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# BY LEAFY WAYS.

Brief Studies from the Book of Nature.

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL,

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

FRANCIS A. KNIGHT.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. T. COMPTON.



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TO

J R. ROBINSON, ESQ.,

*THESE SKETCHES,*

WHICH FIRST APPEARED IN THE *DAILY NEWS,*

Are Gratefully Dedicated

BY

THE AUTHOR.



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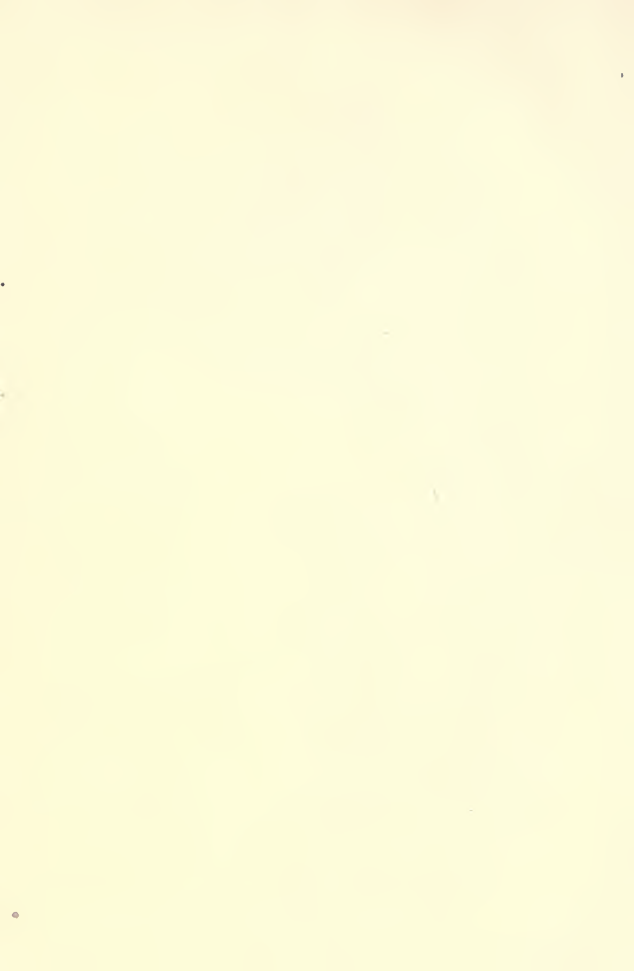
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Under the greenwood tree,  
Who loves to lie with me,  
And turn his merry note  
Unto the bird's sweet throat,  
Come hither, come hither, come hither.

*As You Like It.*





## TENANTS OF A SEASON.



‘It was the season when through all the land  
The merle and mavis build.’



**S**LOWLY, in the morning of the year, the hard hand of winter relaxes from the sleeping land. The purple buds are thick on every tree. In the copses, the woodbine and the briar are fretted with tufts of dainty foliage. The white clusters of the sloe cling to bare black stems like the last trace of lingering winter.

Although there is but scanty cover yet in wood and hedgerow, the birds even now, in quiet nooks and unfrequented corners, are beginning to build.

Already the missel-thrush has put the finishing touches to her great nest in the apple-tree, where, without a leaf to hide it, it stands plain to all the world.

In banks and walls, robins have long been busy with their early broods.

The magpie is lacing more sticks among the outworks of his citadel. In many a budding elm the song-thrush is singing to his mate on her nest in the thicket below.

The mellow whistle of the blackbird, the cheerful cadence of the chaffinch, and now and then on bright days the music of the lark, tempt us to forget the lingering bitterness of the winter, and dream of May-day flowers and summer sunshine.

Most dexterous architects are these children of the air. The nests of some of them may seem by comparison rough and undecorated structures, built for use and with little claim to beauty. The jackdaw blocks the turret stairway with a pile of rubbish that looks like preparations for a bonfire. The ringdove trusts her eggs to a frail platform of sticks woven so carelessly that their white forms are often clearly visible from below.

Some birds, whose lives are passed chiefly on the ground, make no nest whatever, and their young can run—in some rare cases, even fly—as soon as they leave the shell. But the nests of others, though used only for a single season, are marvellous works of art; and of all clever builders, the most dexterous is the long-tailed tit.

In a quiet corner of the meadow, where the dubious

path is seldom worn by foot of man, a thick briar-bush, standing out from the hedge, leans over the little brook that under its canopy of fresh green hart's-tongue wanders by unseen. In the thorny tangle of the briar a pair of these skilful weavers will set to work upon their dwelling, and the fast opening leaves of April will soon draw over it a green veil.

The structure is indeed a triumph of the builder's art. Without, it is an oval ball of moss felted with wool and hair, and thickly studded with scraps of gray lichen from the stems of ancient trees. Within, it is cushioned so deeply that nearly three thousand feathers have been counted in a single nest. All this is finished in a fortnight, or less, from the first layer of moss to the last feather in the lining. The entrance is at the side—a tiny hole, not always easy to discover. How eight young birds find air to breathe in such close quarters, and how their parents contrive to feed them all in their right turns, must ever remain a mystery. And the wonder grows when we consider that twelve or even twenty eggs have been found in one of these diminutive nurseries.

