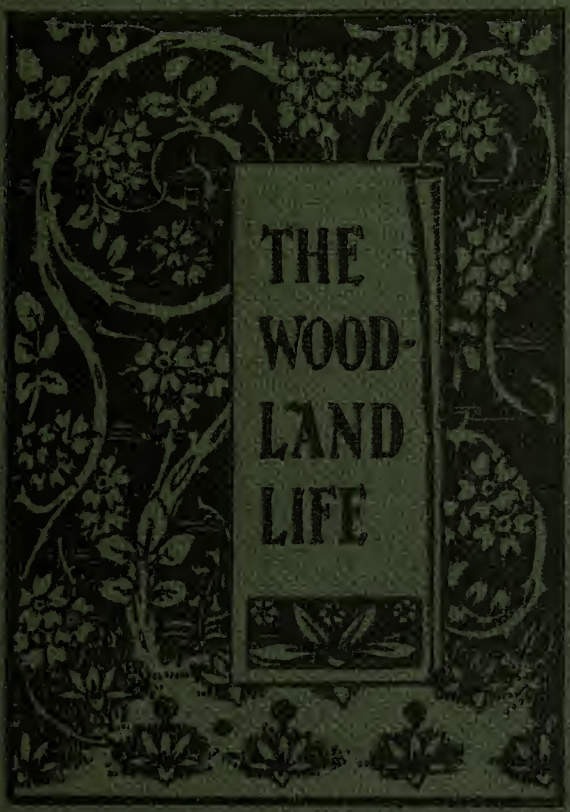

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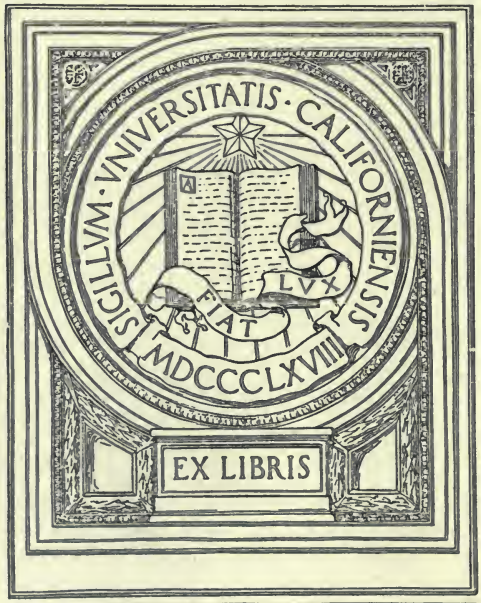

THE

WOODLAND LIFE

A HAUNT OF PEACE.

THE WOODLAND LIFE

BY

EDWARD THOMAS

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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CONTENTS.

THE SWEET O' THE YEAR

The Sweet o' the Year.

DARK furrowed boughs of elm-trees in line dip like a bank of galley oars towards the meadow, where the slight end-most twigs mingle their young foliage with a thicket of varied grasses and blossoming plants. A myriad stars of stitchwort and purple spires of orchis join hands, as it were, over the elm-branches swathed deep in the lush growths of spring. Shadowing the spangled blossoms rise the lofty columnar boles of the elm-trees, with the black nest of a crow swinging on the topmost boughs—the nest already

The Sweet of the Year

tattered by the farmer's vindictive shot. There, in the middle days of March, sang the early chiffchaff, first visitor to these Wiltshire meadows from the warm southern lands of ever brilliant noon. When the silent avenue was startled by his soft singing cry, the budding thorns still lingered ere they burst, and the violets had not long opened. With a fluttering flight he followed the long line of elms among their topmost boughs, crying as he flew. It seemed as though he had no care—no task but to sing, sing in the sunlight; and though his song, the two syllables repeated half-a-dozen times in leisurely succession, was sometimes broken off short from some unapparent cause, that voice on which the ear dwelt intently was hardly ever hushed through the long March day. Moving among the boughs of the broad oaks, he varied his song with a gentle inward chirruping. His frail form, of finely

chiselled grace, moved everywhere along the lane, and, the bird being far from shy, his sprightly motions might be watched as he searched the crevices between the buds; and you might note the pleasing hues of his plumage—apparently brown on the back, but with a tinge of olive, for which a match must be sought among the chestnut-leaves of autumn, and pale on the breast. This chiffchaff in the lane was solitary, but, farther on, each double hedge and wayside coppice gave shelter to at least one of them.

On the morrow, a day of brilliant heat, the chiffchaffs flooded the lane with their showers of song, now lost in rivalry with the shrill louder wren, but, from its persistence, always at last triumphant. The sun in its waxing strength seemed to extract a fragrance from the earth, and there was a peculiar richness in the atmosphere. Heat, too, had brought into the light a crowd of new-born insects, a brilliant

The Sweet o' the Year.

host that filled the grass, creeping up and around the blades and sunning themselves on the warm bank. Small flies and beetles, in shining mail of emerald and sable, and with silken folded wings, met the eye at every turn. To one listening silent a while in the coppice, an undertone of the insect-song of summer grew upon the ear: it was the hum of innumerable gauzy wings fanning the light air, through the less insistent music of the gnats weaving an airy dance overhead, and came from the willows by the brook. An almost countless band of bees hovered around the "palms," turned golden in a single bright morning, with a burring of their lightly-beating wings. Some buried their amber-barred bodies in the gold dust, and the soft winds playing among the boughs did not dislodge them—they swung with the branches; others paused but a moment on their quivering fans. With them richly-marked flies mingled,

but rarely visited the catkins; like the creatures of sunlight that they are, they merely crawled along the warm boughs in the faint almond-like odour they seem to love. When they did approach the "palms," it was but to flutter round, careless and fickle, amid this wealth of microscopic grain. Bees with curving bodies were so intent upon the gold that three or four of them clung to the same catkin, hiding the golden treasure which they fast cleared, and then took their way heavily laden for their distant nests. All the willow-boughs curved up towards the tip and made a graceful line from the trunk to their finest twigs. The catkins were mostly at the end, and particularly those full-blown of brightest yellow.

Days of grateful warmth follow, and the nine-angled coltsfoot leaves shoot up beside their drooping blossoms. Already the chiffchaff's song has lost its singularity, and goes to swell the spring

The Sweet o' the Year.

chorus, now almost "grown full quire." Another voice has in a day been added, one easily passed by and of small note. The black-headed bunting, as he keeps just ahead along the hedgerow, sings from the topmost sprays, where his black top-knot gives him some distinction, the simplest and weakest of all songs—a few plaintive notes jerkily ejaculated at intervals, and less melodious even than the yellow-ammer's. Hardly less simple is the handsome great tit's "'tis sweet, 'tis sweet," as he flits among the bare grey ash-poles. High up in the boundless ether larks sing and in their joy leap in the very air. Descending and singing the while, they pause a yard above the grass and the song dies with a sweet gentle "hear it—hear it—hear it." These same syllables, tenderest of all, form also the culminating notes in the lark's finest ecstasy aloft. Yonder across the brook the hillside gorse flames in the sun with

innumerable golden tongues that flicker in the least wind's breath.

On the green mound lies a dead oak-leaf, sober brown and nothing more to the first glance. Through the winter it has lain there, while some of its fellows yet cling wizened and wan about the saplings. Its scalloped edge has kept intact in spite of wind and rain and frost. With the process of the months it has darkened and curled, till now it is a semi-cylinder of the hue of old leather; but underneath the plain brown surface shows a beautiful variety of shades —amber streaks, strange mottlings of chestnut, red and tawny, and, breaking through all, a bloom of faint gold. Each different tinge glows richly as the sun-beams light up the glossy curving surface. It is a last remnant of winter and of the bygone year, pillowed among the tender growths of early spring—sere brown set in the midst of youthful verdure. In the

The Sweet o' the Year.

ditch below the water has become swift and deep; and through the dense flag-thicket it makes a sound as of splintering ice. Another ditch close by, broad but stagnant, is choked with weeds and frog-spawn—the latter showing black where it rises above the water. While the frogs were still spawning, and on the approach of an intruder, numbers of them hurried with all possible despatch to sheltering weeds at the bottom; as they did so, a great commotion disturbed the water, and here a leg, there a yellow-mottled back, was thrust above the surface.

A peculiar dull warmth broods in the meadows, which become as basins, engirt by tall hedgerows, within which the atmosphere is motionless and sweltering. It is this fleeting sultriness, dispersed in a moment by a rain-shower, that the chaffinch loves; and under such a sky, where the blue is often veiled by straggling clouds, dark and swollen, he sings

his song, according well with the drowsiness around. While the grasses hardly stir, and the osiers do but nod, the chaffinch is master of the field — oak, elm, and hedgerow ring to his lay. There are few leaves as yet to give sound to the downpour, and, save for a faint hissing on the placid brook, the rain falls between the grass and the bare trees in silence. In the shower the chaffinch is hushed, and a shadow rests on the dim far hills, rolling their curves away to the eastern horizon. At length the singing of the raindrops against the water ceases, as the sun once more lights up the downs and shows the last paling clouds between the trees. Overhead the peerless azure sky, veined with snowy films of vapour, is dazzling to the sight; anon dark masses roll over, and the landscape is thrown in shadow.

Sunbeams dancing through the willows light up the surface of the brook, and

The Sweet o' the Year.

penetrate to its depths. A shoal of minnows move against the stream, looking like long-drawn-out wedges, dull save when a silvery side is turned over with an answering flash from the sunlight. Their taper bodies quiver as they progress, and sometimes a fin dimples the surface or a maze of circles forms as together the minnows dart affrighted from a shadow. On the water the first "skater" insect floats at rest, his legs making him appear like a boat with outriggers; but when going forward, breaking the surface with rapidly-dissolving ripples, he suggests a sculler progressing with an occasional stroke, content thus to take the sunlight with the least exertion and to rest on his oars. Sometimes the "skater" is stranded among the flags, and the insect that is boat and oarsman all in one disappears. So swiftly that the eye cannot guess its shape or colour, a large insect blunders along and plunges sud-

denly into the brook, leaving no ripple behind and seeming not to reappear: like a stone flung in, he passes out of sight. Now almost touching the waters, and now high above the willow-boughs, the gnats sing with a finer and lighter note than the bees. Most brilliant of all the early insects, a tortoiseshell butterfly wanders over, throwing a likeness of his angled wings in the brook's mirror. He seeks the coltsfoot blossoms at the shore, and passes from flower to flower with a frolic in the sun which this morning unfurled his jewelled wings. With the nodding blossom he sways; while he moves up and down, his fans rise and lower, open and shut, as fancy pleases the gay sun-drinker. Though not a flower is neglected as yet, he will not venture among the petals put carefully to tempt him between the leaves of a book. Parted from their roots, they are no longer a lure for him, though a bee would follow

The Sweet o' the Year.

a fragrant posy right within doors. Only for a second a chiffchaff leaves his song, and tumbles playfully from an upper ash-bough, twisting with quick wings as he descends twirling like a shuttlecock to the ground.

At the rookery in the elms by yonder farmhouse twice as many pairs of rooks as there were nests laid claim to the settlement. After days of noisy strife, in which there was little done to mend the tattered nests, building has begun anew in many trees. But the heat has lulled even the noisy rooks, who cry with a sleepy languor far more gently than usual. So busy are they that the shortest ways are taken, and they sweep homewards close to the ground without waiting for one another. Sometimes a string of them follow in quick succession, their bluish plumage flashing as they strain in flight, uttering an inward sound that suggests their youngsters in mid-May.

Oaks and elms have been thrown in the lane, and the rooks come hither for the thickly lying twigs snapped off in the falling of the trees. Where the cattle seek the slender shade still left, pied wagtails of sharply contrasting black and white in dashes come to feed among the legs of the slow-grazing creatures. If there is little shadow here, there is none for the sheep far away on the downs, now vivid with noonday brilliance. Cropping steadily, at such a great distance the sheep seem quite motionless except when long watched.

Rooks and peewits feed together in the meadows, but not in contented company. One of the former continually makes a vicious rush at his gaily-plumaged neighbour, who eludes his clumsy attack with an easy flap of his rounded wings and a laughing cry as he dives and settles close by. As the peewit alights he closes his wings slowly with a conscious display of their

The Sweet o' the Year.

pied plumes. Presently the rooks leave the meadow, and the peewits are alone; but they cannot remain long still, and soon they start quarrelling among themselves. It is a beautiful sight to watch their facile turns of flight as each strives to surmount his rival. Now a couple seem as one bird, and again they part to soar and twist in opposite directions. As they race the sun gleams on their crests and greenish bars, and the peewit swings in the air with his prowess of flight. In a straight steady motion, rare indeed with a peewit, their wings are soundless, but in the whirling dashes from side to side in combat or amorous display a strange wind-like rush is made as if their joints were stiff. Under a strong sun, when it is dazzling to look up, this rushing sound betrays the bird as it passes overhead. Though less loud and decided, it strongly resembles the bleating of snipe, and can be heard at some height, though the turns

which cause it are usually made near the ground. Peewits only visit this meadow for play and food; the ploughland is their home in spring, where they nest among the furrows. As they sweep by, striking the ear with their strong swift pinions, they give a cry less like "pee-wit" than "whip-poor-will." The peewits often come close enough to be marked in detail; but the golden plover, haunting for a while the same land, rarely approach within gunshot, and, should they do so, their course is altered with a swish and a glimmer as the sun lights up a hundred pale breasts at once. With a carefully marshalled advance the plover rise, unseen almost, as their dark backs are uppermost, and climb swiftly to a dim height among the clouds. Their whistling, shrill and penetrating, and also somewhat like "whip-poor-will," reaches the ear from an immense distance when the birds themselves are scarcely in sight. As they

The Sweet o' the Year.

drift overhead, their wedge formation is clear against the sky; even when they are split up, by wind or varying strength in the long swift rush with which they leave the earth, the wedge is kept, and sometimes three such shapes appear in line. When the plover swerve or turn high in air, their ranks alter to a bow-like curve, gradually returning to the former shape as they settle to their course. Once, in a fierce wind, the plover were seen to rise in a long dark line, like an ascending rocket, above the hills, and when scarcely visible broke up and stooped low down, still further suggesting the rocket's scattering sparks. An hour goes by, as in powerful flight they range high and low, fading among clouds, and anon appearing themselves as a fine summer cloud over the ridge of downs.

Broad periwinkle blossoms, of a rich though not brilliant purple, press close against the grey stone wall of the keeper's

cottage, and are half-hidden by the rounded glossy leaves that cling about the crevices. The narrow hillside path, dipping here to a fir coombe that shelters the cottage, winds near to the old wall, fringed with plumes of tall young grass growing in bunches. At the base, where crumbling lichened stones hide food for the early thrushes, pale flowers of wood-sorrel swing beneath their canopies of graceful leaves, which droop in threes against the stock supporting them, and suggest a beech-nut by their combined shape. As yet wind and rain have left the tangled grasses of last summer still standing, and the fresh shoots creeping slowly among them scarcely catch the eye; but one solitary stalk, shaped like a long streamer, flutters above the rest, and as it waves strikes its stiff withered neighbours. Like the snow-incrusted boughs of winter, the pear-tree branches of the orchard seem

The Sweet o' the Year.

almost to bow beneath the weight and wealth of hoary blossom, sunlit and flashing from the dew beads that rim the faint petals. In the wind, warm and caressing from the bright sun, the crisp blossomed boughs bend and rise with a languid dreamy motion, for the odour and beauty of the million petals seem inconsistent with brisk movement. The orchard, one heaving mass of bloom, looks from afar like the foam-line that seethes and scatters spray along the sea-shore, though the wind in its frolics does not yet fling showers of petal-flakes to rise and drop twirling to the sward below among the daffodils. Beyond the pear-bloom, only a narrow band seen thus at a distance, stretches the wide sea of moaning firs, whose dense array is rudely broken here and there by the broad reach of an oak—its leafless branches making a pale gap in the dark evergreen summit of the woodland. Among the firs the pheasant cries

loud and weirdly, as if asserting that here he is sole master and rightful occupant; and his claim rests unchallenged till the artillery crash of the battue, except by the hearty storm-cock's song. The missel-thrush sings in the wood or on its borders; but he is at home among the orchard trees, where his nest was open to the view of all before the blossom came. Pheasant-covers being inviolable by virtue of their countless dangers to feathered marauders, by gin and gun, and finally the gallows of the keeper's shed, the storm-cock at the edge has little fear from the jay or magpie, whose vindictiveness and cold cunning so often outwit his own bravery against his superiors in size.

Low hazel-hedges and the threat of spring-guns confine the wayfarer to the path and the steep banks dappled with anemones since middle March; but the woodland galleries, with their trains of

The Sweet o' the Year.

song-birds and fir-loving squirrels, their innumerable primroses among the trunks, and the glimpse every now and then of an emerald and ruby woodpecker, or at least the sound of his loud hilarity, are a perpetual delight even to the outsider. It is an eerie pleasure, in a humming summer night, to walk among the nut-bushes, where not ten yards distant the night-jar rattles liquidly in the gloom, or, with a swishing sound, dives into the dark silence of the wood. But now at the same hour, or when day breaks amid fallen rain, there is scarce a sound, unless it be a skylark from the far-off ridge, and the pilewort flowers in the dim light are as sunflecks on the grass at noon among the trees. Already a change has come over the willows, which lean this way and that across the rillet draining the wood; for the bees, in a few days of busy groping among the golden catkins, which hide them as

wheat hides the reaper, have turned the palms to a pale silken hue, and the sunbeams dance now through silver instead of gold. Under the willows, in their thin shadows, burdock leaves flap almost ceaselessly in the wind that creeps thither along the stream; and in the same way broad concave ivy leaves flapping in the breeze hit the oak-bark with a sound which almost deceives the ear by its resemblance to the tap-tapping of a woodpecker.

