was discovered, most cleverly concealed behind a laurel stump. So we filled up the hole, and once more re-set the trap. Once again, and once too often, Squg returned, and it was worth all our trouble to watch his fury, his ungovernable fury, at finding the comedy so unexpectedly a tragedy. He had gone too far, and was a prisoner. It took two days for his ill-temper to subside—until, indeed, we caught his mate, and they busied themselves in using up the armfuls of hay and leaves, moss, wool, and tow with which they were provided in building preposterous nests at every possible point of the aviary.

It was not hunger that impelled him thus repeatedly to imperil his freedom, for, besides baiting the trap, we always put one or two nuts outside. These he would pick up, and, scampering across the turf to any shrubbery border, would at once bury. The disregard of getting caught was therefore under no compulsion of hunger. And this reminds me of another trap incident quite as curious, where I caught, as I thought, eighteen "great tits" during a spell of very severe weather last winter. They went into a little decoy trap, after the fat which I had put in, as fast as I could set it. All the birds were released in the aviary at once, but none could be seen in it, and at last, after an afternoon's excitement, the repeated capture of Squg was recalled to mind, and we now found that the tits, or tit, as soon as they were, or it was, let go in the aviary, got through the three-quarter inch mesh of the netting and returned to the trap for one more peck at the life-saving fat. Poor little birds! All the rest of that hard spell there were lumps of fat hung on the yew-tree and tied on to rose-

stakes for them, without any afterthought of capture.

And here comes another visitor in seasonable red fur—a dormouse. Never was such a philosopher as he. If he sees you wish to catch him, he will do his best to run away. But if you catch him, he immediately assents to the capture and will nestle resignedly in the palm of your hand, and when you go to feed him he will nibble out from between your fingers the grain of wheat which you hold between them. Nothing comes amiss to him, not even bad weather, for when he thinks the time propitious for slumber he calmly retires into his dormitory, and curling his tail over his nose, between his ears and down his back, falls tranquilly asleep. To find him at this time is always a pleasure to me. I like to take him out of the middle of his cosy ball and let him wake up in my hand. He wakes so delicately. Sleep goes and consciousness returns with such subtlety! The large black eyes open, the tiny pink fingers unclose, a ripple of life seems to pass

along the soft fur, and lo! the dormouse is awake. A morsel of nut held out on a pin arouses its appetite, and it begins to nibble. But it is very drowsy, and before the morsel is finished the wee thing's vitality gradually fades away, and once more, in the hollow of your hand lies a round lifeless ball of fluff.

When kept as pets, having only a little cage to move in, they seem to be mice, and nothing more. As a matter of fact, it is quite a question whether the dormouse is not as much squirrel as mouse. It climbs with the greatest ease; is a gymnast, hanging head downwards to eat what it cannot reach any other way; as a rule it sits upright, using its forepaws like hands; has a bushy tail; goes to sleep at intervals during winter. In all these points it is more like a squirrel than a mouse, while its teeth and the manner of growth of its hair differ from those of other mice. But we call it a mouse, and it really does not matter very seriously, either to it or to us, what we call it. Some people think it is a night-thing; but this is not the case. It is

"crepuscular," perhaps—a creature of the twilight; but it is also a creature of the noonday. Not that it ever goes out wilfully into the sun. I have never seen it do so myself. But here, before noon, in the beautiful sea-water twilight of the nut-trees, the loveliest soft shade of green imaginable, the large-eyed dormouse is perfectly happy.

Watch it on the boughs. With what wondering eyes it seems to look about it, and then, on a sudden, as if familiar with every twig, it swings itself along, now above the branch, now below it, its tail, like Blondin's balance-pole, jerking this way and that. With what a dainty agility it leaps from a bough! With what expert precision it keeps its hold on the next! Many of its gestures are curiously like the squirrel's. It lies along a twig and peers over it at something on the ground. It is only a robin. Satisfied, it sits up again and washes its face, passes its tail carefully through its paws, scratches itself here and there. Evidently it has all its day before it, and is certain of its dinner by-and-by. So, perfectly careless, perfectly happy, it

loiters along from the tree in front of you to the next one, and is gone out of sight.