As the firs are grouped more densely the primroses become scarcer, till, in the depths of perpetual shadow, not one of them brightens the dull mat of needles. Now ash-poles succeed the firs, and flowers again prank the sward — finest where rabbits nibble. Frailest moschatel, with its green knob of petals hardly noticed as a flower, mingles with the common blooms of early spring—with a forward bunch of red-robin, and with

The Sweet o' the Year.

cowslip, cuckoo-flower, and marsh marigold; while the first bluebell is roofed low down by fleecy clouds of blackthorn-bloom. At times the statue-like form of an old ash, spared by the billhook that has pollarded the rest, rises from among the clustering poles, as a tall ship rises out of the maze of lesser craft. Bunches of dull red flowers are crowded on the sweeping limbs of the ash-trees, but, so spare is the texture of the interlacing branches, the blossom, which in the elm gives a suggestion of purple mist, does not colour the tree's outline. Couples of cole tits, faring hither and thither, dash out sulphurous clouds of pollen-dust from the ash bloom as they alight on the finest twigs. From the whole, especially where a flower-laden bough dips earthward, comes a faint fragrance as of peeling bark. A shadow seems to have fallen over the almond blossom yonder in the garden, and it is wan with the coming fall.

Long rows of lime-trees, washed with grey, as it were, by lichen, advance to the edge of the woodland from the manor on the hill. Their glistening buds have burst and the soft red light is no more around them; in its place are innumerable opening leaves, which, on slender branches, seem like a shower of emerald flakes stayed in their fall. The young leaves, newly burst, hang down as yet, and, when in pairs that do not overlap, are placed gracefully like the curved wings of a peewit drooping in flight. At intervals, past the limes, follow black poplars with rugged contorted trunks, and loftier elms whose boles are dappled low down with fresh-opened leaves. On the poplars, the ruddy wealth of catkins becomes suddenly lit up as the sun flashes a moment through a rift of cloud; but in a moment the glow is gone, and, at a little distance, the paling catkins remain unnoticed.

The Sweet o' the Year.

Steep banks sloping away from the hazel hedges imitate a mountain-side in many details. Here and there is a yawning crevice where the mould has slipped away—a cavern in miniature; while the overhanging moss clothes the rugged slope as with woodland. Among these cliff-like banks, in their clefts, the red wood-mice hide as a strange tread sounds near by: or the slow, patient humble-bees creep humming in and out: while now and again the weasel slips through the portcullis of drooping moss and roots to avoid a passing foe. Most frequently the moss adorns the furrowed roots of some dead or dying tree, drawing its latest sustenance many yards away; again it is the butt of an old tree, long lost to sight, that is wrapped in mosses; oftentimes, too, a stone from the ha-ha, lain there since the hunt scattered the topmost layers of the wall, is hidden below the surface. From out the dark moss

a frail starry growth lifts aloft whorls of crystal-clear leaves. And here a thrush has left, with sadly battered sides, a beautiful snail-shell, orange-striped and delicate. Purplish ivy leaves climb the grey stone-like stem of a young ash, lightly encircling it as the ivy or vine entwined the thyrsus of old time. This seems a finer ivy-wreath than common, and the angled leaves, pressing against the smooth bark, look as though chiselled from the wood itself; only the tender green veining suggests the life within.

Larches, whose grey contour is still hardly brightened by budding leaves, form a belt in the wood beyond the evergreen spruces. Tender red blossom adorns the hanging chain-like larch-boughs, and by them the earliest leaves are opening out. The chain is composed of links now grey, now red, and oftenest of all pale green. In these outer firs that overlook the path vast numbers of field-

The Sweet o' the Year.

fares have gathered, and, in the brilliant sun anticipating, perhaps, their coming journey north-eastward to other firs than these, they fill the air with a ceaseless racket of rival cries. The sound of many wings, as they restlessly change from bough to bough or hurry ahead of the intruder, is drowned by their harsh chorus. All through the bright warm noon their tactics are unchanged; racket and whirr of wings come continually through and across the trees. Deeper in the wood, where the spruces give shelter impenetrable to the gaze, the plaint of the wood-pigeon, hidden among overarching boughs, gurgles far and near; or, hurtling with eager flight, one goes swiftly over and droops among the trees. As with starlings, so, in a less degree, is it with wood-pigeons; and at nearly all times of the year they may be seen foraging in bands. When they rise from the sward or from the furrows the sun gleams on

their white-barred plumage; nodding as they walk among the boles, there is a brighter changing in the hues that linger about their necks, coloured like shot silk. Though in smaller numbers than when they throng the lawns strewn with mellow acorns, the clattering of their hard quills rouses the whole woodland crew as they wheel high and low above the oaks, revelling under the sunlight in their pride of wing.

LYDIARD TREGOSE

Lydiard Tregose.

THE meadow-path, edged with a faint white line of daisies, whose unopened cups are crimson at the brim, runs with a twisting course athwart broad fields of grass, studded at their margins by the brilliant gold blossoms of celandine. Elms, misty-purple or rust-red with expanded buds, stand out in the midst of the grass, and near where the path leaves the roadway, seven vast trees are set in a circle—the pillars of a temple domed in summer by thick foliage penetrable only to the sunlight, and floored with level grass inlaid

Lydiard Tregose.

with pearly eyebright. Near a rude stile of unpeeled elm it skirts a tiny pond almost hidden by withered flags and the broad leaning trunk of a dead willow. The soft mud at the pool's margin is thickly marked with the broad-arrow prints of moorhens' feet; but in the course of an hour, when the winds of morning have risen, the rippling waters will erase all traces of the birds that fed around them in the dim light of dawn.

Beyond the pool is a steep chalky slope crowned with branching burdocks that have weathered wind and storm, their dark burrs still adhering. Amidst the scanty grass which clothes the bank, several early blossoms of the ivy-leaved speedwell have peeped out, their faintest blue marked by cerulean veins. They might easily be overlooked, being mere tiny spots of colour deep in the grass, but the lemon-coloured flowers of coltsfoot make a flaunting show all about the slope.

Lydiard Tregose.

Blooming before its leaves begin to appear, the coltsfoot is, next to the lesser celandine, at once the commonest and most brilliant flower of early spring. There must be thousands of the yellow discs scattered over the chalk; those which are over-blown have changed at last to a deep orange as they faded. A few white violets, palest and loveliest wildings of the season, are hidden by their own broad leaves, beneath which they nod and scatter fragrance on the passing wind-breaths.

A little hazel-cover lies somewhat away from the path, screened from the common gaze by a thick-set hedge of blackthorn. The only gaps are where the rabbits have broken through, but a way can be found to enter by an old squat pollard-oak which stretches a friendly arm out over the mound. Within, among the smooth wands, each lissom and straight as an arrow-shaft, mazes of crowded bluebell

Lydiard Tregose.

leaves spring from the damp earth. These dark green sword-like blades, as of some strong grass, curve gracefully with their own weight, and by their multitude fully conceal all other vegetation. Slowly, in early April days, the green changes to blue, and the leaves in turn are veiled by the blossom; a thousand bells are swinging like dainty censers in the wind; the deeper purple of the early orchis, of which a few freckled leaves are showing lower down, does not so much as tone the bluebell host. Primroses here and there are couched among the leaves out of sight from without the coppice; but the gay daffodils dance where all may see. Soon their yellow cups are beaten down to earth by rain, and the dewy nectar pours from them; but by slow degrees the sunlight lifts them again, and at midday, after a kindly touch, they are as erect as ever. It was on the mound near by that the first

Lydiard Tregose.

violets opened when March broke upon us with wind and rain: weeks passed ere another put forth, and now the same spot is pied with purple and pink; the scentless ground-ivy flowers, shading from heliotrope to deep blue, show on the same bank, mocking the hues of their sweet neighbours.

An old ash, whose cavernous interior is blocked by a huge dark bloated fungus, marks the middle of a meadow across which the path leads towards the woods. Oaken palings bound the latter where the footway touches it, but a few trees lie outside the fence. High up on one of these a board, weathered green and perforated, may be, by shot what time the lead-shower of the battue pelted fiercest, warns one and all from the sacred silence of the wood. The notice itself is gone, but its significance survives and is in part respected. Keepers' paths, narrow and blackened by dead leaves, tempt the

Lydiard Tregose.

wayfarer, leading as they do among vistas of nut-bushes and lofty trees. Some yards farther on, the old grey-towered church fills a gap in the woodland, its hoary and massive stonework harmonising perfectly with the solemn grandeur of the gnarled boles amid which it is set. Noticeable grooves have been worn in the low wall that surrounds the yew-shadowed churchyard by the constant passing of rabbits to and fro, there being burrows actually among the graves and under the shattered headstones. This woodland, beginning at the very verge of the church precincts, is the haunt of all those birds which are most inseparable from trees and forest stillness. The wildest hawks, swift wood-pigeon, crow, and magpie, are all to be met with in the open meads or moorland as often as in the forest, but the woodpeckers are almost exclusively birds of the woodland. Every now and then the loud-laughing shout of the green

Lydiard Tregose.

woodpecker or "hicwall" rings through and through the chestnut aisles, echoing among the hollow-sounding trunks. Hardly has his cry died away than another and yet another, loud and long, startle all within hearing. "Tap, tap!" like a drill at work, with inconceivable rapidity his beak rattles on the bark or powdering touchwood, and leaves behind a smooth, deep hollow in token of the bird's vigorous strokes. His brilliantly-contrasted plumage of green and red and yellow is startling as he dives boldly through the wood. Most of the trees here are chestnut, lofty, and with scarce one lateral limb—swaying in the wind from knotty base to topmost bough; with them mingle smooth beeches and the dark firs which hide the hawk's nest. The old trunks are strangely rock-like in their drapings of shaggy moss, and lichen, and weird shapes of jagged fungi; but while proclaiming old age and decay,

Lydiard Tregose.

they give a rugged splendour of antiquity to the wood. So thick is the moss-coating, that the little tree-creeper is hardly to be distinguished half way up the stem as he climbs round and round with silent persistence. For a moment he is plain to the eye, as a flash from the sun shows him up against a bare spot on the bark: then his slender downward-curved bill and brown markings, fading almost to white on the breast, may be noted, and his adroitness in searching the crevices admired. Near him the larger nuthatch, with a sweet reiterated "pip-pip pip," climbs a leaning ash, missed as soon as seen in his winding course up the trunk.

Elms are not true forest trees, but yonder, through the depths, a whole row of them seems to break the rule. A drive, grass-grown except in the ruts, accounts for the elms, and a noble avenue shadows it for a space. Their majesty is

Lydiard Tregose.

retained in spite of a great limb gone here and there, a proud head lopped off or thrown down by storm. Sometimes, when hollow and broken off short, they appear like jagged-edged chimneys, with starlings instead of swallows entering them. Places bare of bark are riddled by the woodpecker's borings, and the many cracks and knot-holes and crevices behind the bark provide him and his kin with an endless choice of nesting sites. A delicate translucent fungus adorns the end of a dead bough, in shape like a ball deeply indented, and of a soft gelatinous substance: its outer side is brown and somewhat velvety, and pleasant to the touch. On a lower branch, his chosen post, a missel-thrush sings his powerful short tune, loudest of all our woodland lyrics, seeming by its strength to defy the wind and rain that rage about him. But his short period of song is nearly over, and he must needs be silent when the

Lydiard Tregose.

red-freckled eggs in a cleft of the apple-tree are hatched. Like the woodpecker's, his voice rings along the wind and echoes loud. The endmost trees of the avenue, where the carriage-drive cuts a strip of unenclosed sward in twain, are an oak and an elm on either side. Among their vast roots, and in the hollow trunk, is the abode of a colony of rabbits, whose runs intersect over the short greensward in every direction. When pressed by dogs or ferrets, they will rush up the almost perpendicular side of a tree, and are reputed sometimes to use the broad top of a pollard-willow as a couch for their young. The oak is dead and quite stripped of bark, yet its gaunt grey arms stretch far out over the turf on every side; while the bark of the elm, near its roots, has been nibbled by the rabbits, revealing the red fibre within the dark wrinkled covering.

Goose-grass climbs apace on the hedge-

Lydiard Tregose.

mounds. It mounts daily higher among the thorns and briers, rank on rank close together of its pale whorled spires of leaves mingle with the bare lowermost branches. All other plants are dwarfed in its presence; only the withered docks and hemlocks surmount such an ambitious growth. The herbs which will for a space outgrow it are as yet low down, but they quickly rise, and garlic mustard with palest green leaves, and, much later in the year, the vetches, will in turn climb above the goose-grass: autumn finds it among the highest in the hedge, with bittersweet and the bryonies. Finest of all, though at its full height, is the frail moschatel, its fivefold green flower, opening bit by bit, scarce noticed among its own foliage. Pinkish buds are fast bursting on the blackthorns, whose dark boughs will soon be dappled as with snowflakes from the countless white flowers coming before the foliage. Weeks

Lydiard Tregose.

earlier than usual—early in March—green leaves burst on the hawthorns, and the elders were green even before the middle of February. But the foliage of the hedgerows, scanty as yet, fades out of view at dusk as the last starlings hurry to the elms. Under a blackening sky a solitary heron goes over in silence, rocking somewhat from head to tail in his flight. As he goes onward, with swift yet easy motion, his great wings droop low and belly out like the curving sails of a ship before the breeze. Gently he slopes in his course, and dips out of sight into a gloom of oaks.

A WILTSHIRE MOLECATCHER

A Wiltshire Mole-catcher.

IN fresh clear air of the white dawn the grey mass of the distant hills rises out of the plain like a headland from the sea, and its outline is pencilled against the checkered sky, where fleecy clouds, red-tipped and flushed with pink, roll their fantastic shapes along the ridge. Black firs in a shattered group look blacker still in the brilliant white light. Pewits that were up ere the night gloom was broken by the first rays creeping over the hill, flap with an easy grace of wing from our path, and with a whirl of gay pinions begin an aerial dance, delighting in their

A Wiltshire Molecatcher.

unsurpassed nimbleness of flight. One tiny form, looming faintly as yet in the distance, darkens the grey slope. The molecatcher, nearing the end of his early round, descends to the valley now where his remotest traps are set. A grey-complexioned, silent man he is, with a curious lingering gait, ever looking downward as he goes. On these wide open hills there is hardly a man without woodcraft enough to know the ways of his fellow-denizens of the waste, and, if need be, the way to set up a wire. The molecatcher is no exception, and long use compels him to watch the sward at his feet. Dark grizzled curls hang about his low, deeply-furrowed brow, while his neck, freckled and hard, is open to the wind. His back is bent rather from constant stooping than from age, and there is power in him yet, as you may note when he climbs the hill.

Of all the molecatcher's odd attire—thirdhand velveteen jacket, torn loose

A Wiltshire Mole-catcher.

gaiters, and stained corduroys — his hat is the most curious. Made of soft felt, it was once white, but is now weathered to lichen-grey, and with darker streaks winding here and there; the broad brim curves downward and overhangs his forehead, shadowing all his face. Save when he looks up, half of his shaggy visage is hidden, and this concealment adds to the mystery that clings to a man of his decaying profession. By the bent brim of his hat, his curls of growing years, and by his dense eyebrows, his eyes are half hidden, as are the mole's by its protecting fur. Unperceived, the keen small eyes are ever fixed upon you; and the stranger shrinks on becoming conscious of their piercing glance through the shadow hanging about his face. Rarely, even in conversation, is the veil of mystery removed. It may be that he carries secrets which shall die with him; so, at least, his morose reserve

A Wiltshire Mole-catcher.

suggests. Not without a natural dignity, in spite of his lowly occupation, he goes through his day of silent solitary toil, or holds short pithy snatches of talk with those who care to visit him. Seated in the mound, between high double hedges, at noon over his "dinner," luxuriously pillowed among lush grass and golden pilewort, with his back leaning against an elm, he will converse intelligently on subjects that might have been deemed beyond his care, with a sharpness of sense and economy of words that bespeak a healthy mind cleansed by the pure hillside air.

Far up on the plain that undulates beyond this ridge of Wiltshire downland, acres of pasture are brown with the mole's crowded earthworks. Amid this desolation not even the thistle flourishes, and the crows, playing bo-peep among the heaps, must find only scanty fare. But it is in the lowland meadows, rather than

on the bleak bare hills, that the mole-catcher finds his hunting-ground. There he can sit, when the early thaw winds set the moles at work by loosening the iron grip of the frost, and can watch the trap spring as the creature is silently crushed or garotted. On the hill, even when the mild winds are blowing, it is cold work enough, and rarely do the traps spring soon after they are set. Generally the moles are busiest at night, and it is then that the wholesale captures are made which threaten to exterminate the velvety burrower. Constant passing through the earth seems rather to sleek the fur than to coarsen it, but in almost every case the mole is infested with minute insects which disappear when the body is removed from the trap. The old-fashioned noose, tightened by the springing of a lissom wand stuck in the ground, has been generally superseded by an iron trap, having two pairs of jaws

A Wiltshire Mole-catcher.

A Wiltshire Molecatcher.

which close, one or the other, round the creature's body as he attempts to force a way through a hole not large enough to admit him.

The level green of the meadow is ruffled with the brown of many mole-heaps, scattered like miniature mountain chains and groups here and there in disarray. Of these some are old, as may be guessed from their smoothness, and the newly-springing growth of buttercup or grass which has risen through the mould. Those that are new show the colour of the fresh-turned soil, and are bare of vegetation. But beside the little mounds—"wont 'yeps" or "oont heaves," the molecatcher calls them—the moles, like all wild creatures, have their regular runs, by which their journeyings can be traced. Frequently these runs are close beneath the surface, and the earth is turned up throughout their length, so that, by removing the broken

A Wiltshire Molecatcher.

sods, the tunnel may be revealed, rounded, and large enough to admit the hand for some distance. At times, indeed, they may be tracked for a short space over the grass without any disturbance of the soil. As the runs always range from heap to heap—the latter being the result of the pushing out of the borings—even where they do not cut up the ground, they can be discovered by probing with a stick, unless unusually deep. The molecatcher makes a deep heel-mark on the run — pressing the earth together, and so blocking the tunnel—and is thus able to tell when the mole has passed that way by the consequent lifting of the trodden turf. Two moles never, it is said, meet snout to snout underground without a fight, which invariably ends in the death of one combatant. In one of these heaps, usually somewhat larger than the rest, the mole brings forth its young, whose fate is often to be pitched

A Wiltshire Molecatcher.

rudely out on to the sward as they lie in their dark nests. Runs are often to be seen which mark the turf in a long line, seldom interrupted by heaps, and in such the molecatcher prefers to set his traps. A dozen moles is no very rare number to be caught without long interval in a single tunnel, and it has been known to reach as many as seventeen.