Its nest—for it has one all the year round—is in the very middle of that great clump of Pampas grass, a lovely ball of the shredded fibres which that beautiful plant throws off from its leaves—so elastic that you can squeeze it up in the hand and it opens out again. There is no hole in it, for the dormouse gets in anywhere, and the wall closes on it as it passes. No leaf or grass blade is needed to protect the tiny inmate from harsh winds, for the Pampas grass itself is sufficient shield from any storm. So all that the dormouse has to think about is to make its nest cosy ; and cosy it is, with its inch-thick wall of silken threads. Down below, stuffed in between the stems of the grass, were three grains of maize, carried off from where the pheasants are fed ; but whether stored up for winter or not, I cannot say. I know that, in captivity, the dormouse, when winter comes, shows no desire to hoard up food, which I think it would do if the instinct were natural.

Tap! tap! Something in the tree overhead. Tap! tap! What is it? Only a "great tit" tapping at the nut it has crammed into a crevice of the rustic seat. But if you will listen you will hear another wood-tapper. That is the nut-hatch. His is a far more businesslike tap. The tit is an amateur, the other a professional: the former taps irregularly and hurriedly, the latter with more measured strokes, as if each were intended to tell, and the bird did not mean to waste its strength in unnecessary effort. The nuts are almost too young for it yet. When they are soft its beak pierces without cracking the shell. Besides, the nut-hatch cannot pick nuts off the trees. It has to find them fallen, and even then the long husks of the filbert vex and baffle it. It doesn't (like the squirrel) understand how to rip off the green covering, or, like the dormouse, how to nibble through it. But when it finds a nut that has slid out of its husk the nut-hatch knows exactly what to do with it. As a rule, it flies with it, holding the nut in its beak, to a tree or wall, in which it knows of, or may

find, a convenient crevice. Fixing the nut in this, it sets to work by repeated blows, delivered with the greatest accuracy on the same spot, to split it. I have picked up the two shells and found that the nut-hatch had left no marks of misses on the nut. Every stroke had fallen on exactly the same pin-point of space. But it does not always put the nut in a crack, for I have seen it stand with both feet on the nut—as the marsh-tit will do with maize—and peck it on "the seam." Picking up the shell afterwards, I found the bird had not made at all a neat job of it, the foothold probably being insecure and the nut shifting its place, thus putting the little hammerer off its stroke.

In front of me as I write I have a tray full of shells that have been rifled by the nut-crackers of the avenue. Those with the large irregular rent, and some with the whole side ripped off with jagged edges, are the squirrel's work; these with the nice round holes, always near the big end of the shell, have been plundered by the tits. But it is

curious to note how often the same shell has another hole, much smaller and perfectly oval, on the other side, and nearer the small end. Why was this? Did the tit get all it could reach out through the big hole at the big end, and the mouse take the trouble to nibble a little hole in the very hardest part of the nut-shell to get at the rest of the nut?

I wonder the mice, especially the dormice, have not given up eating nuts long ago. The labour they expend is enormous. But they do not care for trouble apparently. Note these walnuts. Each has two little round holes, one on each shell, nearest the sharp point end of the nut, and it is easy to see what happened. The mouse nibbled one hole, ate what it could reach—very little indeed—and then found that, for some reason or another, the walnut was fastened inside to the shell. So then it tried the other side with exactly the same result, and then it left the nut in disgust. But this did not prevent it attacking the next walnut in precisely the same way, with precisely the same barren results; and the next, and the next, and the

next. The partitions inside the nut prevented the mouse getting at the kernel, but it did not desist from trying. On the other hand, absolutely useless work is never, so far as I know, done by the mice. I never found an empty nut or a bad one that they had attempted. The squirrel, on the other hand, does not care how "high" his nuts are. But when we think that the squirrel relishes young fir-cones, with turpentine oozing out at every pore, we can appreciate the digestion with which Nature has blessed the merry little forester.