The long track is more likely to be used than the short one, and is the mole's highway, or main road, from which he seldom turns aside, except to make fresh burrowings. Meadows are often intersected in places by twisting runs, and it is hard for the trapper to decide which to use. He may have to wait several days ere the animal passes that way. In search of insect food, moles will wander to the strangest places, boring hard-trodden paths, and even stony roads. Occasionally, in all likelihood, they pass

A Wiltshire Molecatcher.

under brooks and watercourses; and gardens parted from the fields by roads and walls are commonly disturbed by their heaps. In the garden mole-runs mingle with the tunnelling of the smaller field-mice, who mine for beans and other garden seeds. Far plainer than rabbit-paths, by reason of the turned-up mould, which makes them patent to all, mole-runs sometimes extend for several score yards, either straight or with devious curves, just as the chance of food or soil influences the burrower. As the year advances, and, with summer heats and drought, the soil becomes hard and dry, the number of surface-runs decreases, and the molecatcher must put aside his traps, or be content with a few chance captures. The ground at the top is then more difficult to work: worms also, and the insects which are the mole's staple food, descend with the moisture into the

A Wiltshire Molecatcher.

earth, and the mole must follow them or starve.

The molecatcher's grey-clad figure stands out on the hill-slope, brilliant with the morning sun, like a dead and wrinkled thorn, seeming scarcely to move. He crosses a clover-field, where the scanty growth does not quite hide the chalk, and on a nearer approach the hares' runs show faintly as light streaks across the mingled green and grey and white. Days go by without a single visitor to the remoter parts of these broad hills, and the molecatcher may safely stoop in his path to take the hare which has lain in the wire since daybreak. The weathered coat flaps in the wind as the hare sinks into the unsuspected pocket concealed by the ample velveteen, and, quietly as ever, the climb continues. Though he stoops, and his gaze seems always directed downward, he will note,

A Wiltshire Mole-catcher.

as he looks intuitively up, the swift plovers that whistle and rush with their wings as they seek the ploughlands of the valley. Like a dim cloud, alone on the ridge, the old man sinks out of sight beyond where the smooth mounds of the ancient "castle" swell into the blue.

MAY SONG

"Fine sounds are floating wild
About the earth."
—KEATS.

May Song.

CROWDED woodland of varied hues, ledge beyond ledge, climbs the hill's slow ascent, and in this dazzling dawn the sunlight plays upon the dewed leaves with gorgeous effect. Mellow limes contrast with sea-green chestnuts, now flaming with pinnacles of waxen bloom; the reddened foliage of the oaks seems to burn in the fierce light, while the pale tasselled birches are all a-quiver; and

May Song.

at the margin frail poplars change from grey to silver—whitening, as their leaves turn, with undersides uppermost, in the wind. The parched ploughland sloping to the wood glows rust-red, though shadowed at its borders by tall thorns just crowned with the silver-white of may blossom. Yonder, where the ridge dips to the north among dark meadow-tracts, the gleaming roofs and glittering spires of a silent town pierce the pale sky. Coils of wood-smoke from the keeper's cottage, with grey thatched roof and russet chimney-stack, drift lightly in the clear atmosphere, draping a corner of the wood as with a blue translucent haze. Flaring lights of gold and purple fade in the eye of day, and barred clouds drive slowly over from the west.

The rarely trodden meadow-path and the taller grass around is hoary with dew; but as it enters the hazel gloom the scattered blades do but faintly twinkle

May Song.

in their sheathing crystal. Tender hyacinths that open bell by bell each morning are washed with a finer hue which must vanish with scorching noon; and the little spring-vetch, mounting with spray over spray of narrow leaflets to the lowest hazel-boughs, is for the moment gay with its solitary purple flower. Tiny caterpillars, on which the whitethroat preys, seem to hang from the oaks by silver gossamers, and their own bodies are clear as amber in the delicate half-light, half-gloom, that dwells as yet in the wood's shadow. Through this weird light the early willow wrens chase one another with twirling motions like butterflies; then in the nut bushes or the broad oaks they sing their tender threnody, playing among the slender swaying twigs. In the deeper shadows, far among the oaks, jays squeal and chatter, drowning half the music of the wood. Suddenly, with a flash of blue-pied pinions, a jay

May Song.

leaves a tree where a nest of oak twigs and woven rootlets, yellow and stiff as cocoanut fibre, is hidden amid thorny boughs,—a hoarse cry and a flutter of wings through the leaves following her flight. Blackbird and thrush steal across the lawn-like walks between roofing arcades of oak, halting half way over to pull a worm or to listen for a while. Unsheltered and in full view the blackbird displays a grotesque mixture of daring and timidity—in his hurried though bold-seeming progress, with ducking head, and in the chiding yet half-exultant chuckle with which he slips away into cover. In his mellow music alone there lurks no sign of doubt or fear.

Where a pool, encircled by fringing rushes, makes a broad open space, the sunlight streams in as through a pane upon the woodland shadow. The surface itself, rippling silently in the middle, and at the edge lapping with low music the

May Song.

shelving shore, glitters as though flashing sword-points were continually thrust up and drawn below the water. A green hazel thicket slopes steeply down to the pool, with here and there an oak rising from its midst. Under the bushes, where shadows change each moment as winds disturb the boughs, a russet leaf mat hides all growth save pale spears of grass and young bracken, whose fronds uncurl more and more each morning in the sun. Already some of the brake reaches high among the hazels, with three green fronds tufting the straight stem like palm-plumes. In the mists of dawn, the midday glitter, and on through the still warmth of afternoon and the dews of evening, the nightingale sings fitfully from the nut-tree shade. Outbursts of rapid melody break from the rust-brown bird as he flutters, stirring the dead leaves below; and again high up in oak or deep in hazel the song is withheld

May Song.

for hours. Straying wantonly amid the dark undergrowth and the dewy grasses, the nightingale rises now and then to a low screening bough, and in the liquid rapture that rushes throbbing from his throat, the very wood seems to have found a voice. Though often choosing dark bowers wherein to sing, he is not shy, and commonly he may be watched on an open branch piping whilst unwitting of the stranger below; then, as the sunbeams thread the hazels to sparkle on the spangled grass, the bird's form is clear in each detail — the body always quivering, the mandibles vibrating with baffling quickness, in the characteristic bubbling notes that throng with such rapidity. The clear rounded notes are varied by a strange plaint, uttered with closed beak, like the melancholy whining of a dog at night; yet always the whine swells to the perfect song, tremulous as a straining human voice. Often a dis-

cordant chatter, when a rich note seems unattainable, unworthy of Philomel's May song, changes imperceptibly without jar into purest melody. When a fine note is reached it is repeated again and again with passionate power; and not a sign of melancholy intrudes save in the whining strain. In full song, change follows change with nervous rapidity, and even in one burst the note is altered consummately in its midst. Nothing so marks the lay as the rhythmic words in which the poet phrased the ethereal music heard by the train of nymphs :—

May Song.

> "the wild
> Thrilling liquidity of dewy piping"—

words which suggest with subtle power what else is indescribable. There is a force in its delivery, peculiar to the nightingale and the cuckoo, which carries each utterance without loss of beauty across such a wide gorge as that at Clifton between the cliffs of Avon.

May Song.

Tall tufts of brown and green rushes mark the edge of a swampy meadow at the woodland border, where willows crowd, flinging inconstant shadow-lines on the shallow pools, never stirred by ripples, behind their double bastion of sedge and grassy banks. Brown leaves from the wood spread even to the rain-pools, and over all trails the pale tapestry of moneywort, strewing the dull sward with golden flakes of bloom, and brightening it with lines of young foliage, varied here and there by a coppery leaf that has lasted two springs. Shooting like the moneywort from amongst the fallen leaves and the moss-islets of the shallows, the dark bugle blossoms with ring above ring of flowers, metallic-blue ribbed with deeper streaks, its upper leafage tinged by a purplish sheen. Brown-flowered waving grasses spread and lengthen around, and where the brown-and-white dipper now feeds in full view,

May Song.

a matted jungle of water-plants—iris and bristling reed—will soon hide the black-bottomed pools. In his flight, swift and jerky, skimming the dark waters or stooping among the brook's foam and ripples, the dipper gives a weak wild squeal, and his curving wings come down smartly below his body like a partridge's. Feeding by the rushy margin, lit with cuckoo-flowers, or even under the nearest oaks, he runs hurriedly about, bobbing nervously as he picks from side to side. Black tadpoles cloud the shallows as thickly as summer gnats in a July twilight.

Cattle, with silken flanks marked red or tawny, find scattered fare in the gorsen tracts that follow beyond the pools. Tough heather, having scarcely a sprout of green, hides the lark, and gives cover to the wandering partridge, yet offers hardly a bite for the herd. But they love the black shade of the tallest gorse, and lie languidly rolling

May Song.

the closely-bitten grass from side to side between their jaws, opening their deep liquid eyes, large and beautiful now as of old when Hera was hymned as the ox-eyed in Homeric song. Hardly taller than the heather, petty-whin speckles the dry tracts with golden blossoms, smaller and more pointed than those which flame on the gorse; its thorns also are slender and needle-like; and in its dwarfed size this little whin differs from its commoner cousin. Under the gorse rise the earliest red spires of sorrel, shorter and plainer than those brilliant flower-heads which glow in the mid-summer mowing grass with knapweed and yellow rattle. Ere the wilderness of whin and heather gives way to greener meadows, becoming gay with butter-cups, brambles interlace their thorny boughs to bar all progress. Yellow tor-mentil and the delicate foliage of wild strawberry climb or creep among these

May Song.

lowest branches and about the rising grass. Tenanted only by red and russet mice, rustling in their shades, or by the fickle birds — whitethroat and sweet-voiced blackcap — that visit here, the brambles are a paradise of jewelled insects whose myriad hum makes the air vibrant with subtle music. Glazed wings of crystalline delicacy, amber and golden bodies, gleam amongst the foliage at every turn — spring leaves and autumn seeds are not more numerous than these. In their haphazard jaunts from copse to brook, from brook to copse, the happy whitethroats, singing ever as they go, visit the tangled brake and bramble, and are seen and hid again each moment as they flit through the endless plots of light and shade.

WILD FRUITS

Wild Fruits.

IT is a bright autumn afternoon, and here in a remote and unfrequented corner of a glorious common, quite close to London, pheasants in twos and threes are continually rising from the leaf-strewn ditch beneath the great oaks of the hedgerow. Their heavy flight — heavier even than it is wont to be — and their reluctance to leave the ground, tell of some great attraction there. It is not far to seek. Heaped among the long grass at the edge of the ditch, and upon the dead black leaves beneath, are bushels of ripe acorns. Many of these

Wild Fruits.

have burst open on falling, from very ripeness, and their numbers and size allow of no wonder that the birds lingered over them so long. The tints of the acorns are those of the season. One might say that the woods are orchards with infinite numbers of fruit-gatherers at this time of harvest. No yellow of cultivated fruit could excel the soft glow that is diffused in streaks over the acorns, as they lie on the green-sward, and the many shades of gold and brown, varying almost from whiteness to a deep hazel-nut tinge. All this wealth of colour and ripeness is spread before the wild creatures of the woods in rich October. Many of the browns of the acorns might find a match on the pheasant's mottled back, and he harmonises completely with the surroundings he has chosen.

But the pheasants are not left alone to enjoy the feast. The grave rooks and

Wild Fruits.

pert daws come in large foraging bands and make havoc and rejoicing among the mellow heaps. The red squirrel is there also, but he is wiser than the heedless birds, and lays up great store for the harsh season that is coming. Beneath the crab-tree in the coppice, gnarled and lichened, there is rarer fruit than the oaks provide. Never surely was there such a pile of wild apples. They lie broad-spread, layer on layer, some already covered with the dead leaves. Their colouring is yellow, softly golden, but their looks are not justified by their flavour; hence it is, perhaps, that they lie untouched, left to rot beneath November's frost-bitten leaves.

The present glory of the leaves is such as was not approached at harvest-home, or when the cultivated fruits were gathered. Each leaf now is tinged with apple-yellow and acorn gold and brown. As the sun comes pouring in through the

Wild Fruits.

leafy screen, the gay-hued leaves flash back something of their own colour into the atmosphere, and lend to the autumn air a peculiar charm. Each tree has a special hue of its own. Many of the glossy beech leaves are of an exquisite pale gold, while oaks are reddening later than the rest; the sunbeams on the willow-leaves produce a faint, soft, amber light, and the osiers flash deeply ruddy; on the dogwood-trees, which are even now in flower, there is a bronze colour that is almost unique, while the hawthorns wear their own purplish bloom. The nut-trees alone show little in their foliage that speaks of autumn, but the catkins are there, telling the season in spite of all, and even the leaves must soon succumb. One bird, more than any other, fits in with this changed aspect of the woods. The robin's crimson breast is perfectly matched by the combination of gold and red and hazel that floods the

Wild Fruits.

woodland scene; the brown of his plumage goes admirably with the leaves among which he wanders, and the fallen masses that are scattered about. His very song seems to harmonise with the air that inspires it; above all, it is passionate and softly mellow, and the depth of colour about him helps to convey its meaning. It is one of the few songs of the wild creatures' thanksgiving; the blackbird and thrush give him little aid, though the lark—that does not enter the woods—occasionally mounts high in song, unable to forget the summer days when he soared to the unsullied azure, with the carols of his rivals ringing about him.

Above all others, perhaps, the blackberry is the fruit most significant of the season in the woods and hedgerows. The great harvest has indeed passed, yet the berries that remain are sweeter than ever before, and more welcome in their comparative rarity. The bloom on the sloe,

Wild Fruits.

or blackthorn plum, is unrivalled, and can scarcely be adequately described. It is purplish, toned with lilac, becoming almost pale blue; the colour is in fact almost that of the last scabious that is flowering beneath. Wreathed in amongst the lower oak-sprays a bine of honeysuckle yet bears one crown of fragrant blossom. This single flower calls up memories of June, with its wild roses, its song of Philomel, and its long happy days rung in and out by the wild music of the blackcap: there is summer in its faint perfume, and it is almost out of place among the ruddy oak leaves that are heralding cruel frosts and damp destroying mists. The festoons of bindweed are the palest of pale yellows, and the few white trumpet flowers hardly hold up their heads; they are fast going with the fall of the year.

The haws seem more scattered than usual, and give no character to the

Wild Fruits.

hedges as a whole. Here and there, however, a tree is one mass of deep crimson, which lends to it at a distance that peculiar purplish hue given by the combination of the sumptuous colour with the duller tints of the fading leaves. As yet the rose-bushes are untouched with the flush that the hips give them; the leaves are hardy, and many of the berries are hidden by them, and so their colouring is lost for a while. This makes them far less prominent till the finches and redwings come among them, when the leaves have dropped away.

The fruit of the bittersweet is brightest among the hedge berries. Hanging as it does over the thorn-bush or sapling which the plant has chosen to climb, the effect of the many oval bunches is that of ruby pendants mixed with polished emeralds. The bryony berries, like bright red beads strung on invisible threads, are larger and almost equally gay; and where these

Wild Fruits.

beautiful berries are abundant, autumn's many-coloured vesture gains a new opulence of splendour.

The many wild fruits give a character to the hedges and woods, and never are they more lovely than at sunset. The faint rays steal in through the fretted foliage, lighting up the dewy green grass beneath and the silvery trunks of the frail birches, and brightening the ruddy brier-stems and the few flowers that remain; whilst over the hill-top the firs of the ridge are reddened for a while by the glow which lingers after sundown is announced by the homeward-flying rooks and daws, and the clatter of the lesser birds assembling in the rosy light amid the trees.

IN AUTUMN WOODS

In Autumn Woods.

THE leaves are falling from the poplars steadily one by one, and occasionally in little showers. The frosty night has done its work, and what were erstwhile glowing green leaves are now fast spreading the sward with a sombrely yet sumptuously coloured carpet. There is no wind, and the pearly haze hangs oppressively over the tree-tops, thereby obscuring the true outline of the branches. It is this dead stillness and gloom that make the fall of the leaves so arresting; no flutter of wind drifts them through the air, no subtle

In Autumn Woods.

rays of sunlight play upon their glossy surfaces to make ephemeral fairy glintings as they wave; not even the robin sings to them as they glide through the stirless space from branch to earth: their disappearance from the picture is marked by nothing but the solemn rustle as each leaf touches and settles upon the growing heap.

In the coppice, but a short distance from the poplar grove, there is a scene of surpassing beauty. The narrow winding path is completely hidden by dead leaves, their colours mingling in charming confusion. Sycamores are heaped on sycamores, and broad horse-chestnuts over all, while ever and anon feathery ash-leaves drift lazily down. The tints of this medley of leaves bewilder description: red and gold and orange are thrown together fairily, while some of the horse-chestnuts still retain a few streaks of green. Even as we gaze on this wondrous scene of

In Autumn Woods.

colour, the mist disperses and the sunbeams pour down, further to enliven what was already gay. As far as eye can see through the maze of trunks, the earth is strewn with gorgeous hues lit up anew. As the light varies the shadows shift, and now the orange, now the gold, is all aflame.

The woods are pervaded by a silence broken only by the challenge of the blue tits in the dense firs, and the croaking of the rooks afar among the acorns. Not a song is there to cheer the solitude, as the leaves drip, drip continuously. When the path takes us out of the wood, we leave the sheltered stillness behind, and feel the cool breath of the breeze that has sprung up with the lifting of the fog. In the foliage of the oaks, still dense and shadowy, three wrens are singing in broken snatches. Even in summer their song, though high-pitched, is short; and now the little fellows stop suddenly in the

In Autumn Woods.

midst of their hurried tune, for want of heart. Their tiny forms are hardly distinguishable high up in the dark shadows; only a little flutter now and again betrays where they may be found. Farther along, a couple of wood-pigeons crash hastily out of the oaks and make for the adjoining plantation, where the cries of jays tell that acorns are to be had.

So late in autumn we hardly look for the beauty of flowers. One short hedge-mound, however, displays quite a number of dainty blossoms. Thick as daisies on a lawn, the tiny field-speedwells stud the exposed side of the slope; their leaves are still a tender green, and the blue of the flowers equals that of the veronica of May, while this we treasure for its late-ness. In the brambles above there are still a few pale petals, but sadly torn and discoloured by wind and frost. Another late blossom is the golden cinquefoil, with

In Autumn Woods.

its pretty five-branched leaves trailing hither and thither. Though long dead, the tall docks yet defy the season, and raise aloft a slender spike of deep red, singularly like the sorrel-tips that toned the buttercup fields of midsummer. Like the docks, the teasels are grey and dry and brittle, but look strong as ever, growing from the shallow ditch, and rearing their tall stalks and prickly plumes almost to the hedge-top. But perhaps the rarest of all these flowers of the fall is one little spray of hawthorn bloom. Though so inseparably connected with spring, it is here in the drooping of the year, with its snowy petals and delicious fragrance. This single group of florets recalls the May day, just after the swifts came, when first the dewy green of the hawthorn was dappled with flakes of blossom, and the call of the cuckoo was heard in the land. How changed the scene since then!

In Autumn Woods.

Five teams are engaged in ploughing up a broad sloping meadow, where the blood-red clover grew, and about the steaming horses the rooks are wheeling and settling here and there. Over the same field flocks of larks and finches are flitting, seldom staying long in the damp furrows among the brown clods that hide them so completely. A moment ago two larks were straining in song high above their fellows and the quarrelsome rooks; and, what is rare in autumn, their notes were uttered with the old persistence and charm. Along the blackthorn hedge blackbirds start out now and again with their peculiar nervous chuckle, so irritating to the sportsman, but a note of warning to other birds. They hesitate to leave the cover of the hedge, for it is a long flight to the gorse opposite, and eventually determine to rely on the shelter of the dead grasses that thickly envelop the blackthorn-stems. Before we have long

In Autumn Woods.

passed them, their hilarity, so long subdued, bursts out in a defiant shriek as they follow one another up into the pollard oaks.

In the dense green coverts of the summer hedgerows nests were difficult to find, but now they show at every turn. The cunning basket-work of the lesser whitethroat, so frail as to seem incapable of holding the smallest egg, is filled with rotting black leaves and haws that have dropped thus early. Screened by the trailing dog-rose branches are heads of yarrow-flower and a few worn dandelions, mingling with the purple that stains the woodbine drooping almost to earth, and with the crimson of the blackberry foliage. With the failing light that precedes sundown, a blackbird and a thrush join their notes and delight for a while the ear, now all unused to such harmonies of woodland song.

Beneath the rosy-clouded sky come

In Autumn Woods.

black battalions of rooks, with their attendant daws, almost equally numerous. Night after night, with striking regularity, vast numbers of these broad-winged birds pursue their way to the elms and beeches that form their rendezvous. When their hereditary roost-trees are reached they mount aloft and, with an eccentric turn, swoop towards the beech-tops, apparently to plunge amongst them, but, turning abruptly, they rise again, to repeat their diving movements. In these manœuvres, oft-repeated, jackdaws accompany the rooks, performing strange aerial feats. Sometimes they race and plunge like nesting peewits. For an hour at a stretch rooks and daws execute these strange evolutions, and the former lose for the time all their usual unwieldiness. As the daylight continues to fade the birds still keep high in air, while some few descend to the sward, which they

dot in the distance with doubtful specks of black. When at last the faint gleam of sunset disappears from the woods, the clangorous rooks in the swaying trees are beating assembly for the night.

In Autumn Woods.

WINDS OF WINTER

Winds of Winter.

EVERY line in the landscape is now etched boldly and deep. In summer each tree received a special character from its foliage, but this was lost in the maze of forest or hillside clump. The falling of the leaves has left the branches stark and bare, and —no matter at what distance—the trees seem wrought in black alone, that will not blend with the sky as did the green of kindlier seasons; each trunk becomes clear and distinct from its neighbours. The hedges, spoiled of their colouring, save that of berries, are sharply de-

Winds of Winter.

fined, standing out clearly when seen from a distance; even the ridge of downs, with no verdure left but that of grass, is darker than ever before; there is no longer a soft blurred line at the horizon leaving the eye in hesitation as to where exactly earth ends and sky begins.

The wind is raving through the trees, and scattering broadcast the few leaves that cling forlorn to the black branches. Few they are indeed. None but the oak seems to have retained a single one from afar; only on a nearer approach do a few dull patches show on sycamore and hawthorn, beech and elm. Hardly a fortnight since, in a more favoured region, two elms in a hillside meadow were one mass of deep green, without a tinge even of gold. Here, in the full sweep of the cold east, a single shrivelled leaf or two remains of the beauty that has been. Seedling beeches, only shoulder high, are

Winds of Winter.

still covered with vari-coloured foliage, though even this is dry, and saved alone by the lowly situation. The ash-trees are clothed in sombre garb, with russet clusters of fruit instead of leaves. These bunches leave behind threads that survive the winter, and even the bursting of the buds in spring-tide. Oaks have lost their warmer hues, and are now dullest of brown — dull as the sods of the fresh-turned stubble. The wind tears through the slight barricadè of twigs, and then, reaching the verge of a coppice, vents all its pent-up fury on the oaks. A whole maze of leaves is whirled into the upper air, one over the other, and chased far out, over ploughed fields or brown heath. Here they sink and settle, strewing the surface like spoils of blossom from a garden after storm. Nor are the lesser branches spared: rustling through the slender hedges and over the turf, they find a resting-place in the brook that

Winds of Winter.

roars along the edge of the field with doubly swollen waters. Against a partly submerged bramble twigs and dead leaves have collected, forming a thick though porous barrier that turns the stream aside with a slight lifting curl.

The very leaflessness brings into notice a feature that would otherwise be lost. The sky is pale blue, yet faintly washed with grey. Seen through the network of boughs and interlacing twigs, the blue appears as a haze; though, unlike haze, it has no density, and does not in the least obscure the form of tree or moving creature. Only from a point midway up the tree-stems is this visible; dark larches in the background make the rest shadowy and grey.

Of the trees that are scattered about the broken surface of the heath, the birches are perhaps least striking; but more than any they are completely in accordance with the aspect of the stormy

Winds of Winter.

plain. Their silvery twisted stems might have been shaped by the slow action of the wind; so, too, the thin dark branching and ragged outline. Yet, in spite of their exposed situation and frail appearance, several faded leaves still adhere. Small blotches of hard wrinkled fungus have grown about the stems of several, a certain indication of inward rottenness.

Though the wind is roisterous, the day is mild for the season, and we may sit with comfort on the lichened roots of a wayside oak, protected from the full strength of the blast by the dense evergreen thickets that line the track; and a blackbird's song fascinates for a while. Leisurely, as is his way, but passionately, as the day is lowering; not a mere short stave, as is more generally the case amid such changed surroundings, but late-prolonged and delicately intoned. Now loud and almost shrieking in its ecstasy, now

Winds of Winter.

low, but always passionate, the song proceeds. For full ten minutes the song endures, and even then a note or two is uttered at intervals ere sundown. Autumn has laid but a light hand on this spot, with its undergrowth of dense rhododendron and its deep green spruce-trees; hence perhaps the intense joy of the songster. The blackbird is singing what leaf-buds on everything silently proclaim. Lilac in the garden is pale green with buds; willows are covered with ovals of hazel-nut brown; and the beeches show countless "bird's-claw" points of a deeper brown. There is wide, deep hope and promise expressed in bird song and tumid bud.

Open to nearly every wind that blows, on account of their height trees lose their verdure long before the underwood. Many straggling brambles are still deep green, and creeping marsh pennywort amid the lush grass of the meadow is

Winds of Winter.

untainted by the sere: elder, too, that was so early to grow green in March, shows no sign of the dying hues that now prevail. Even a flower has survived so late. Small bugloss, common but little known, bears several dark-blue petals, unexcelled even by forget-me-not. It ranks with the uncouth weeds about the edge of a ditch, with nettle and dead burdock. The oat-stubble is dappled with numberless blossoms of corn feverfew, somewhat tarnished from exposure, but still flowers, and gay by comparison with the greyness around them. All but hidden by the purple and black leaves that have been driven hither, are golden petals of a creeping buttercup, and one starry daisy, even less noticeable to a passing glance. Several discs of orange dandelion are strewn about the short grass beneath far-reaching briers, and even the flimsy puff-balls of pappus have survived the breeze.

Winds of Winter.

On a sandy plot in the midst of a waving sea of gorse-bushes, where rabbits have riddled the bank with their burrows, the grass is bright emerald, and brighter from the recent fall of rain. It is short from constant nibbling by the creatures that have their tunnels beneath, yet soft and even mossy: such delicate grass is not uncommon in similar situations. For their principal meal the rabbits have to wander farther afield by their secret paths through the gorse and bracken wilderness, beyond which the grass-blades are long and luscious, and mingled with delicate fronds of hare-parsley.

About the dry stems of gorse, grey and brown, narrow blades of sheep's sorrel cluster thick, but no other growth exists. Gorse seems inimical to any growth beneath it, probably on account of its density and the darkness that prevails within its shadow. On the stems themselves grow several parasol-shaped fungi, pale

Winds of Winter.

yellow, and flushed at the top with pink. Of other fungous growths that abound in the underwood, some cling in sober brown bunches; others of a deep crimson, dotted with tiny white knobs, stand singly, but are more prominent from their colour, which is brilliant.

Except in the farthest depths of the wood, the wind is so powerful as to keep all birds to cover. Even the strong-winged rooks but rarely pass over, and sometimes appear as if about to be dashed to earth at a terrific pace; but a slight inclination of the pinions changes their course at a short distance above the ground. Finches labour with the utmost difficulty, and are temporarily beaten back. Their rate of progression, judged as they move over the regular furrows, is miserably slow. Starlings, with stronger flight, occasionally swoop down under the fierce breath of the wind, and are almost forced to alight. Pheasants keep in hiding till

Winds of Winter.

hardly a yard from the passer-by, when they suddenly start up and race with the wind at headlong speed, their wings whistling loudly through the air. Now and then they crash out of the oaks, or a cock-bird crows loudly and threatens by his cry to summon the keepers ferreting by the ash stoles yonder. Wood-pigeons arrive at intervals in foraging bands of nine or ten, and settle with difficulty among the heaving tree-tops. The monotony of the wind-music in the woods is quite unrelieved now at evenfall by any bird-song; but here and there among the thorns a blackbird chides as he seeks a roosting perch, or a robin utters a harsh challenge. At the edge of the wood, where the wind finds outlet, the music is deep-toned and roaring; in a clump or single tree it is of a higher tone and less decided; while it only hums through the grass and thistle-stems by the hedge.

A TOUCH OF WINTER

A Touch of Winter.

FROM this elm-pole stile, overshadowed by curving hazel wands and with the rustle of dead bramble stems ever at hand, the eye travels over a wide landscape of sloping meadow, furze, and woodland. Grey pastures undulate to the horizon, hedged in by hawthorns, with here and there a dark yew or wind-shapen oak. In the green coombe beneath us tall elms, purpling with buds, tower above the meadow. Past them, and through a brier-hedge, winds the path—a thin line faintly drawn across the fields of vale and

A Touch of Winter.

windy upland. Spread about the slopes are dense coppices of oak and hazel, and hedges that are almost as wide. Over all the lowering sun sheds a soft red light, enamelling the grassy tracts and brightening for a while the leafless hedge-row bushes.

All around a light fall of snow has checkered the meadows and the plough-lands of the valley with fleecy white, like cirrus clouds that fleck the azure sky. It lies thickest in the hollows and on the footways; in the shelter of the tall hedges it has drifted deep. Looking only at the exposed fields, the aspect is wintry; but in strange contrast are the hedge-mounds that line the road and border the copses. The summer verdure, indeed, is gone—red-robin, knapweed, even herb Robert and the grasses, are withered and hidden by the drifted leaves. Yet everywhere are scattered signs that we look for only in spring. Succulent shoots of many

A Touch of Winter.

plants peep through the dropped leaves out of the cold earth. Deeply lobed foliage of celandine springs in plenty by the ditch side, and with it palest green of ground-ivy—hardly seen, so small and delicate are the leaves. Chickweed in masses, spangled with little starry flowers, has sprung up—unnoticed till it has put out its many blossoms. But commonest of all, and most beautiful with its whorled leaves trailing about the mound and leaning over the lowermost hawthorn-twigs, is the goose-grass, well known for its habit of attaching itself to the clothing. To the rustic it is known as "clytes"; and the tiny berries, that adhere even more readily than the foliage, are called "sweethearts." Not yet long enough to festoon the hedge as in summer, the stems shoot up several inches high, pale as the young ground-ivy. Nettles, shorter still, and only recently emerged from the ground, rise here and there

A Touch of Winter.

in small clusters. More vigorous than any in its spreading growth is the hedge-parsley, with its intricately-cut leaves. Here also a haw has fallen, and, buried beneath the leaves, has sprouted forth and sent up a slender red shoot adorned with spring-green leaves: in the same manner young seedling elms, no taller than the nettles, have grown up under this cold sky and biting wind. Many another plant, such as the broad dock and wild parsnip, has burst into leaf about this same hedge.

Alongside the road, but some yards apart, runs a deep wide ditch, resembling a west country lane. Through a grove of beech and ash it goes, and underfoot their leaves lie rotting many inches thick. Bushes of bramble and elder straggle across the way, and in places knotted roots, raised high above the earth, render the walking difficult. Though parted from the road only by a strip of sward

A Touch of Winter.

grown with young beeches, it is utterly shut out from the highway, busy with market-carts. Hither flock the titmice, scared from the more frequented path, and the blackbirds come to pull a worm from the moist earth. Among the boughs scatter the merry great tits, and away into the underwood. Close at hand two robins flit in the dense cover of the thorns, recalling by their motions the amorous chasing of late February days. Afar in the turnips or the oat-stubble we can hear at intervals the cry of partridges. Overhead, now and again, fly the banded larks bound for new feeding-grounds. Tall burdocks rise up frequently in the ditch with their bristling clusters, and about the mounds on either hand dark shining ivy creeps, rounding off the rugged banks. Now the hollow widens out till it is lost in an underwood of blackthorns; but beyond it is steep-sided and narrow once more. In the crooked limbs of oak

A Touch of Winter.

that roof the grassy ditch blue-tits call loudly as they scatter. Screened from the blast, all the young green growths may be seen that flourished on the hedge-mounds behind. Where this sheltered hollow ends, almost at a farmhouse door, a great yew-tree leans over, and in its dense stiff foliage the wind makes moan like a sea lapping on the shingle. Fresh twigs cluster thickly about the old peeling stem, and, with the darker leaves, appear to be varnished, so glossy are they. The smaller branches of the oaks are tinged with a ruddy hue like willow-wands.

From some point not far distant comes a song that is rarely heard in December. These sweet though melancholy notes are unmistakeably the chaffinch's. We are disappointed to find the handsome pink-breasted bird prisoned in a cage hanging against the farmstead wall. On the ancient bricks so dull and brown

A Touch of Winter.

the yellow blossoms of the jasmine are studded thick, and they creep on to the tiled roof, weather-stained to browns and dingy reds. Most of the flint cottage walls along the road are flaming with the same bright-blossoming creeper.

Passing the farmyard and the pied pigeons fluttering among the horses' feet, the road itself is worn deep through sand and chalk. So tall on each side is the wall of crumbling earth we cannot see the meadows above, and the elms that stand away from the track. Just over the sand a thin stratum of dark loam, bound together as it were by the many rootlets that stretch hither, juts beetling out towards the roadway; and hanging from this rich dark layer a waving rootlet of elder has sprouted afresh into leaf, though several inches away from the low cliff of sand.

At length the road emerges from its groove on to the hill-top, and once more

A Touch of Winter.

it is level and bounded by narrow woods of spruce, whence comes the startling challenge of the pheasant-cocks. Meanwhile the twilight air has become keener and the wind rises—humming through the green firs. The smaller birds are nearly all in cover, and only a belated pipit or a steady flapping rook moves aloft in the rude air. Sometimes, in the hedges that line the way, robins rustle gently and fly a yard or two, or a blackbird blusters out; otherwise the life so lately stirring is silent, and the tomtits are rocked asleep amid the swaying larch-boughs. Out in the fields, freshly turned by the plough, peewits run rapidly hither and thither, occasionally chirruping a low distressful note, unlike their usual screaming wail. The whole flock is within thirty yards of us, and their markings are perfectly clear,—the flowing crest, the dark band beneath the throat, and the snow-white

A Touch of Winter.

breast, showing against the clods. With the chilling wind the snow begins to fall again, and from the shelter of this holly-tree we can watch the flakes drifting swiftly across the meadows, and rolling like thin smoke, silvering the sward and heaping by the ditches. Still the peewits move uneasily in the open, always facing the wind and the thin wall of snow bearing down upon them. Scared by a sportsman passing near them, several rise, but soon settle again, running a short distance in the very teeth of the blast. Some of them stand huddled in the furrows, as partridges do by the ant-hillocks. At length the snow ceases and the wind drops to a whisper; then over the hill-top the lapwings start up again and wheel in phantom flight, shrieking their weird night call.

WINTER IN RICHMOND PARK

Winter in Richmond Park.

KEEN frost and a grey hanging fog have numbed and silenced all life within the Park. Not a sound trembles through the heavy air. The rooks that travel over, each day at dawn, linger yet in their roosting-trees, and no sullen caw reaches us from their dark forms high up in the elms. Starlings, whose myriad wings make a faint music through the morning air as they pass for distant meadows, are also delaying their flight: until sunlight pierce the gloom they will not stir.

From the outermost twigs of a broad-

Winter in Richmond Park.

spreading chestnut the stem is quite invisible, and the boughs above are lost in grey, so dense is the mist. Nestling against the trunk are scattered groups of sparrows, hardly moving, and betrayed only by a half-hearted chirp at rare intervals. The melancholy long-drawn whistle of a starling that sits with ruffled plumage in the same tree is the only other break in the stillness.