How is it that October came to be called "the month of nuts"—that its symbol was a nutting crook, and its totem a squirrel? Nuts, taking one year with another, are at their best in the last week of August and the first three of September; are then at their nuttiest —pleasant to the teeth, and milky. Early in September the edges of the green husks begin to take autumn tints, and the shells to mellow into warm shades of colour, and by the end of the month they are "nut brown." The

juice has gone out of the husks, which are now dry and crackle, and the nuts sit so lightly within that the squirrel, moving, shakes them out on to the ground, and even the velvet touch of the dormouse's tiny paws makes them slide from their covering. Great, then, the joy of the field-mouse, the burly little farmer-mouse, who finds them on the ground, ready to his hand, as it were, so that he may trundle them down into his hole at the root of the hazel, or carry them off to the bank where he has his winter home. Not that he cannot climb where he has a mind to, for often, when you are birds'-nesting, you may see the pretty little beast—sad that he should be so destructive!—slipping along the hedge, just as the hedge-sparrow does, or, when you are in the garden, running up and down the ladders of the espaliers, or scaling the wall-fruit trees. A nimble little person, but preferring, all the same, his ways along the ground, and his nuts and berries shaken down for him by squirrel and blackbird, rather than have the trouble to go up and fetch them for himself. And it is thus that in

October he finds them, with the shells glossy brown, and the kernels hard and just in proper condition for storage.

But nuts are not at their best when they are ripe. They have lost nearly all their true nut flavour of earlier weeks, and are granular between the teeth. They need wine to moisten them. Not so in the last week of August and the first week of September. The filbert and the cobnut and the hazel are all alike in their prime, and on tables in country houses where they are wise in nuts, they hold a place of honour. By-and-by they are relegated to the lower levels of esteem. The walnut, then juicy, supersedes them, and the first invasion of foreign nuts displaces them. By Christmas the home-grown nuts have gone from the dessert altogether. The children can have what are left in the apple-room for the asking.

But do you know the secret of keeping fresh filberts always with you, and having them almost equally good all the year round? The plan is simple enough. Pick your nuts before October over-ripens them and while

they are still clinging in their husks, put them into tin biscuit-boxes, husks and all, and bury your boxes a foot underground. As you want them, dig them up, and you will find your nuts as sweet and juicy and nutty next September as they were when you packed them the September before. By this means you may exorcise the demons of shrivelled Barcelona and of musty Brazil; and when walnuts, mouldering, fail you, you shall always have new nuts with your old wine.

DAYS IN THE FALL

FOR at least one week in the year—the week in which it sheds its fruit—I know nothing in our English world of nature to exceed in beauty and interest the beech-tree. One year in particular I have in my mind, when in mid-October there was a break of incomparable weather, of mellowed sunshine, and I found myself where beeches grow, and, loitering beneath them, took note at my leisure of the visitors in fur and feather that were so happily busy among the glittering leaves, gathering or garnering the lavish harvest of the fruitage of the trees.

I remember how, when I was a boy at Marlborough, I used to sit hidden among the

ferns in Savernake Forest, and watch the wood-pigeons feeding upon the beech-mast. The silent earthward flight of these beautiful birds is very different from the noisy wing-clapping of their uprising, and they used to come sliding down through the air without any sound of feathers, and appear quite spectrally in their places. They would begin to feed at once—for the nuts of the beech are a very favourite dainty with the culvers, as indeed with all the woodland folk—and, picking up a "nut," would give it a tap on the ground to split it, and swallow the rich kernel whole. After a few days of this feeding, they grew so full-fed and so lazy that if I stood up they did not fly, but waddled away, like gouty partridges, into the covert of the yellow bracken, with a wide-legged gait that was vastly funny. Sometimes, by sudden rushes, I came near catching them with my hands, as they blundered about among the ferns, embarrassed by the close-growing stems and the over-lapping fronds.