The windows of a cottage facing south-east flash back the first bright sunbeam. A rustling breath of wind sighs through the dense foliage of the spruce-firs and disperses the fog, till all around countless points of frosty crystal glitter in the tardy sunlight. Slowly the landscape is unfolded as the fog retires, and depths of woodland, unseen before, loom slowly into view. When at last the mist hovers above the elms of the horizon and the far-off mere, from a kindly veil of fern doubling back to the grass the morning

Winter in Richmond Park.

lark climbs high into grey space. Instantly, as in answer to a signal, the shivering birds scatter from their retreats of knot-hole, tussock, and rugged oak-limb. Widespread companies of rooks go dinning overhead, and the starlings take a hurrying flight eastward. On every side the clamouring sparrows descend to scour the grass and the bramble underwood; some of them wander to the pools, and where the ice does not prevent, indulge themselves in a bath, spraying the water with their rapid play of wings, and quarrelling noisily for the best places.

From the bed of a narrow runnel, not yet filled with winter floods, we can watch the starlings foraging across the lawn. Intent on a meal already long deferred, they allow us a close approach. At each step they make a swift downward stroke of the beak on their insect prey. Rapidly here and there they hop and run,

Winter in Richmond Park.

now hidden by a tussock, now in full view above the close-shorn grass. In their busy journeying to and fro they weave an intricate maze of lightly trodden paths, leaving no inch of ground unsought and no sod unprobed. Tomtits, a busy throng, find insects in plenty about the elms and in the beeches, where a few dun leaves, shrivelled and dry, still rustle in the breeze. They climb and spring and flutter from branch to bough, springing heedlessly upon the slenderest twigs that rock wildly beneath them. As they advance slowly along the groves or away into the thickets, their merry chattering talk echoes sweetly through the glades. Ever and anon a score or two of fallen leaves are lifted feebly among the trees. The tenacious oaks still hold their leaves, but the stronger winds cause a russet fan to float slowly through the air to the deepening mass that lies in the hollows beneath.

Winter in Richmond Park.

Sober-hued "November" moths cling motionless against the grey oak-palings, and seem but half alive, not stirring even when touched. Each frost and every morning dew chills them more and more, and ere long they must perish and fall to earth. The fog that hung thick and silent about the fields an hour since suggested no thought of beauty, but now that it has vanished it leaves behind crystal beads of moisture, adorning the slim beech-wands and the dead thistle-heads below. Twin leaves of woodbine just unfolding in so cold an air, hold within their clefts one sparkling drop.

Out from the rank clinging undergrowth, now turned grey, rises a tall bleached stem of hemlock. Long bereft of foliage and blossom, it has outlasted its compeers of the summer; but its shiny stalk of crude arsenical green is now brittle and shrunken, and nothing

Winter in Richmond Park.

save the skeleton ribs remain of the umbels that once bore its flowers. The old stalk rises amidst the branches of a birch, and leaning on this support its fall is long delayed. Around are showing newly budding leaves of humbler growths, whose faintly-fragrant foliage makes the hemlock the more gaunt by contrast. On the briers, not quite leafless, though deeply sered by slow action of the elements, the few hips spared by the field-fares are dull black and wrinkled, probably by the frost. Some of their younger branches wave high above the rest in graceful curves, pale green with great ruddy claws, the thicker and older stems being dark and dull, almost of an earth-brown hue.

Past rolling acres of dead bracken and mossy banks drilled with rabbit-burrows, giant oaks rising on either hand, the broad track of greensward descends to the Penn Ponds. 'Tis here,

girt about by tufted rushes and gently sloping turf,

Winter in Richmond Park.

"Where the duck dabbles 'mid the rustling sedge,
And feeding pike starts from the water's edge,
Or the swan stirs the reeds, his neck and bill
Wetting, that drip upon the water still;
And heron, as resounds the trodden shore,
Shoots upward, darting his long neck before."

The wild duck are invisible, but their haunt is where the flags grow thickest, and rustling alders throw a deep shade; moorhens creep among the rushes, and every now and again their startling cry comes weirdly along the shore. Upon the placid surface, near the tiny islet, a pair of swans glide slow and silent, heard only when they skim the water with clumsy ponderous flight; the pike assert their presence and their marauding habit by an occasional mighty swirl among the rotting weeds; carp leap perpendicularly half-way into the air. Alone of the wonted denizens of the ponds and the

Winter in Richmond Park.

enclosed woodland by their margin, we miss the herons, gone, perhaps, on their wintry wanderings by wild sea-shore or in marshland solitudes. Beneath yonder oak, that leans somewhat over the water, is a favourite haunt of the heron: late into the grey twilight his lank figure may be seen there, motionless in the reedy pools, dreaming over his own dim shadow, till gudgeon or eel unwittingly approaches within the stroke of that poniard bill.

From the marshy sward about the edge of the higher pond, our way, diverging from the beaten path, lies along a slight ascent through a waste of brake-fern and crisp yellowing turf, trodden in all directions with rabbit-runs. In amongst the oaks that tower well apart like massive columns, straight and thick, we hear wood-pigeons clatter out of the branches with loudly beating pinions. On either side, far as eye can reach, stretch tiers

Winter in Richmond Park.

of dark-stemmed trees. Some of them fork into a pair of giant limbs close to the earth, and are less striking than those which rise sheer up without a break for many yards. The lofty gnarled hollows within the trunks of the larger trees suggest the haunt of owls. High out of reach against the rugged sides their nests might well be reared; but the stern spirit of game preservation drives elsewhere the soft-winged hunter of the night. In the oval shadows cast by the oaks the grass is short and spare, cropped, no doubt, by the deer when feasting on the strewn acorns.

Beyond a strip of level turf tall palings surround a large plantation, with dark chestnuts showing at the border. These are sacred depths, whence comes the vigorous crow of a pheasant or the garrulous screaming of the unwelcomed jay. Where the trees end an open space is studded with bare hawthorns, one or

Winter in Richmond Park.

two still aglow with their bright haws. Nearer the fence thickly-growing rhododendron-bushes make a perpetual shelter for rabbits and winged game, affording as they do safe cover when bramble and thorn are leafless.

With the approach of night the mist has again lightly gathered, and the sun setting over the western oaks is quite obscured. Empty husks of Spanish chestnuts crunch audibly underfoot, but farther on the walking is soft and silent over the velvety sward. Not yet retired for his winter sleep, a bat wheels in eccentric curves overhead, and as he flits above the moonlit pool a faint shadow of him falls on the shimmering surface.

A PINE-WOOD NEAR LONDON

A Pine-wood near London.

GREAT rugged elms stretch side by side on the short turf of the meadow which yesterday they shadowed. The labour of a few short days, with many strokes of axe and saw, has felled them all. They have been thrown just as the innumerable buds were beginning to show a faint purple when the sun gleamed among their branches. Resting long with their immense weight on the yielding soil, not yet hardened by frosts, they will leave great rounded grooves across the meadow. In the fresh pellucid air the

A Pine-wood near London.

elms yonder, leaning at a threatening angle over a pond of the village green, show clearly in every detail of twig and bough, and the sparrows are easily distinguished. There is no defined bank to the pool, but the long grass trends gently down till it is lost in the shallows. From near the margin grotesquely-shaped willows grow in a curving line, and follow the road with its strip of sward into the village, some of them standing almost alongside the "solemn, shadowy" yews of the little churchyard. Cut off from the green—where the villagers' geese are digging at the turf—only by a narrow ditch is a furze-clad common. For a space tiny hillocks cover the ground, each tipped with a dark-green that is almost brown by moss and heather and dwarfed gorse. The walking is hazardous, and in places the surface suddenly descends into precipitous hollows spread thickly with birches and an undergrowth of heather

A Pine-wood near London.

that nearly hides a goat roaming among them. Narrowing at length, the furze-common ends, and a pleasant grass-grown track winds along a lane between tall oaken palings. On the farther side of the fence the turf is somewhat lifted up, and sends through the interstices a drapery of ground-ivy and blackberry-bramble still bright in leaf. High above the palings rise many oaks for the entire length of the lane. In one of these, from a middle bough, a thrush is singing a sweet though unfinished tune. The singer, too, seems conscious of his fault, and stops short now and then to gaze timidly around: a harsh note thrown in occasionally half spoils the tune, but there is promise in the mellow whistle for the wildwood chorus of March.

A lawn of the sweetest grass reaches with a slight swell to the very foot of the oak-fence, and is there strewn deep with black and purple leaves from the trees be-

A Pine-wood near London.

yond. A robin, silent for a while after a passionate outburst of carol, drops quietly from a lower bough of oak behind the palings. Among the dead leaves his long stilt-like legs make a faint rustle as he probes carefully for the worms that abound. It is a favourite corner for a robin, where food will surely be found—here at the foot of a fence screened by the oaks. Perched on a fallen twig, the little fellow leisurely gulps a large worm pulled from between the leaves and the grass-blades peeping up. You will find him here or in a like spot that need not be sequestered, at any hour, but especially in the grey early morning. Confident, as he ever is, he will allow the wayfarer a near approach, and charm him with the most exquisite song of winter, at least until the music of the thrush and others of the hedgerow choir is more finished. Trefoil, with its pale rounded leaflets, nestles by the palings, and close by a few

A Pine-wood near London.

drooping stalks of dumb-nettle, just bereft of blossom; while beyond a fresh growth of nettle is pushing up. On a birch that shows here alone among the oaks, broad ledges of fungus jut out from the upper stem, in shape and outline like a scallop-shell. Skirting an avenue of mighty beeches and a narrow spinney where wood-pigeons are flapping as in March, the way leads straight in amongst a group of pines, then loses itself in a waste of furze.

Under the pines there is hardly a slip of grass, and nothing flourishes but bramble, that wanders round the lofty pillars, and matted brake and heather; a scanty trail of ivy creeps, though rarely. The silence within the shadow of the trees proclaims that such cover is not loved by the birds. They favour strips of woodland where the branches reach and spread almost to earth, that they may drop with ease on to the sward and

A Pine-wood near London.

rise again to the bough, often repeating these short desultory journeys to and fro. Branches of the Scotch fir—and notably where the trees are closely ranged—spring in dark tufts at the top, and a long sweep of stem is without a suitable branch. Hence there is a dearth of birds in the pine-wood, where human footfall seldom disturbs the stillness of the years sleeping in the wind-battered stems. High aloft the titmice bands are scattering, and their happy cries ring sweetly, like the tinkling of fairy bells. Most of them are cole-tits —with their black caps and short squat figures; their notes, too, are distinct. As they hang head downwards, like flies from a ceiling, their faint grey-blue wings shiver slightly, and their tails, spread widely out, vibrate so that the sunlight shows through their gauzy feathers as through the wings of a dragon-fly.

A feeble wind plays dreamily through the dense fir foliage above, and the un-

A Pine-wood near London.

ceasing groan sounds like the far-off murmurs of the sea; like it, too, the sound swells and dies away as the wind-waves roll and break. Though so susceptible to the flow of the breeze, the fir-wood is oppressed with a strange silence.

A small white fungus on a stump of birch under the firs suggests the thought of snow, but the mild wind, that makes the thrushes sing and the young leaves peep through the sods, belies it. Here and there amid the trunks many fungous bunches are to be met with — all emitting a disagreeable, damp, earthy smell. The carpet of fir-needles, that nowhere ends in the wood, is sometimes half a foot thick, and has taken here a brown and there a whitened tinge. The narrow track, too, that stems its haphazard way between the trunks, is thick with fallen needles and cones, so that the heavy woodman's cart approaches without sound, and the

A Pine-wood near London.

wheels roll as over even velvet. Indeed the needles make softer and more silent going than turf, which yields, and then springing back, jolts the cart. Scaly cones, bleached needles, and flaking bark emit a pleasant odour as of fresh-turned earth among spring woodlands. Tall, straight pines tower on every hand, and the eye is baffled in trying to thread the maze; and each tree is like its neighbour, inasmuch as short branches—all snapped off near the trunk—grow at regular intervals round the russet stem. These stout-looking branches stretch out an aid that is at first welcomed by the climber; but they are quite unreliable, being frequently rotten, and likely to break unless the foot is planted right close against the stem.

Now the rows of pines on either side the track open wide apart, and we quit the gloom and silence of the wood for a broad lane, with a farmhouse at the end showing through the oaks. A little patch

A Pine-wood near London.

of undulating sward lies immediately beyond the trees and before the lane is entered, where grey lichen contrasts with the thick moss-matting over which we walk. The lane, with three cart-tracks side by side, is little used, and the turf is scarcely rutted; but refuse from the cottages, standing somewhat back, mars the pleasant green and the dandelion leaves showing through the grass. Once more closely-set oaks stretch across the way from either hedge, rising out of a thicket of hazels and bramble. In the depths, amid the wands and trailing stems, a wren creeps and rattles off his song; farther on blue-tits are playing among the slenderest oak-twigs—their heads no bigger than the oak-apples. A dark streak is drawn right down their yellowish breasts, as though they wore tunics buttoned in the front. The road dips just by the farm and discloses the chimney-stacks and church tower of a sleepy village. A faint

A Pine-wood near London.

blue smoke wreathes upwards from a log-fire, losing itself in air at the height of the topmost elm-branches, where the rooks' nests are swinging in the breeze.

Turning aside from the lane, we enter a narrow footpath, graceful pagoda-like spruce firs mingling their foliage overhead. Herb Robert covers the hedge-mound with its daintily-cut hairy leafage —quite a fresh growth, too, that was under the earth a few weeks back. Passing the spruces, another open common lies on the one hand, with a dark coppice of Scotch pines on the other. A scratching faintly heard on the bark of a tree arrests the ear. Two squirrels, matching the stem with their reddish fur, with agile steps race swiftly towards the green boughs above, and there play heedlessly among the lesser twigs. As evening falls, from the gorse on the common — even from the black forbidding firs and the spruces behind — comes the blackbird's

vesper song. The rich, far-reaching tones rise high above the gentler melody of the robin, the light tapping of a solitary nut-hatch on the elm-bark, and the rustling of the red squirrels amid the fir-cones and the deep-green needles.

A Pine-wood near London.

A SURREY WOODLAND

A Surrey Woodland.

SHADOWY spruce firs stretch their foliage overhead from either side of the path, and while the light is gloomy enough in the open, it is still more dim within the shade of the coppice. It is but a strip of woodland, left in the midst of arable and pasture fields—a bare stone-throw across—yet in its depths we are quite shut out from the meadows by fir and chestnut and oak, all closely ranged. Yonder, half a mile away to our right, through the columned stems, is an oakwood of greater extent; but it is hidden for the

A Surrey Woodland.

while by a yellow mist, and beyond the boundary hedge of thorn nothing can be seen. Underfoot, signs of promise and decay are strangely mingled. Winter winds have driven the acorns into the shade and shelter of the firs; and they strew the ground, soddened, darkened, and crushed by rain and the hoofs of the gipsy ponies that pass through. And still they lie, some of them on the little-trodden path, along with the dark-skinned fruit of the horse-chestnut that has long ago lost its rich glossiness. Dead twigs from the oaks and myriads of fir-needles make a mantle of the wood's decay which has fostered the new shoots of spring. Ground-ivy is here with its rounded leaves, daily broadening and deepening to a glaucous hue: it trails and interweaves its slender stems till the earth, even under the firs, is carpeted with living green. More rare as yet, and oftenest standing alone among the

A Surrey Woodland.

dead grasses or by a bramble-stem, is the crowfoot, whose stalk is already tall, and whose leaves are almost full-spread. Dandelion and thistle in stout clusters make way by the ditch-side, and from the former a faint flower-sheath is shooting up. The gorse stems that we passed in the meadow behind were hidden at the root by a bold growth of pale sorrel leaves. The better to show up the beauty of the budding leaves, the common berried ivy, that spreads in places as abundantly as the ground-ivy, is dull-brown and grey, like the earth over which it lies; for where it grows so thickly there is no sign of grass. All around, too, clustering thickest by the hedge where brier and bramble trail, are the tall grasses of last summer, grey and wan after months of wind and rain. Much of it is still breast-high, and topping the thin stalks are light ghostly plumes, so airy that the wind hardly stirs them in

A Surrey Woodland

its flight. Near by they have wandered on to the path, and, though we step never so gently through, they snap and fall.

When the mist has lifted slightly, the clearer light makes visible the long ridge, as it were, of oak woodland across the broad ploughed field. It extends in a scarcely broken line for a mile perhaps, though in places it is so thin that the sky beyond can be seen between the oaks. The tall dense hawthorn hedge that surrounds it is undistinguishable at this distance, as it blends completely with the dim mass of the trees. Westward the wood recedes sharply from view and dips below the horizon. On a bulge of meadow somewhat nearer at hand is a group of dark elms towering above the sward with a dwarf wind-battered birch alongside. Coppices of beech and fir and poplar are dotted here and there, half a mile or so apart, over the meadows, one

A Surrey Woodland.

or two of them so narrow that they are like untended double hedgerows with trees set in their midst. Our way lies up a gentle slope skirting the fir-wood that we lately passed through, and which ends at a farmhouse a quarter of a mile ahead. On our right lies the largest wood, chiefly oaks of half a century's growth, with a moss-grown patriarch standing at the edge. Over them flaps a battalion of peewits lately risen from the clods: they wheel and swerve somewhat in their course, then rise a little, and, dipping, are lost behind the trees. In front the country is open, and the view to the horizon is but slightly interrupted by a homestead embowered among its shrubs and rookery elms. We leave behind the meadows where we entered among the firs, and over a stile find a path that leads to a wood whose solitary pool harbours the moor-hen among its matted flags.

A Surrey Woodland.