And here to-day I have been sitting just in the same way among bracken watching wood-

pigeons feeding under beeches. They might be the very same birds, for every gesture is the same, but I myself am not the same somehow. The wood-pigeons know I am here. Perhaps they smell my pipe, and it may be they see the smoke; and as for making such sudden rushes as shall surprise the wary creatures before they can leave the ground, even though heavy with bursting crops, that agility is no longer mine. So the birds have their will of the beech-mast undisturbed. With what a pretty daintiness they go about their quest, and how exquisite the contrast of their plumage against the fierce burnished copper of the fallen leaves upon which they step with such a delicate deliberation! Tired of eating, they sit down and stretch out their wings to their utmost width, and fan out their tails, so as to let the sunlight strain through every fibre of every feather. Perfectly happy. And not the culvers alone.

As I look, a little movement here, another there, draws my eye first in one direction and then in another, until I discover that under-

neath the beautiful carpet of red leaves numbers of field-mice are busy. They are hardly noticeable in their russet coats as they come up to the surface now and again, sit on the leaves to lunch and wash their faces, or dash about in short zigzags, as if they were clockwork mice and the clockwork had gone wrong.

And there is something else at work under the leaves, far more stealthy and infinitely more potent.

This is the common earthworm, the most terrific living agent that Nature employs, the gravedigger of cities and the fashioner of the face of the earth. If the rock-roots of mountains did not strike deeper into the ground than the worms go they would bury the mountains. If it were not for earthquakes and volcanoes the worms would have levelled the surface of the world. They are busy now in every inch of ground beneath this wonderful sheet of fallen foliage, sucking down the leaves by their pointed ends into their tunnels. In a few days all the leaves will be gone, drawn in by the worms, and bunched together,

the stalk ends uppermost, in their tiny burrows. No one knows why they do this. Is it simply their awful lust after levelling? If they can help it, these terrible blind-working instruments of Nature, there shall be nothing left above ground in the whole round world, and the globe shall be universally slab and smooth, so that earthworms may go everywhere at their ease upon the face of it.

Watch the leaves come floating down; the air is never for a single instant empty; and there is a wondrous whispering as they slip through the twigs and settle upon the ground. Just as unceasing is the constant patter of the dropping mast; and, if you shut your eyes and listen, you will hear the rain mimicked as you never heard it before; for, besides the steady pattering of the drops near you, you can hear—it is really only the multitudinous whispering of the leaves—that other and larger voice of the rain when it falls, not upon your own roof and dripping from your own eaves, but upon the wide world "out-of-doors." The simulation is beyond belief, and you can only believe it to be simulation by

opening your eyes upon the sunshine and the clear sky.

Look up into the tree's leafy dome. When did you ever see so many birds of so many kinds together? At first you may not notice them. The falling leaves distract your eye with their motion, and the pattering of the nuts suffices to conceal all other sounds. But you catch sight of one bird, and then of half a dozen, and then a score, until the truth dawns upon you that the tree is full of them, restlessly moving from twig to twig, excited by the constant shower and the distraction of such plenty. Great-tits and blue-tits, marsh-tits and cole-tits are hard at work flitting from place to place with mast in their beaks; the greenfinch, and chaffinch, and bullfinch are all there, feasting beyond their hearts' content, with the nut-hatch and the hawfinch. But it requires some sudden surprise to reveal the actual numbers of the little workers, and, if you will only wait, the surprise is sure to come, and with startling unexpectedness. Probably the mischief-maker will be a squirrel. For, of course, he is here, the president of

every woodland ceremony. He is somewhere up the tree, indistinguishable among the red leaves, and his usually noisy progress quite concealed by the sounds of leaf and nut. He will come creeping down the trunk, disregarded by the birds, and some few feet from the ground he will stop, and, flattening himself against the grey bole, will stick there, head downwards, perfectly motionless, surveying the peaceful scene, and looking more like a squirrel skin stretched upon the bark to dry than a live animal. But have patience and wait, and you will see the small rascal suddenly spring off the tree, come down with a loud souse among the dead leaves, scamper as if his life depended upon his speed, and with all the noise possible, to the next tree, upon which he will jump, and, once more a flat, motionless skin, will calmly look on at the uproar he has aroused. The suddenness of his descent startles the wood-pigeons, who rise all together with loud-clapping wings, and the tumult of their uprising frightens every bird in the trees. And now you can see how many there were.