Thud and echo of the woodman's axe have but lately died away: for a few days there was bustle and din instead of the wonted calm, and now a clearing has been made like a vast hall in the woodland. The poplars have suffered most, and on the thin sward lie their pale crooked stems pitted with small dark scars that look as if made artificially with a tool. In falling, their greater limbs have furrowed the soil deeply, and torn up masses of ivy carpeting. No path crosses this wood, and a way must be carefully picked through the tangled blackberry bushes and over the prone poplars often buried in the undergrowth. We have to stoop to pass under the lowest chestnut-boughs, with their great sticky buds, and the branches of the beech, still adorned with warm brown foliage that has long been crisp and dry. Here is the pond, in a hollow, just seen as we emerge through a portal of giant trunks. Dense haw-

A Surrey Woodland.

thorns overhang the water, making gloomier with their shadow a pool already looking as if bottomed with pitch. On one side a low hedge borders the pond, and through a gap the cattle stray, cautiously to sip the stagnant black water. A poplar has been uprooted at the bank, and, falling across the surface, it forms a natural but unsafe bridge. Its bark, saturated and rotten, is coated with furry moss that affords only precarious foothold. Almost at the end, among the boughs that have survived, a moor-hen cradled its nest, so as just to touch the water. The cottage lads know the story of its plunder. A long crawl on the slippery trunk and untold bootfuls of the black oozy mud, and some at least of the bird's treasures were no more her own. But among the fringing bed of broad flags and tufted rushes there is safe hiding for a nest, surrounded as it would be by yards of yielding boggy soil. The

A Surrey Woodland.

marsh-marigold first puts forth its golden "bubbles" by the water-side, and with them crowd the dim white cuckoo flowers. Through the thorns and willow about the margin the titmice creep and chatter, and farther on a passing band of fieldfares rattle hoarsely as they fly, while a moor-hen shrills weirdly from the flag-thicket somewhere; but it is fully hidden, and does not rise, though we must be passing it close. Under a sycamore the grass is shorter than any downside pasture, and looks from afar like a film of emerald dust that might be rubbed out with a finger-sweep. Hither the blackbird hastens at dawn to snatch a worm from between the blades; and out into the furrows he wanders, where the pale green wheat is sending up its spear-shafts wide apart as yet, so as not to hide the black robber. In the shadow of the elm-trunks, where the grass is still short, two snowdrops nod their frail white bells—

A Surrey Woodland.

outcasts in all likelihood from the garden close at hand.

No sunset-flames illumine the dark sky to-day; but through the trees the sun burns as a crimson disc of concentrated light that dazzles the eyes, though shaded by the lattice-work of twigs. A nuthatch taps faintly on the bark of a pine as it climbs mouse-like and but dimly seen in the shadow; and ere its tapping ceases, the sun is down behind the elms, and it is rapidly darkening in the wood. Twilight is a signal for blackbird and robin to join in a last chorus, and the woodland rings with their music. Rabbits are creeping out into the dusk of the hedgerow, and our path ahead through the spruces grows fainter with the waning light. When the track passes once more over greensward, and through a waste of gorse, hedges bound the field on one side, dark firs on the other. From behind the eastern slope the moon has risen pale and

A Surrey Woodland.

silvery: as the night darkens, the air becomes clearer and a wind waves the grass underfoot. Gradually the moon glows deeper and more golden, shedding bright beams across the rain-pools by the path; and thus the last note of woodland music faints on the wind.

A DIARY IN ENGLISH FIELDS AND WOODS

HERONRY at Richmond Park —on a harsh blowing day. Nests chiefly in firs, also in beech and oak, and almost invariably built among the crowning branches; differing much in bulk—some are huge with the layers of succeeding years, others lightly built in the manner of wood-pigeons. One nest was a yard thick, of large twigs, the hollow for the eggs, however, being no broader or deeper than usual. In general the eggs are laid in a shallow depression, roughly lined with mosses and light grasses or

A Diary in English Fields and Woods.

April 1, 1895.

In English Fields and Woods.

April 1.

branchlets. The number of the herons has decreased, the keeper thinks, since the long frost, when the ponds were ice-bound and abandoned by moor-hen and wild duck; at which season the birds are much abroad in foraging, at the river-side or remote marshlands, and a prey to every gunner. Not more than five or six nests could we then make out. One contained six eggs, an unusual number; like a wild duck's in size and colour, but rough and chalky in the surface of the shell, as many sea-birds' are: they had been laid, probably, in the middle of last month, and would be hatched in two weeks hence. Another nest had only one egg, others were empty yet. Rising at our approach, the birds wheeled, their legs held parallel to their tails and close to the body, disturbing the banded wood-pigeons from the oaks under. When about to alight, the legs are dangled awkwardly as if seeking

In English Fields and Woods.

April 1.

a perch, and their cries are loud and hoarse, varied by gentler metallic calls and coughings not bird-like. We learnt that the colony is the result of a forced migration from the neighbouring Park of Bushy.

Hedge-sparrow laying: in a low-built nest with the willow "palms" over it: following the blackbird, thrush, and robin.

Swans resorting to their nests in the parks.

6.

Chiffchaff singing, our earliest visitor, late this year; accompanied by the gentler willow-wrens; while the Norway wanderers, fieldfares, are still here.

Blackbirds and thrushes laying and building; new nests discovered each day since the earliest in mid-March.

Horse-chestnuts green with half-breaking buds; preceded only by the elder (always early: once noted on February 1). Hawthorn following, lime also in the

In English Fields and Woods.

groves, and blackthorn with its flower before the leaf.

April 12. Cuckoo at Wimbledon crying in the oaks; and below him the first wood-anemones, flushed white. Young rooks and thrushes in the nest.

13. Swallows, house-martins, and sand-martins come to Wandsworth Common in fine blue weather.

15–17. London to Marlborough Forest on foot. Swallows' and cuckoos' voices along the road westward. Whitethroat has come, singing and chattering with his "I did it, I did," ceaselessly.

Jackdaws building in hollow beeches, and in rain-worn knot-holes.

Squirrels' drays, or "huts," as they are locally known, contain new-born young.

Snipe bleating over water-meadows near Hungerford. This sound, which is most

In English Fields and Woods.

April 15–17.

loud when the bird is in full flight, circling upward or hovering, makes the air vibrate, and seems to be caused by the play of wings. Peewits make a similar noise in their sharpest turns, diving and ascending; their joints seem to creak.

Loud laughter of the green woodpecker; clarion song of the missel-thrush; "whit-whitting" of the nuthatch up the beech-bole.

Many jackdaws' nests lined luxuriously with down and deer's fur.

Swindon, North Wilts. 18.

Moor-hens laying. Their nests built raft-like, with an osier mooring, on the water: deep in the flags: upon hidden trunks or limbs of willows: or far above the ground, like wood-pigeons' nests, in thorns. As many as fourteen eggs in one nest, the lower ones very damp.

In English Fields and Woods.

April 19.

Garden-warbler singing; but everything here is behind-hand, the white-thorn black and bare and no thrushes laying. We are as a rule two weeks behind the neighbourhood of London.

Willow budding, with its pennon leaves uncurling.

Chiffchaff sings "chiff-chaff" several times, ending with the same syllable twice called — "chiff-chiff." He sings whilst flying.

Yellow-ammer, besides singing, ejaculates "bit-bit" when perched and alarmed.

20.

Meadows rare with cowslips; deep purple later, with lush early orchis.

Woodlark singing. His song like a snatch from the skylark's, uttered too whilst soaring and descending as well as from a perch; wistful, but sweeter than that of his cloud-loving relative; delicate concluding notes "sweet-sweet," which also the skylark has, but with more fire.

In English Fields and Woods.

April 20.

Pilewort (lesser celandine) blossoming; a month earlier in Surrey.

Chaffinch building: an early date.

Nightingale singing: much earlier in eastern woods: not to be confounded with any other, thrush or blackcap; powerful and characteristically bubbling; the finest bursts led up to by whinings.

Blackcap singing, sweetly wild.

21.

Blackthorn steeped in blossom now.

Reeds piercing the ripples of the brook, with twin blades curved and meeting like calipers.

22.

Kestrels much disconcerted by light gusts, and in the breathless noons they often slip weakly on from their hovering.

Woodlark sings often from telegraph wires, and from dead-bare branches on the tree-tops; so, too, the yellow-ammer and chaffinch.

In English Fields and Woods.

April 22.

The black hedges now emeralded with hawthorn-buds.

Gorse—often in bloom when the stem is dry and dead-seeming, and the thorny branches crack saplessly.

Partridges urge a lowly flight over the meadows, hedge-high, by abrupt wing-flaps, each of which carry them several yards.

Peewits fight over the furrows—buffet and parry in mid-air adroitly; each turn seems a conceit to display the pied plumes.

Broad-leaved garlic, with its furled leaves like lily-of-the-valley, covering the mounds like arum in February.

23.

Bold bluff music of the thrush; chiding sometimes, with the common thrush-phrase "Did he do it!" that shamed us in our robber days.

Elm-bole green with the first leaves, low down.

In English Fields and Woods.

April 23.

Dead leaves on the oaks; husks on the beeches.

Marsh-marigolds or "bubbles" in blossom with the dull-flowered lilac butterbur.

Ash-sprays out to greet the earliest sedge-warbler.

Coots laying in piled nests of drenched water-weeds and jointed "mare's-tail."

Young dipper abroad at Coate Reservoir.

Cuckoo-flowers in the damp meadows.

27.

Chaffinch laying; one egg each morning, till five are told.

Nightingales, quarrelling in the midst of their song, break away but keep up a careless note in flight.

Wren sings from all heights and whilst flying, when the movement obviously hurries the already hurrying lilt.

29.

Moschatel blossoming with its green fivefold flower.

In English Fields and Woods.

April 29. Red-robin flowering in crowded ranks along the steep hedge-banks and in dank hollows.

30. Beech out in leaf with the sycamore, which begins to shower its green-yellow bloom on to the thin sward under.

May 2. Orange-tip butterflies first seen, threading the coppice with a flight like blown leaves.

Early field scorpion-grass, a miniature hairy forget-me-not, blossoming from crannies in an old ha-ha: pale blue, earliest of its kind.

Mares'-tails not only grow in marshy land and even quite submerged, but in the driest spots, such as seldom-used railway embankments where the riddled chalk will not hold water an hour: here it grows, among the metals, with colts-foot and wild carrot and poppy.

In English Fields and Woods.

May 3.

Coltsfoot down floating everywhere: the linnet takes it for her nest in the furze.

Dead-nettle flowers: found in January, June, and November.

Cuckoo, courting with drooped wings, bobbing head and tail, and twisting body, with a laughing guttural "coo-coo-coo-ga!"

Hum of bees loud round the stacked withy wands, golden with catkins that live long after the cutting of the branches.

"I be fond of a crazy!"—the "crazy" is the Wiltshireman's buttercup; so also, the marsh-marigold is the "water-crazy."

4.

Hedge-sparrows laying still.

Lesser whitethroat cradling his lightly woven nest in the blackthorn, whose blossom, mingling with the hawthorn boughs, is often taken for the may.

In English Fields and Woods.

Sedge-warbler bathes singing in the rillets after rain.

May 6.

Oak-buds losing their nut-brown for the green of bursting leaves.

Buds more backward on the pollarded ash-trees than on the free-grown giants.

The linnets are breeding, but come in bands to the dandelions, whose flowerless husks they tear and empty.

Ribwort plantain blossoming.

Flycatchers arriving.

7. Swifts unaccountably late, the weather having been mild throughout last month: at last they are here, screaming about their old turrets and familiar eaves.

8. Waters strewn, as with scant driven snow, by waterweed blossoms.

Reed-bunting has a short peevish song, occasionally sweet; uttered from the topmost sprays of the hedge thorns.

Outer leaves of hawthorn partially bronze or deep red. *In English Fields and Woods.*

Sedge-warblers laying: in rushes not often: usually in underwood near water: a nest built up inordinately high, but with no very deep hollow for the eggs. *May* 10.

Pæonies in the cottage gardens.

Whinchat laying: five blue eggs, paler than the hedge-sparrow's, and having very few faint red stains. Nest, deeply hidden under the jags of an old willow at the root, built carelessly of grey bents, rootlets, moss, and little hair.

Horse-chestnut thick with bloom: a week earlier in London. 11.

Dragonflies abroad, spinning over the pools.

Reed-bunting has a nest of five eggs: built in the midst of rushes round which the outer bents are woven: coarsely

In English Fields and Woods.

May 11. needled, and large for the bird's size: framework of brittle grasses lined with black hair.

13. Herb Robert flowering, with faint pink, rarely white; giving out an unpleasant odour from its dry downy leaves.

Laburnum founts of blossom.

Ash-leaves, bronzed before they are full-spread.

14. Hawthorns covered up in bloom: a tardy blossoming, and the trees open their flowers one after another, some being thick with unopened buds in June.

Bird's-foot trefoil in gold-and-orange flower; a mere film of herbage on the parched chalk-downs, but several feet high in the damp hollows. The favourite lotus of Jefferies.

Oaks yellowed by slim catkins.

Comfrey or boneset blossoming with peals of white or purple bells over

a mass of coarse foliage: kept in a hallowed corner of their gardens by the cottagers. *In English Fields and Woods.* *May* 14.

Five eggs, one by one, on five successive mornings in the whitethroat's nest. 16.

Greenfinch laying in a hair-and-moss nest up in the thorns: nest and eggs often like the linnet's—the former usually larger and more careless, the latter larger and with finer markings. While the linnet's eggs are often pearly, the greenfinch's are generally blue. 17.

Bullfinch laying: one pure-white egg among four others, dark-blue with blotches of red and chocolate.

Delicate ivy-leaved toadflax covering the ha-ha with its pale foliage and faint pink flowers.

Meadow crane's-bill flowering, with its 21.

In English Fields and Woods.

May 21.

blossoms, large, widespread, of various purple, quickly fading; its intricately cut foliage dashed here and there with scarlet.

Chaffinch laying: eggs newly laid on every day of this month: in one case a pale green, without spot or line, unusually frail and dusted with chalk.

Evening campion or white campion blossoming very commonly: on chalky soil in particular: noticed with harebell and toadflax on London railway embankments.

21–26. *Clifton.*

Swifts very numerous in the neighbourhood: in the Avon rocks and on every side. Nightingales in the Leigh Woods and on the hither bank of Avon commonly: their song piercing strongly across the broadest pass from cliff to cliff.

Jackdaws never so common as here—

building in the midst of this town of groves, and in the rocks inaccessibly. *In English Fields and Woods.* — *May* 21–26.

The luxuriant greenery of the gardens and avenues and clumps within the town itself loud all day with cuckoos, who, where there is little poultry, waken us at dawn.

Hawthorns on the Downs just flowering: smothered in yet by flowerless wild clematis.

Goose-grass pearling the hedges with its strings of little blooms, climbing over all inextricably.

Hot-coloured tormentil flowers.

Globe-flower in blossom.

Brooklime in tiny flower: a speedwell, and blue and beautiful as the other speedwells.

Swindon. 27–31.

True May forget-me-nots in the wet hollows, and densely among the water- 27.

In English Fields and Woods.

May 27. side rushes: some flowers, pure white with the blue trembling through as in the lining of a shell.

White bryony in flower: green-ribbed blossoms among its many-angled leaves, that fling themselves, as it were, aloft on airy tendrils.

28. Young whitethroats gaping in the nest.

Yellow iris coming into flower in the broad reed beds at Coate among its willow-islets.

29. Herb bennet or avens blossoming; its yellow flowers succeeded by bright deep-red plumes, bristling all over.

31. Honeysuckle in flower.

Moorhens and coots still laying at Coate.

Mowing begins on the broad billowy meadow that slopes to the forget-me-nots at the southern water's-edge of Coate

In English Fields and Woods.

May 31.

Reservoir: near it, in the water now, is the hollowed oak; and on shore an old crab-tree whose bark the cattle have rubbed to a polished red—to it the chaffinch comes for horsehair in the chinks. All along the shore is a row of young willows where the house-martins linger with the bank-swallows and preen their plumes and twitter. Out in the "mere" pike leap: in the deeps at the edge of the vast weeds that root, twenty feet deep, in the cold bed of the pond, there are great tench. Hither, on a summer's day, the keepers stroll and chat with the fishers, and talk of the pheasants that do well this year. The keepers are from Burderop on the hill—great woods of oak and ash and lesser larches, with violet and wind-flower and primrose in spring—in whose midst is the low dormer-windowed cottage of Richard Jefferies' "gamekeeper," overbrowed by walnut-trees, whose fruit the old

In English Fields and Woods.

keeper used lately to give the boys of the countryside.

June 1.

Opposite the old house of Richard Jefferies, on the Coate Road just beyond the stile which leads a path aside to the reservoir, I met an old dame who had lived there in the old low house since a time considerably before the birth of Jefferies. She talked willingly of Jefferies; of his wanderings at all hours and on every side: and of the fact that she, in younger days, prepared the single-windowed cheese-room at Coate Farm for use as his study. The family has left the village: Jefferies himself visited it little after his marriage. The martins that built in the eaves of the old lady's cottage she called affectionately "my birds."

Ragged-robins and water-cress in flower together.

Sainfoin blossoming.

In English Fields and Woods.

June 1.

Nest of young swallows; and near it, in the barn, an old swallow's nest had been altered by a great tit, and crammed with his own customary moss and feathers.

The last cuckoo-flowers.

5.

The first wild rose of the summer.

Several nightingales have ceased to sing.

At one time sand-martins built at the very edge of Swindon old town in "the Quarries"; but frequent blastings and the invasion of starlings and sparrows have exiled them.

6.

The sand-martins here certainly are not, as Gilbert White described them, "rather mute" and not "of a sociable turn"; they are garrulous, though in gentler tones than swallows, with whom also they associate. Neither are they shy, seeking unfrequented banks; for in London, in a busiest suburb, they occupy

In English Fields and Woods.

June 6. drain-holes in the upright cement wall of a railway embankment, past which trains are incessantly whistling towards and from a great junction.

7. Yarrow blossoming from the stones of the field-roads, and at path-sides: cocks-comb out in the thin mowing grass.

Elder in flower, its scent thickest after rain when the petals whiten the sward under: the flower-clusters were noticeable, bosomed in young leaf, as soon as the March buds burst.

Hemlock in flower along the brook.

House-martins beginning to lay: thus late, because earlier nests had been blown down.

Lesser field convolvulus in flower: braiding the driest paths, even on ploughed land, unsown: and creeping about the barren sea-beach.

Common mallow flowering in dry places.

In English Fields and Woods.

June 12.

Blackberry-bramble blossoming; humming already with many bees.

Cuckoo sings, but broken-voicedly.

16.

Wild parsnip flowering: found more in the midst of the fields than at the hedges, like parsley.

Curious crying of the young rooks—a faltering "ka-wa-wa," in attempting the grave "caw."

Bee, burying himself in the larkspur blooms, each one of which he looks into in turn.

Meadow-sweet flowering: at the margins of canal and brook — sometimes actually in the water, with the lesser skullcap and its upturned leaves.