They will be back in their places soon. Not that you will see them come, for they will slip in by one and one ; but they will be there all the same, and just as busy as before at their interrupted feast.

This is the latest nut-feast in the year's calendar of bird-banquets. The hawthorn-berries have still to be eaten, and the rose-berries ; but these hips and haws are the real winter provisions, only eaten when there is nothing else. They cannot be much relished by the birds, or they would not leave them untouched on the bushes till they were starving. I have often wondered at this, and the foresight of Nature in making these large crops comparatively unappetising, and so securing their reservation for the pinching days of greatest want. The birds themselves are improvident. They will allow yew-berries to waste in myriads, while they prematurely feast on the holly. In early November the holly has not yet deepened into its real Christmas red, but the birds have been feasting on them for weeks. The yew-

berries, meanwhile, are dropping over-ripe off the trees in countless numbers and going to waste. If the hips and haws, which so tempt the village urchins, were equally tempting to the birds, there would be no store of berries left for winter.

How greedily each of the other wild vintages of hedge and copse is eaten up even before it fairly ripens!

First the mountain ash, so profuse in fruitage and, where it abounds, the chief of the trees of the wild things' orchards. Its berries, before they turn scarlet, take a beautiful shade of bronze, and in this stage the missel-thrush, blackbird and thrush devour them eagerly; and then comes the honeysuckle, a favourite dainty of every fruit-eating finch. Next the bilberries, a local crop, and then the yew's delicious fruit, and the prolific elder. What prettier sight is there than the birds on an October morning among the yew-berries? The thrush assumes the habits of the honey-sucker and the humming-bird, hovering on fast-beating wings in front of the berry before it darts at it; and the black-

bird mimics the oriole's beautiful gymnastics in its attempts to reach the lovely fruits strung upon stems that are too slender for any foothold but the tiny golden-crested wren's.

Next the hawthorns redden; their bronzed foliage falls, leaving their berried branches conspicuously bright, but the birds pass them by. Beneath them in vivid tints of orange the rose-hips glow upon the long leafless briars, but except the hawfinch picking and choosing as it goes fastidiously along the spinney-side, none touches them. The blackberries are now full ripe; oh! joy for all the birds, and how busy they are! The children with their faces all streaked and smudged with purple juice may plunder as they please; but there is enough and to spare, for the birds get all those that are "on the top" and "the other side." The sloes are purpling, but these the birds leave till they wrinkle, and the frost has mellowed them for the red-wings and the fieldfares. And next the holly, a capricious harvest, but usually bountiful. The birds will scarcely let them ripen, so fond are they of this acrid fruit. Last of all,

the privet and the ivy. The privet is liked by all, but the ivy, "harsh and crude," is left by the birds to the very last, and in some years is not touched at all, its black bunches still hanging on the strands after the young leaves are sprouting. What instinct teaches the birds to avoid the delicious-looking night-shade? No berry looks more exquisitely fit for food, more lusciously tempting, yet hungry as they may be the birds do not eat it. Nor the pretty fruit of the briony. Yet I have given both to a chicken, and the fowl lived to the full span of fowl-life; a healthy hen and the ancestress of many chickens.

In the procession of their departure the foliage of the different trees follows punctiliously the order of precedence of their arrival, and the last to strike in Spring the note of green that completes the vernal chord, is the last in Autumn to crown the diapason of scarlet and gold when the trees unite to celebrate their *Nunc dimittis* in canticles of colour.

When everything round it was shady with young leaves, the dainty acacia held up bare boughs, a most delicate tracery of grey twigs, adorned with bunches of frail fairy flowers, as finely veined "as the lids of Juno's eyes" and faintly sweet as "Cytheræa's breath," but with scarcely any trace of green. And now, in November, that all round it the trees are leafless, except the oak, sturdily tenacious of its squirrel-tinted foliage, the acacia waves green fronds, faintly tinged with primrose.

Earliest the horse-chestnut. One by one it lets drop its beautiful palmed leaves, a bright canary yellow, covering up the nuts that still lie glittering on the path. The mountain-ash precipitately sheds its foliage: though it is only straw-coloured yet, the tree strips itself as if it were in a hurry to get rid of its summer bravery. More deliberately the lime-tree follows, letting its leaves deepen into brilliant chrome before it parts with them, but once the leaves begin to fall the branches are soon bared, and except the horse-chestnut, I know no tree that spreads so

pretty a carpet as the lime. Its leaves, weighted perhaps by the long stalks they take with them, seem to fall compactly all together, round about the tree, showing more continuous gold than other trees, and of a deeper warmth of tone. Meanwhile the walnut has been taking strange tints of brown and bronze, and the wind finds the heavy leaves easy victims, and sends them whirling down with the pattering sound of heavy rain, to reveal on the topmost boughs the black-shelled nuts that have escaped the October pelting of the nut-gatherers and the inquisition of rook and squirrel. All the other trees are "falling into the sear." Unobserved the willow has let slip its narrow leaves, the beech is orange, and the elm is lemon-yellow. The Spanish chestnut is very sudden in its change of colour, but reluctant to disrobe itself of its splendid apparel, and many glossy leaves, in every lovely shade of brown and copper, hang on the tree till after the elm boughs are empty, and even the oak begins to resign its pomp. The larch in its October tint of old

gold is singularly beautiful, and even in November may be seen with every twig fully plumed of a wonderfully uniform soft dead yellow, looking in the sunset like a golden haze among the leafless trees. The birches, curiously capricious, are some of them quite green, others bare, and so too the sycamores, their foliage leoparded with black spots.

As a rule, the trees of all kinds that have fruited lose their leaves first, and of the trees that are growing in a copse, those on the side facing the west retain their foliage longest. Young trees are later in shedding their leaves than their elders; and some of them, the beech especially, retain on young bushes and on the lowest boughs of grown trees their chestnut foliage to the following Spring.

The plane does not wait to turn yellow but drops its leaves half green, as too does the ash, under which at the first touch of frost is found one morning all its foliage in a heap, as vivid as in the heyday of August. The poplar, except for its topmost twigs, shakes itself clear before the elm, and its stout leaves take as a rule a very beautiful shade of

clear yellow. And then the elm, scattering from its heights showers of golden leaflets, proclaims the end of the Fall, and long after the gardeners have carried away into uttermost corners the painted spoils of lime, and walnut, and plane, goes on sprinkling the turf with scraps of colour. Last of all the oak, sullenly retentive of its foliage, yields to the storms its crisp, dried leaves, so brown and dry that you wonder how they clung so long to the branch. But the oak is the oak, and unless the cold actually rots its leaves off or the wind tears them off, it will carry its Autumn into the Spring, and only confesses to the necessity of surrender when it feels the new buds breaking and knows that surrender is only an exchange.

In the hedgerows the brightest patches of colour are the hazel and the spindle-tree. The hawthorn takes various tints, very beautiful indeed, and the guelder-rose bronzes into a deep golden brown. The wild rose is still green when everything else is sere, and the brambles, refusing to fall, are painted like the underwings of butterflies.

Some fruit-trees are singularly beautiful in the Fall. The pear-tree, for instance, spreads round it a matchless carpet so intricately coloured and so harmonious that the finest Cashmere web is coarse and crude by comparison. The cherry is sometimes wonderful in the combination of vivid scarlet and clearest yellow, and what scent can be more exquisite than the perfume of dying cherry leaves? Sunning itself one day in the orchard I saw a tortoiseshell cat asleep, its bed a drift of cherry leaves, and the cat was almost invisible, so happily did it blend with the foliage. A pheasant is almost lost to sight as soon as it steps upon fallen beech-leaves.