17.

Common arrowhead in blossom; growing in dense beds, where the moorhen builds, and under which the pike lurk: its leaves and tough, easily penetrable stems, hold the angler's line or hooks.

In English Fields and Woods.

June 17.

Nightingale hatches her eggs under a bramble: and her mate stops singing and begins to scold with a harsh "bit-bit" or a wistful "wheet-torr," in which both birds join deep in the underwood.

Spotted orchis blossoming with poppy, tormentil, chamomile, and coltstail, among the railway metals on dry soil.

Shivering drawl of the common bunting, as if the dust of the roadsides, which he loves, had got into his throat: he sings on the telegraph wires or bare posts by preference: quite a short song, betraying his relationship to the reed-bunting, and in a lesser degree to the larks.

18.

The chiffchaff is now the commonest singer, with the willow-wren, and he sings on to September; the garden-warbler is silent with the nightingale, and the talkative whitethroats and sedge-birds are more often quiet than before; the cuckoo now is hardly a voice, and it is strange how

In English Fields and Woods.

June 18.

few know his low flight and long-tailed figure as he journeys, now silent as a rule.

Stonecrop with mallow on the dry ha-ha wall.

19.

Stonechats in the furze occupy the blackened sprays and cry from them "whee-chuck-chuck" on the windy warren-hill.

"Brook betony" or figwort blossoming purple above its square stems.

20.

Pied flycatcher's nest lodged ten feet high against an elm-bole: four pale-blue spotless eggs. The nest was built outwardly of crumpled hawthorn-leaves, as the nightingale's is of oak-leaves: lined with hairs.

Nightingales follow us through the copse where their nest is hid: the young birds are abroad within a fortnight after hatching.

In English Fields and Woods.

June 22.

Branched water-plantain in flower.

Young cuckoo, fledged in a hedge-sparrow's nest, abroad.

Flowering-rush puts out a bunch of rosy flowers from the abrupt top of its stem after the manner of certain kinds of narcissus.

Greenfinches laying.

23.

Swifts dip in brook and pond as they fly; but more rarely than swallow and sand-martin.

Bird-voices heard at midnight:—

Corncrake intermittently.

Sedge-warbler.

Nightjar: with his rattling drilling cry, long, and seldom musical—though it has something in common, from its ease and liquidity, with the nightingale.

Larks rise singing in the darkness, before the stars are gone: followed by the swallows as the east grew white (but not for half an hour did the swallows fly,

they only twittered on the oaks that overlook their barns): later came the shrieking of a peacock, yellow-ammers singing, hedge-sparrow, rook, and wren. All night the rabbits pattered in the wood. *In English Fields and Woods.* — *June* 23.

Water-vole swims out to an arrowhead bank, nips a stalk, and returns with it trailed behind. He feeds frequently on a flag-platform of his own construction, much resembling a moorhen's nest. Beaver-like he nibbles the tallest reed through at its thick base, and feeds upon it at his ease when it has fallen flat. 27.

Grass of the rising aftermath or "lattermath" beautifully green after a quickening rain, while the thistled pastures are grey. 30.

Narrow-leaved water-parsnip in flower. *July* 1.

Nuthatch flings himself through the air with powerful jerky strokes.

In English Fields and Woods.

July 5. Last cry of the cuckoo.

Yellow-ammer yet sings.

Sparrows flocking in the unmown fields: as they rise their combined wings sound like a horse shaking himself in the meads.

Peewits flocking: in much the same numbers as will be seen henceforward until March.

7. Teasel plumes purpling.

11. Eyebright blossoming with wild thyme, bird's-foot lotus, and rest-harrow on the hot downs.

Hips large and reddening; here they are "peggles," blown through hollow wild-parsnip stalks, called "peggle-shooters."

A tender sky, stroked, as it were, by winds into ripples of grey.

14. Tall willow-herb, capped with fresh red flowers, crowding in the ditches, where

their grey stalks outlast the winter with a thin cottony plume aloft.

Yellow lady's bedstraw, lowly, thick on the banks and square wastes, with a faint smell of autumn. *July* 14.

Larks, already banded, fly skipping across the clover, with but a chirrup of song. 16.

Linnet has eggs newly laid; also blackbird. 18.

Linnets lay on until the end of August, together with swallows: wood-pigeons even later.

Small insects throng very high in the twilight air: slight rain does not beat them down, and the swallows do not descend. 20.

In English Fields and Woods.

July 21–31.

Surrey once more.

21. Succory blossoming on dry wastes and stony roads with docks and poppies; its petals lucent blue, and frail, notched at their narrow edge.

Toadflax spires of yellow bloom, with orange lips, cradling weevils in their pollen.

Adonis blue butterflies crowding over an odorous purple field of mint.

26. Wild clematis over the hedge-thorns; deep red corn-cockle under them.

27. Rough hawkbit, like a chastened dandelion, in flower.

31. Starlings whistle and chide on the London roofs, for the first time noticeably since busy May. About the beginning of this month they diminish in numbers and conspicuousness. Now they are roused

In English Fields and Woods.

July 31.

by the sheet-rain of dawn; lifting their voices as the wind whistles down their chimney-perches.

The sky cobwebbed with delicatest silk, which the wind sweeps but does not destroy; the webs recur writhing and wildly spun everywhere.

Thistle-down floats on the winds, and, drifting, lines the wood-hollows tenderly.

Fading chestnuts smell of decay, not unsweetly, like the earth-odour of spring: their fruit is yet pale and bright.

August 5.

Swifts abound in Richmond Park, haunting the ponds there with the swallows and martins.

This wet weather succeeding the late drought favours the pheasant-rearing.

Crows do far more harm to the game in the Park than hawks: the former use art, and sidle up and wait about all day; the latter dash, gain or miss, and are off. But a hawk will on occasion seize a chick,

In English Fields and Woods.

August 5.

or more often the nestling of a song-bird, under the very mouth of the gun.

The arrival of a hawk is rare and noteworthy now, and though a pair will haunt the plantations with the intent of breeding, it is very rarely that they succeed even in building a nest—far more seldom do they hatch. They, with the jays (so common near by, at Wimbledon) and rarer magpies, are ruthlessly shot.

Stoats and weasels are trapped and shot; and, so ill has this exterminating work been carried out, not one has been seen this summer.

Owls visit and are shot here.

Peewits once haunted the low greensward, rush-tufted, that sweeps to the larger ponds.

7.30 P.M. the herons return to their nesting trees: five of the birds in close company came over from the west. Each wing-stroke lifts the bird perceptibly, but its course is not thus altered, sinking as it

does in the distinct interval between each flap. *In English Fields and Woods.*

Five pairs of martins have built under the eaves of two houses in a crowded thoroughfare of shops: their hawking is done over mud-pools or chimney-tops, and literally under the horses' feet or the wheels that go by without end. *August* 6.

Wind breaks up the sheets of scum upon the ponds, so that it appears to sink, but collects again in calm. 8.

Moorhen builds at this late date in Battersea Park. 10.

Bittersweet or woody nightshade knits the thorns together with weakening threads of red and green berries, round which the flowers also linger. 14.

White bryony yet in flower: while its bunched green berries are large and bright.

In English Fields and Woods.

August 14. Herb Robert, whose foliage reddens more and more, and silverweed, are blossoming.

Oat-harvesting at Merton.

Already stalks of the wild parsley are stiffened and dead in the woods.

15. Ducks gathering insects from the surface of a pond at dusk—skimming them literally, with sharp snaps of their beaks, which they hardly dip.

17. Hedge woundwort blossoming, with willow herb and wild balm.

18–31. *Eastbourne.*

18. Pimpernel in the corn on Beachy Head: with it harebells, toadflax, lotus, and poppy.

Butterflies on the Downs: all the common Vanessidæ, Peacocks and Painted

Ladies—Brimstones—Graylings — Chalk Hill, Adonis, and Common Blue—Argus — Fritillaries — Small Coppers — with bright Burnet moths. *In English Fields and Woods.* — *August* 18.

Swifts still here. 22.

Yellow horned poppies bursting from the inaccessible cliff-walls.

Linnets are gathered in small bands, which break up as they alight among the gorse and thistles, each dropping a soft snatch of song in flight. 31.

Mullein blossoming, with a tall ragged wand, on which the yellow flowers hide inconspicuously in the leaf-axils. This plant, with its flannel-like leaves, thick at the ground, is common on the coast-hills of Glamorgan, between the Mumbles and Langland Bay.

Wheatears and wagtails come down to the chalk jags with which the beach is littered under the Head, and through

In English Fields and Woods.

August 31.

which glitter the rills of spring-water from the cliff.

Stonechats in the windy gorse, crying and flitting without end.

Chiffchaff sings.

At this time a cuckoo flew up and down a London street, bewildered, sheltering in its limes.

Sept. 1.

House-martins still occupied at their nests.

Herb Robert, red campion, and white campion blossoming commonly throughout the month; also bird's-foot lotus and chamomile, with common mallow, charlock, and foamy yarrow.

4.

Chiffchaff singing: last voice of the migrants, except blackcap and the swallows.

Clover and an aftermath being cut.

Leaves filling the ditches: the early-budding limes are many of them leaf-

In English Fields and Woods.

Sept. 4.

less, others unsullied in their green: larks and pipits gathering on the ploughlands.

Both convolvuli or bindweeds blossoming, with red purple-dashed fumitory in the underwood.

Brimstone butterflies, earliest of the year, are still abroad: Red Admirals, too, and Whites.

9.

Swallows and martins still at their nests, where the weak young chirrup.

Sycamore foliage darkening, but unflushed.

Bats fly in the evenings: and even in treeless London streets, where lodging for them seems wanting.

Air suddenly thick with elm-leaves falling: on the sward the decay is beautiful until the rains and winds have huddled them, stained and warped, into the root-hollows of the trees.

The winds become more keen in the

In English Fields and Woods.

thinning trees; and autumn is in the air despite an opulence of sunlight.

Sept. 11. Martins leave us for a few days, and return unexpectedly, still playing about their nests.

Cold white fog, whose moisture is beaded exquisitely in the late flowers of white bryony and buttercup.

Wood-pigeons cooing, their nests still undeserted.

16. Shoots of young gorse pierce the fire-blackened sward; and in the clustered spikes grey buds show and swell. New green life wakens every day: in winter ground-ivy leaves do not fail to broaden, and deepen in hue.

Chiffchaff lingers, still with song.

Cobwebs slung anew each morning on the furze; their threads hung with globes from the mist, which make them visible; but the weaver is hidden.

Ragged-robins flowering still; also premorse scabious. *In English Fields and Woods.* Sept. 21.

Robin, the spirit of autumn woods, sings at daybreak and dusk unfailingly each day. The bleakest spot does not daunt him: on the harsh western waste he sings, even now, below the level of shrub and flower, among the rocks with the sea-pies.

Cinquefoil in blossom on the mounds. 22.

Larks sing and soar: others only twitter. 28.

Poppy, ragwort, white bedstraw, and succory flowering at Carshalton.

The umbelliferæ, parsley and parsnip, we must associate with the summer migrants; at whose home-coming they first become conspicuous and blossom, whose nests they shelter, and whose hidden hedge-paths they cover, and at whose vanishing they wane: they now put forth a last flower.

In English Fields and Woods.

Sept. 28.

Lime-leaves are breaking out anew in the bared groves.

Catkins swelling, and growing conspicuous on the hazels, under whose leaves they hid in earliest August.

Flowers on the blackberry-bushes; they outlast the fruit, and keep up the bee-song by their late sweetness.

Starlings "mobbing" a kestrel high in the air. Though the hawk meant them no harm, and had not the power to hurt such a band, they tilted at him whenever he attempted to poise for a descent, and upset his balance. The starlings were loud as they closed about the hawk, but seemed never to touch him.

Last swallows seen.

Blue burly beetles in crowds upon the hills, with spinning and often lofty flight; glancing suddenly from the earth as if singed like moths from flame. They are attracted by the sheep's droppings, in which they mine and are hid. The sward

In English Fields and Woods.

they will tunnel until it is torn in all directions.

October 1.

On these cold misty dawns the sparrows chirp far more persistently than before, as if for company's sake, when they cannot venture far. With the starlings there is an endless round of musical talk, huddled as they are in the elms. The character of the morning may often be told by the sparrows' chirrup. Oftentimes they attempt a song, but the sequence of notes, sweet in themselves, is not pleasing, and the effort is very apparent.

3.

Harebells flowering, and throughout the month, with dwarf red-rattle, among the rush-tufts with lipped flowers and mossy thick leaves; sheep's scabious; ragwort; hawkweeds; field speedwell; yarrow; second woodbine wreaths; tormentil; buttercup; bramble; dove's-foot crane's-

In English Fields and Woods.

Oct. 3. bill; herb Robert; wild thyme; eye-bright; black knapweed; and wild parsnip.

12. Blackcap singing in the bared hazels.

Uproar among the assembled rooks and daws at sundown; such wild flights occur at all seasons, perhaps chiefly in the large autumn flocks. Country-folk call similar exhibitions "winding the blanket." Frequently they seem to circle round an imaginary globe in the air, within the bounds of which they hardly enter.

Convolvulus leaves stricken yellow.

17. Larks singing.

Bloom on the sloe, like the colour of the late scabious flower.

Wood-pigeons with rooks at the acorns.

20. Hawthorn blossoming, in scattered sprays, on Wandsworth Common; while

the leaves are gone, or going, with purple about them. *In English Fields and Woods.*

Fallow bucks gathered and grunting at Richmond. *Oct.* 20.

Wrens singing in flight. 26.

Chaffinches banded in small numbers among the oaks.

Gulls appear for a day or two on the Thames, at Hammersmith. 28.

Last martins seen.

Blossoms found also throughout the month: harebell, herb Robert, field speedwell, black knapweed, bramble, fumitory, dead nettles, feverfew, small bugloss, creeping crowfoot, shepherd's purse, chickweed; and a last flake of hawthorn. *Nov.* 2.

Drooping clusters of coral berries on the spindle-tree — bursting, to expose orange fruit within.

"Old man's beard" of the wild

In English Fields and Woods.

Nov. 2.

clematis flecking the hedges; like the tail-feathers of a bird of paradise.

Solitary linnet sings.

5. Tinge of red on the tops of the wands in the withy-beds, like a hovering mist over the green.

Fieldfares crowding, with their racketing cries, to the hips in the hedges.

Peewits arriving in the fields of Merton; which is, of all places, the nearest to London haunted by these birds. They come yearly at about this date, staying four months of the year. All their time is spent on the ploughed fields; and, though they take great lofty flights, roost always in these fields. When disturbed they rise together even in the darkness, and wheel far and high before alighting. They never enter woods. Their nearest nesting station, for they never build here, is probably in the neighbourhood of Croydon.

In English Fields and Woods.

Nov. 8.

After heavy rain the elms are stained down their grey bark as if seared with heated iron; beeches also are marked black down their green-coated boles by spring-like rills of rain from above, or by condensed mist.

Fog pierces where rain and wind cannot, and is more terrible than all to the wild things of the wood — more certain even than frost.

Two elms in a Croydon hollow, purely green and unchanged apparently by autumn; but elsewhere the elms are leafless. It is noticeable that leaves in bunches still cling to elms and poplars in London streets, where the trees are neighboured by gas-lamps. The heat, though intermittent, appears to be the cause of this.

9.

Russet clusters of "keys," or fruit, on the ash-trees. These keys, which have a bitterish taste, like carroway-seeds, and

In English Fields and Woods.

Nov. 9.

are eaten by country lads, are favoured by the bullfinches, who will clear them unaided later in the season.

Linnets at the heads of thistles and docks, which they have nearly stripped.

Briers and brambles laden with fallen leaves in masses that look like nests.

Thrushes and blackbirds come home singly at twilight to the beeches and keep a clamour of answering cries.

12.

Beech-trunks covered with ledges of wrinkled fungus.

Grass, a rarer green when it is shorn by the rabbits about their burrows.

Many hips are now blackened and shrivelled by frost, but the silky seeds within are safe; several are unfaded scarlet amongst them.

Wonderful bunches of big haws on the whitethorns, but untouched by the birds; whilst the hips are almost cleared from the briers.

In English Fields and Woods.

Nov. 12.

Tall white grasses standing in the woods, their streamer leaves quivering on every wind.

Oak smothered in green ivy, which hides its true leaflessness.

Oval willow-buds, green and nut-brown, alternate from side to side up the branches.

Thick bands of chaffinches in rhododendrons at Richmond; which evergreen cover they love and roost in.

Wood-pigeons come home from their forays in the oaks, late, and in broken companies.

16.

Starlings appear now in vast flocks, which the strong winds beat swiftly earthward; but such bands cross London even in the spring high over the city.

20.

Fieldfares in the woods rather than the hedges under storm.

At nightfall a woolly mist creeps ir-

In English Fields and Woods.

Nov. 20.

regularly about the gorse, overflowing in the hollows, swathing the limes low down; deep only as the gorse-bushes—vanishing slowly and inexplicably as it came. Often the mist is so shallow and white that it silvers the green like rime.

Fresh green heather-sprays coming up through the old blackness, about which bleached flowers still hang.

At about this time, or earlier, the little blue-tits visit the streets of London, where their petty migrations lead them for weeks up and down the trees, poplars or willows, that sparingly line the back-gardens.

23. Wind blowing dirges in the black woods; yet hazels have put out a sweet green leaf, smitten, however, in one morning, to yellow along its edge.

Chaffinches with greenfinches spend the nights frequently in the dense hollies;

In English Fields and Woods.

Nov. 23.

their hour of retirement is more decidedly before sunset now than ever.

Rabbits out in the wet windy night, hurrying like vague shadows over the heath.

27.

Fog thick and silent, but enters into the woods not at all, or so dispersed as to be hardly noticed.

Catkins swelling on the birches; they are silent now, but in May at their birth made a pattering against the stiff leaves.

Willows cut in the beds.

30.

Hedge-sparrows singing; and intermittently, with wren and robin, through the winter.

Seven herons arriving late at the Richmond settlement.

A sparrow-hawk flew over; in autumn, released from nesting duties, they wander, like most birds, more than at other times.

A late bat abroad.

In English Fields and Woods.
Nov. 30.