We speak always of the fall of the leaf as melancholy, and, no doubt, it is a generation passing away; and man himself is "but grass." But if we remembered that the leaves of trees fall off only because the buds of next year have pushed them off, much of the melancholy disappears from the process. It is the new leaves coming that makes the old leaves fall, and the yellows and reds of

Autumn are the first sure signs and promises of a leafy Spring. The foliage of the year has done its work. It has seen blossom and berry come and go, "and all's well." The time has come for relieving guard. For the swallows have gone south and the redwing is afield; and the old leaves wait till they feel the thrill all through them to the tips of the tiniest twigs of the coming of the reliefs, and then they know that they may go, and down their line the signal runs, "dismiss," and then at their leisure, with all the blazonry of autumnal honours and the brilliant circumstance and consequence of soldiers retiring with the honours of war, they leave their posts.

How beautifully tranquil is the change sometimes from the "wine-month" to the "wind-month." October becomes November, and the trees do not know it, nor the birds. There is just one touch of frost, hardening the black cases of the walnuts and killing the dahlias in a night. But, thereafter, comes mellow sunshine and rain without stint, and in the hedgerows in November you may find the flowers of July in bloom.

How sharp the line is that the frost draws, how military its discipline! "Lights out!" October had swept the trees with her golden fingers, but the dahlias were still in bloom, and to them came the red-admiral and the bumble-bee. On a sudden, a night of frost, and where are the gay dahlias? Where the marigold and the phloxes, and the snap-dragons? Where the bee and the butterfly? Nor afterwards was it ever the same. The sun shone and the warm rain fell, but the dahlias were gone and the insects with them. And so October wore away and November came, with mild soft moons and cloudy skies and floods. "An untoward season," said a farmer. No doubt for farmers, but not for all the rest of the world. With November more than half spent, the days were so warm that the squirrel and the hedgehog and the mice had not thought of going to sleep, and it was a pleasure to sit on the garden-seat and bask in the sunshine. With leafless trees all about, it was warm enough for lunch in the open air.

"There's nothing left in the garden," they said when November came. And the gardener goes by with his wheelbarrow loaded up with pansies and phlox, to add to the great heap which he is making in some waste corner, for burning by-and-by. They look too pretty to be wheeled away so unceremoniously, with weeds and dead stuff, for they are still in straggling bloom, but the gardener wants to see his beds tidy, and so the phloxes—pink and crimson, rose and purple, or freaked with colours like their companions in woe, the pansies—have to go. Their room is needed for bulbs of hyacinth and anemones, and jonquils, for daffodils and crocus, squills and snowdrops. But they go away and lie on the heap, still flowering, and the pansies wear the same merry little faces that they held up to the sun in June, the same heart's-ease—"frolick virgins once these were." And gardeners are inexorable. For them the month is the month that it is, let its weather be what it may.

That is why the marigolds and gaillardias are lying in sheaves upon the path: why

each bed upon the turf has by its side its little heap of uprooted flowers; why the asters and calceolarias are gone from their places, and the balsams and the pink and scarlet begonias; why the flowers that are allowed to remain have been trimmed round and tied up into neat consequential patches and clumps, no longer able to reach over and exchange flowers with each other, but standing clearly apart with smooth open spaces of brown mould round them. They, too, when their seed has ripened, or the last flowers die, will be cut down, and the large beds and the little beds will all be alike, smooth brown mould and nothing more upon the surface, but underneath it full of patient roots and bulbs, waiting in confidence for the coming of another year.

This is in the garden near the house, the parterres on which the gardener expends the best of his cunning, and for the glory of which he brings out from glass-houses and under frames and all manner of odd corners, after the manner of gardeners and conjurers, pots and boxes full of seedlings. It is for these beds

he kept his double zinnias of queerest terra-cotta, his long-spurred columbines of orange and yellow with snow-white frills, his choicest gentians, verbenas, campanulas, and violas. For these beds lie along the terrace walk and overlook the lawn, and are the cynosure of all eyes.

Strangers always call it "the garden," as if there were no other. But there is. An October garden. Twice in the year it is trimmed: clumps grown too large are broken up; those grown too thin are reinforced. The pansy edging is replenished with cuttings, the rampant musk raked out, and the invading shrubbery cut well back. And then the garden is left to itself. For all the flowers in it are perennial. Some years ago there were only lawn and shrubbery, but the laurels and rhododendrons were transplanted, and cut back to make room for a broad flower-border, and the result is this October splendour. Opposite the perennial border grow some trees, and their almost day-long shade makes this border later in flowering than the sunnier beds. Yet it, too,

has had its earlier glory. To wit, when the sweet-williams and snapdragons made solid masses of colour, and columbine and potentilla and geum filled up the intervals: when the pansies, all down the line, made a riband of gorgeous hues, and behind, the monkshoods in wondrous shades of blue held up great spikes of flower. Every few feet, a cluster of Canterbury-bells struck a strong note of colour, and poppies of strangest kinds, like chrysanthemums, or yellow and buff and orange, were everywhere, thrusting up beautiful heads through the green around them. Later, the tiger-lilies came out to relieve the monkshood, and where the spiræas had sent up their feathers, pink and white, to meet the clematis, the clematis now trailed strands of large purple stars down to the spiræas.

But taken all the year round, it can surely never seem more lovely than in October. The border is filled with foliage of many shades and curiously contrasting patterns, and upon this foundation is traced out a magnificent scheme of colour. Behind, against the deep green of the laurels, rhododendrons

and box, are sunflowers, six feet high, lit up each of them with a score of blooms, and hollyhocks, taller still, are rosetted with deep claret flowers and mulberry and strange old pink. Between them, bushes of cactus dahlias literally ablaze with scarlet. In front are standard roses, only crimson and damask, and now in October bright with their second bloom. Hiding their barren stems, compact and solid, an exquisite combination of green and purples, are perennial asters—a single spike of them with its hundreds of little stars makes a noble decoration in a room—and humbler, if more vivid companies of tritomia. Here and again are old clumps of phlox, of fervent carmine or white starred with pink, and, to my mind, of a singular beauty, the rudbeckias in brilliant clusters of chrome-yellow.

Three times in the long border, Japanese anemones, mixed white and terra-cotta, mark noble periods in the great curve of colour; and at corresponding intervals, as you walk round, your eye catches the beautiful response, set further forward, of clumps of chrysan-

themum, lemon-yellow and Indian red—tiny flowers, no doubt, "for chrysanthemums," but sweetly pretty in their profusion and artless growth. Is that enough? Well, then, for more. There are the snapdragons in every shade of snapdragon colour and geums now making second displays of flower, and pentstemons; and salvias, shaded in butterfly-blue, and Iceland poppies, and the round lavender balls—like the spiked horrors which genial Crusaders wore at the end of chains, for the thumping of Saracens and similar heathen—which the Blessed Thistle bears. Can you see this October garden at all?

And remember there is musk running riot amongst everything, and the pansies and violas, now in full October bloom. The gardener does not wheel them away in his barrow from here. They may flower if they please—and they will—till the frost comes, and until the hungry hares come limping up from the spinney behind the orchard to nibble down all they can find that is green. The gardener will not trouble to trim them. They belong only to the perennial garden,

and he calls them cottagers' stuff. The glass-houses and the frames secrete no surprises for the October garden; but it would, I think, break the good gardener's heart if he only overheard what is often said, that "the old border is worth all the rest of the garden put together." Of course it is not, but in October one forgets June, and while all the other beds are getting ready for winter, this one alone is in full autumnal flower.

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