Weeding the Penn Ponds at Richmond; just as they sink, rotting, below the surface, and become less hindrance to fishing.

Dec. 1.

Blossoms conspicuous in the month: Corn-feverfew, chickweed with many white stars, cinquefoil, tormentil, dead nettles, field speedwells, and fumitory.

Caged chaffinch sings.

Rain glistens on the walls at night like the path of many snails.

Narrow gusts of wind race over the water, whipping its pale surface to rapid streaks of black—like cloud-shadows on summer hills.

Leafless birch beautiful yet—like a living fountain of branches in the wind, such grace and lightness.

Felling the old willows that leant by the Wandle near Wimbledon, once a sweet spot with the green pennon leaves mirrored in the trouty waters. The

elms also are going one by one, and the old path blocked. *In English Fields and Woods.*

Snow lightly around, yet I see spring signs: delicate new sprouts of many herbs — ground-ivy, goose-grass, nettle, wild parsnip—all pale with youth; sticky young shoots about the flaky yew-bole. *Dec. 7.*

Cold fog and frost: the numbed, frightened birds will not leave the trees, but chirrup feebly through the curtain to one another. 11.

Barred, sober-hued November moths cling to the oak palings, where they overlap.

Low young beeches keep their leaves whilst the tall exposed trees have been stripped.

Twin buds of woodbine opening out. Skin of the stout woodbine-stems, that cling about the oaks like rigging, is always frayed and hanging.

In English Fields and Woods.

Dec. 21.

Larks and sparrows unite their flocks.

Thrushes sing short broken melodies.

Bullfinches and wrens singly in the frost.

Fresh fronds of yarrow rising.

Loud shuffling of the blackbirds in the undergrowth.

Hazel-catkins reddening with a faint flush, like fat short caterpillars, in bunches of two, three, four, or five.

Pheasants roosting at night, very conspicuous on the bare boughs; sleep heavily and do not readily quit their perches.

28.

Wheatears linger singly in the gorse.

Wretched squatter's dwelling in the midst of a bare joyless common — rude plank shed, patched with sacks, and hedged by a mound of sods with thorns at top, and birches sheltering the cote of the pigeons, who mingle with ducks and curs within the enclosure.

In English Fields and Woods.

Jan. 7, 1896.

Year opens mild, with the happy songs of blackbird and thrush thick in the woods; green shoots rising everywhere; all life is quick and glad; the fallow deer idle in the tempered sun under the oaks at Richmond, or sip the water through budding buttercups and weeds.

Wood-pigeons crowd to the oaks at sundown, clattering loudly.

8.

Hips quite gone from the briers, though empty husks are left.

One oak shadowy with leaves, while its neighbour is black and bare.

The robin, when alarmed, leaves his perch, but immediately on realighting opens his song once more with breathless eagerness. He is always thus impetuous; no song is more passionate than his. His especial haunt is the heap of dead leaves that drifts to the shelter of palings: on the palings he sings; among the leaves he finds more worms than elsewhere. On

In English Fields and Woods.

Jan. 8. rainy mornings, when he cannot sing, he keeps up a challenging chatter, or a whine, which also he uses at sundown.

9. Lifelessness under Esher pines, whose unbroken dark the birds do not love; few sounds but the harpy-cries of jays or the clatter of rising wood-pigeons.

Cole-tits play in the dense foliage, with sweet callings like fairy-bells.

Squirrels betray themselves by a loud scratching of the brittle bark as they climb; they rise by jerks, pausing at the end of each impulse, to reconnoitre.

11. Birches and oaks still look blue through a mile of clear air.

Midges dancing over stagnant pools.

13. Earth-worms busy in the soil, which rains and sweet west winds have loosened.

Every day the notes of blackbird and

thrush become freer, richer, and continued longer into the twilight. *In English Fields and Woods.* Jan. 13.

Sparrows build busily with rag and rope and straw, in London streets.

Leaves of last year still very thick, many even green, upon the brambles.

After a short dull frost, the air is once more clear and bright and vocal. The bare yellow-brick walls of London answer to the sun, and heighten to a wheat-field's gold. The sky itself becomes dazzling with its blue, even towards the north. 23.

Rooks rising and diving about their nests, which they begin to look to.

New growths of crowfoots, thistle, dandelion, and sorrel shooting up.

The first skylark of the year sings, but hidden in mists.

For the last few weeks the twigs near the elm-tops seem to swell, and thicken to a mist. The purpling opening flower- 24.

In English Fields and Woods.

Jan. 24. buds, which are tipped with deeper colour like a daisy, are the cause of this. On the lower boughs they do not yet appear.

29. Dock-leaves thickening green about the base of the stout old stems.

Brambles still thick enough with clinging leaves to hide the wrens.

Titmice continue in bands, but of decreasing size.

Young wheat rising high where there was clover last autumn; already the pale-green stalks, though wide apart as yet, hide the sparrows and blackbirds probing there.

30. Gorse-blossom opening in sheets over the commons.

Great double daffodils and pale bunching narcissi sold by thousands in the streets at stalls.

Snowdrops flowering under elms, outcasts or colonists from a garden near.

Albino sparrow in Wimbledon town: very dull colour, but almost completely white or grey. *In English Fields and Woods.* *Jan.* 31.

French violets offered commonly for sale.

Frost on the first days, and fog, that throw things back slightly; but all is now bright and warm. *Feb.* 3.

The air of what even now seems spring, is "radiant with arrowy vitalities."

Celandine, pilewort, leaves appear. 7.

Herons busy in their quarters at Richmond Park. At least eight nests appeared complete, so that their nesting this year is very forward. In rising from us they made strange cries, snortings, and blowings such as could not be expected of them.

Wood-pigeons still in huge numbers in the same wood; taking an hour to settle finally for the night, with noisy flapping

In English Fields and Woods.

Feb. 7.

as they dive — looking much paler in plumage than at other times.

Crow, though unpermitted, has a nest along with the herons.

Ducks wandering in the underwood and rhododendrons, pairing thus early.

Great companies of rooks and daws crowding to the places where deer have lain in the afternoon.

Many oaks felled at this time in Richmond Park.

9. Linnets in bands still. They are of all birds the most sociable, and are seen flocking in every month of the year. In the nesting season they gather for the harvest of dandelion-seeds; all through the summer they fly in loose companies over the gorse; and in autumn their flocks become larger and more compact in time for the seeds of thistle-plumes and red dock-spires, which are completely stripped. Their song is irrepressible, and at all times

In English Fields and Woods.

Feb. 9.

they break into music; their lightest chirrup is unequalled for tenderness and sweetness. As a rule, their companies are to be noticed for a certain carelessness of array; yet they roost close together, often with pipits and red-polls, in the furze.

Finches when in flocks over the furrows are, as a rule, in perfect condition as to flesh and plumage, even in frost—but only so long as the snow is withheld.

On the wrinkled gorse-boughs splashings of fungus are bright almost as the blossom over them; others are delicately pink, trembling into amber at their edges.

Larks still in small bands.

Long taper blades of grass arch gracefully from tussocks, which the decay and rooting of years have raised into considerable mounds, in which herbs find roothold.

An elder-tree at Wimbledon covered in fresh green leaf.

In English Fields and Woods.

Feb. 9. Partridges begin to pair; racing low down with their twanging cry.

Great tit singing a song which is a foretaste of the chiffchaff's.

14. Black poplars thick with fat woolly catkins.

Larks become so impetuous in song, they sing in their least flights from tuft to tuft of grass in the meadows where they play, and will fight anon. They dance in the air singing.

Clamours of starlings grow louder; at dawn they seem to strain for the longest, wildest pipe.

Swindon, Wilts.

Feb. 15 *to March* 28.

Feb. 15. Mounds thick with leaves though bare of grass: ground-ivy lengthening its trails —nettles rising — thistles and teasels spreading prone — cuckoo-pint unrolling

—goose-grass thick but low — crinkled leaves of garlic-mustard begin to ascend in spires—young yarrow-fronds compact as yet like a dormouse's tail — elder-foliage bronzed while budding. *In English Fields and Woods.* *Feb.* 15.

Lesser celandine, a firstling bloom.

Linnets singing.

Silk-white catkins have burst from the brown willow-buds.

Moss everywhere a winter growth—one delicate curl from the crisp dead stem of a tall grass.

Primroses blossoming with the snow-drops, in a garden. 16.

Crimson hazel-flower, in minute tufts; their numbers if standing frost foretell a good nutting year. 17.

Wild primrose flowering alone; but violet-buds are hard yet.

Dog's mercury commonest herb along the mounds.

In English Fields and Woods.

Feb. 18.

Hedger cutting a hedge which had not been trimmed for more than forty years, and whose briers and thorns in a thick belt occupied half an acre in a small field. He meets with a fat sleeping hedgehog now and then, but it is getting late, and the creatures begin to breed and lose their fat. Their oil the hedger holds a sovereign remedy for hoarseness, &c., applied to throat or chest. His work begins with looking to the cows before daylight; his wages 2s. a-day with a small cottage; his billhook he calls a "'ookut."

Chaffinch flocks in the rickyards; yet every hedge has its lonely chaffinch singing ceaselessly. The flocks may consist of still undisbanded hens.

19.

Ladybirds abroad.

Palm-like, evergreen spurge laurel tall in the hedges.

Wood-sanicle leaves paving the woods where anemones blossom later. *In English Fields and Woods.*

Feb. 20.

Long tangle of bedstraws in the ditches. 21.

Yellow-ammers sing.

Bees on the sunny walls.

Companies of wood-pigeons digging for new-sown vetches.

Young rabbits already strong and abroad.

Coltsfoot blossoming.

Peewits swerve in their flight like one bird — as sandpipers wheel on the sea-shore.

Goblet-like seed-vessels of red-robin begin to drop—pale, with edges curling daintily back. 22.

Golden plover arrive on a day of frost, and stay for a month, chiefly in the ploughed fields; swift ordered flight, 23.

In English Fields and Woods.
Feb. 23.

with a loud swish of wings and wild whistling. An old friend, a west-country-man, calls them the "seven whistlers," and deems their passing an ill omen.

> "He the seven birds hath seen that never part,—
> Seen the 'seven whistlers' in their nightly rounds,
> And counted them."[1]

24. Bullfinches busy, in a frost, at the ash-keys, left till now untouched: in a few days they are almost gone, though the birds are not plentiful.

The bullfinch's song has more sweetness than is acknowledged; low, inward, but *accomplished* frequently, and like a chastened violin.

Canal is ice-bound; but green buds swell on the hawthorns.

25. In a corner of the garden at the rear of Coate Farm we find a round brick summer-house, with conical thatched

[1] Wordsworth.

In English Fields and Woods.

Feb. 25.

roof, circular window opening south, low doorway, and a seat running round the interior: this house was built by Richard Jefferies alone with his own hands, and is that mentioned in 'Wild Life in a Southern County.'

Beeches and firs of the isolated hill-top clump at Liddington all blown to a leaning angle by the west wind; in the valley also the same wind has bowed many pines.

"Oont land," a land of many moles, near the old "castle" or encampment at Liddington; acres of land ruffled by great mole-heaps.

Hare's form, where there is no grass—a slot in the ground, deep at one end for his hind-quarters.

Limes ruddy with leaf-buds.

Flocks of yellow-ammers in the fir-trees.

26.

The hare in his form rises slowly bit

In English Fields and Woods.

by bit, and returns, as carefully, after a stretch of his hind-legs or reconnoitre.

Feb. 27. South wind breaks up the ice; house-flies hum over an inch of thawing ice.

28. Leaves bursting on bramble and brier.

Starlings have got the visiting plover's whistle by heart already.

29. Stout dock-stems hide each a spider in their hollows.

Bow-legged beetles begin to climb clumsily about the grass, in sable-bright armour: they move the second leg of one side with the first and third on the opposite side at each step.

Moorhens' feet, treading the mud like "ski" on snow, leave broad-arrow prints.

March 1. Larks have paired, and fly, hover, and feed in couples; resorting often to the roadsides.

In English Fields and Woods.

March 2. At the passing of a kestrel starlings and fieldfares rise in fright to meadow elms, squealing long after the threat is past.

Dog's mercury flowering.

3. The first violet.

Kestrel buffeting in the air with two rooks, who rival him in adroitness but not in speed.

Hares prefer to face the apparent and combatable danger of men and dogs to the treacherous net, scented though unseen, by a gateway: they bolt between the legs of the poachers and dogs—the latter being slow, and fit only for driving game.

Water-voles have faint winding "runs" on the beds of streams, worn as they swim, according to their habit, at the very bottom of the water; the "runs" are rapidly erased by the water.

4. Golden plover manœuvre for an hour

In English Fields and Woods.

March 4.

at a time — ascending high and wandering far. But their "wedge" formation is carefully observed; and even when split up aloft, by a wind or varying strength, several wedges appear side by side.

Rooks advanced in their building; but twenty birds, some of them strangers, quarrel loudly over the three nests which were all that were necessary before to the diminutive colony.

Elms glow startingly rust-red with flowers in sunlight.

At evening a new sound is heard, the hissing of fallen rain through the grass-blades into the earth.

5. "Tump" means a small mound. "Tumps" are formed in meadows by the piling of roots and blades of a coarse tufty grass called "bull-polls"; sweet grass soon covers the mound, and it then resembles a tumulus.

In English Fields and Woods.

March 6.

Rabbits out on the windy side of the hedge in storm at night.

Kestrel sways in the lightest wind, like a ship on a calm sea; beats along the hedge, up and down in small curves, hovering at the summit of each—sometimes at the height of only a yard or two. Starlings pass him fearlessly.

8.

Kingfishers up and down the brook together; building at some distance. They give a high-pitched squeal, particularly on alighting, when they bob their heads nervously.

9.

The first tortoise-shell butterfly zigzagging out in the sunlight.

Kingfishers build in the hollow stem of an old willow, leaning like its neighbours threateningly over the stream, which has loosened the soil about their roots.

Willow-catkins hoary, green, and gold: the last on the upper boughs.

In English Fields and Woods.

March 10. Moorhen's cry sounds as if uttered while the bird's mouth was full of water.

Water-vole occupies a heap of flood-wrack on the shore, caught by willow-boughs; there, in hiding, he curls up in a ball, and, shutting his eyes, may be touched or handled.

12. Though the weather is mild, the earth is bitterly cold, as the mole-catcher finds it.

Hawthorns fully in leaf.

Crab-tree leaf-buds burst.

Frogs spawning—on an approach they dive to the bottom-weeds of the water; while here a leg is upthrust, or a yellow mottled leg protrudes.

13. A dull warmth to-day which the chaffinch loves—in which he sings most and best.

Dumb-bell-shaped red ants occupy the

wrinkling roots of a great water-dock; these roots reach an enormous size, are white within, and medicinal. *In English Fields and Woods.* *March* 13.

Bands of yellow-ammers and chaffinches still abroad. 16.

Ground-ivy blossoms.

"Snow on the mountains," Alyssum saxatile, a fleecy show in cottage-gardens.

Common snake abroad.

Blackthorns flushed with blossom-buds.

Common moschatel in flower. 18.

Wrens begin to build. 19.

An old willowed garden, with elms around, where wildings are permitted—Wood sorrel, ivy-leaved toadflax, anemones, moschatel, pilewort, ground-ivy, climbing the rockeries.

Green curled fronds of hart's-tongue fern linger on the mounds as though fresh; as yet young shoots barely show.

In English Fields and Woods.

March 21.

Great tit has a little sweet song, like "'tis sweet—'tis sweet."

Chiffchaff arrives—one here, one there; singing always, even in flight; among others singing on the wing are—wren, pipits, buntings, linnet, robin rarely, whitethroat, cuckoo, and all the swallows.

An undertone of summer's insect-song has begun. Innumerable bees around the willow's "palms," burying themselves in the gold.

Gnats thicken in the air, with finer music than the bees.

"Skaters" first out on the brooks; resting like a boat with outriggers; moving like boat and oarsman in one.

Caterpillar abroad on a grass-blade—beautiful with orange, black, dun, and blue in stripes and spots.

Nine-angled coltsfoot leaves begin to show; as a rule, after the flowers.

Always a sweet tender ending to the

lark's song, as he pauses in his fall to the sward, "hear it — hear it — hear it." *In English Fields and Woods.* *March* 21.

A richness, now first felt, in the atmosphere, as if the sun drew fragrances from the earth.

The grass fairly ripples with the sweet small life of creatures in shining mail—flies and beetles.

Tortoise-shell butterfly at the coltsfoot blossom; but he would not touch it when gently placed between the leaves of a book—though bees will follow a garland into a house.

Peewits always alight with slowly closing wings, as if conscious of grace and colour; so, too, gulls settling in the sea. 22.

Nest of five thrush's eggs; date of first laying—19th. 23.

In English Fields and Woods.

March 23. Willows and crab-trees nearly in full leaf at Coate.

Wood anemones, delicately flush, blossom at Burderop.

Hazels coming into leaf.

Flags show a foot above the water of the brooks.

Hairy bitter cress in white flower; petals almost hid by long seed-pods.

24. First blossoms of red-robin and cowslip.

Brimstone and peacock butterflies abroad.

Wood-pigeons travelling still in troops.

Fieldfares gather, clattering in the elms at noon, and in the larches with their chains of alternate leaf and flower.

Blackbirds are laying; robins also, and hedge-sparrows.

Tender still air of the twilight; when

"the gentleness of rain was in the wind."

Bats begin to flit. *March* 24.

Marsh-marigolds flowering. 25.

Elms in leaf. 26.
Flowers of wood-sorrel.
Blackthorn bloom.

An early cuckoo-flower. 27.
Water-crickets stirring.
Purple periwinkle in flower.

Orchard trees lit with blossom. 28.
Chestnuts coming into leaf.

Deep-red blossom clusters on the ash; odorous of the earth, or of peeling bark. 29.

Missel-thrushes sing on Wandsworth Common.

In English Fields and Woods.

Dull dry days, but calm beautiful nights.

March 30.

Gorse-thorns, like fir-needles, form a friable mat of soil on the surface; gorse wastes almost as much as the bramble, in the number of its lesser branches which decay each year.

Poplar-twigs daily more jagged with breaking leaf-buds.

THE END.

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