The long-tailed tit has neither equal nor second, but perhaps no bird approaches her more nearly than the wren. The materials she chooses vary with her surroundings. Here, skilfully woven of green moss, the nest fills a hollow in an old stump so naturally, that among fringes of lichen, and dark festoons of ivy, it seems but the growth of time. There, under the brown

eaves of an ancient barn, it is a delicate fabric of dry grass, harmonizing exactly with the stained and weathered thatch. Now, in a chink in the crumbling ruin, its grays and browns are in perfect keeping with the tints of the time-worn masonry. Now, cradled in the arms of the giant ivy, it seems but the handful of dry leaves that the winds of autumn heaped into the hollow. Many a time would it escape notice altogether, did not the alarm notes of the builder, like a miniature watchman's rattle, as she flits uneasily in and out of the hedgerow, betray what she fain would hide.

Birds in general are jealous of any meddling with their nests; but the wren is particularly fastidious; and should her sanctuary be touched in her absence she will detect the profanation in a moment, and will probably abandon her eggs without further ceremony.

The wren lays eight eggs, and frequently rears a second brood in the season. If all the young survived, there would be at the end of ten years no fewer than two thousand millions of descendants to a single pair. What ghastly tables of mortality the annals of the race would furnish!

The ivy-crowned ruin of the long dismantled mill whose memory goes back to the days of the old Norman survey is the haunt of many a shy feathered builder. In their favourite nook, draped with dark trailing moss, glittering with drops from water that still plashes down where water fell a thousand years ago, a pair of dainty wagtails make their nest year

after year safe from all invasion, unless perchance the visit of an unprincipled cuckoo.

Niches in the ancient walls are tenanted by the robin and the oxeye; among the sheltering ivy the chaffinch weaves her nest. High up in the great sycamore that spreads its broad arms over the ruin, a crow has built himself a fortress destined ere long to be harried by some angry farmer, and the thief himself, slain perhaps red-handed, hung up as a warning to his fellows.

Along the wandering banks beyond, overshadowed in summer by a cool canopy of marestalk and meadow-sweet, there lingers yet a relic, it may be, of far-off feudal days. For among the tangle of the winter thickets, peering shyly out here and there between the glossy hazel stems, wild snowdrops, wild since Norman times, hang their graceful heads—far more lovely, the naturalist fondly thinks, than their statelier sisters of the garden.

Now the meeting streams widen out into the river. Dark alders and gray willow-trees lean over the water. Broad belts of sedge and rushes line the shore, set here and there with fiery clusters of marsh-marigold.

Here in winter the snipe get up, with strange cry and devious flight; and the water-rail steals silently away under the bank, or, as she flies to cover, leaves a silvery path with her trailing feet.

Here, too, in springtime, the shy moor-hen cautiously anchors her broad nest of flags out in mid-stream among brown stems of rustling reeds. Later on she

will lead out her dusky brood on these tranquil waters. Happy the man who catches sight of the little crew as they make their first plunge into the world. A single day old, perhaps, they do not hesitate at the approach of danger to scramble over the edge of the nest and swim boldly after their anxious mother to safer shelter on the opposite shore. Little balls of black down, with a touch of vermilion for a beak, they venture fearlessly on their first cruise, diving under obstructing logs or steering carefully through a fleet of lily leaves with the coolness of a practised hand. Sometimes a low-hanging branch will shipwreck unawares a little argonaut and turn him on his back, kicking his long yellow feet helplessly in the air until righted by a dexterous touch from the parent's bill.

In a corner of the orchard yonder, as the spring wears on, the redstart will settle down after her wanderings, and in the ancestral hollow in the moss-grown tree will brood over her beautiful blue eggs, while her handsome mate will sing to her from the branch above, the briefest of lyrics indeed, but glowing with the rich music of the south.

The swallow will come north across the far Sahara, and find her way back to the old shed on whose blackened rafters her nest has hung so long. The white-throat and the chiffchaff, and many another rover, will return and join the musical throng that weave their fairy homes among the leaves.

Let no hasty hand disturb them, or too curious eye

drive them from their accustomed haunts. It is strange that any could be found to tear down the dainty fabric and scatter its contents on the ground. But alas! we are all familiar with the birdsnester, who on mischief bent strolls along the lane with a nest of gaping fledglings in his hat and a string of birds' eggs in his hand. He is a young barbarian, the aversion of the old ladies of the parish. The parson has got his eye upon him. He will come to a bad end, after a career of depravity, punctuated by ineffectual birchings, solitary confinement, and the treadmill.

But there is happily a birdsnester of a different stamp altogether, upon whose conscious ear there never falls the accusing plaint of the robin, or the lament of the plundered song-thrush. The flycatcher builds fearlessly in his trellis; the very oriole might trust her eggs within his reach. No bird that flies will find an enemy in him. He delights to watch and not to plunder; he finds his pleasure among the living rather than the dead. The tenants of the tangled coppice are yeomen of his manor; he is proud to reckon on his list of friends a score of singers

' Whose household words are songs in many keys  
Sweeter than instrument of man e'er caught ;  
Whose habitations in the tree-tops even  
Are half-way houses on the road to heaven.'

## A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD.



**I**N those welcome intervals in the bitter weather, when the vanes have all veered round to the southward ; when the biting east no longer threatens to dry up the milk of human kindness in the most genial soul ; when from a fair blue heaven the warm sun smiles down upon the leafless landscape, the birds—untaught by old experience and bitter memories—hail with delight the first glimmer of returning spring.

The tender music of the robin and the noble melody of the song-thrush give us in their dulcet strains some foretaste of the ballad concerts of the April copses.



The rooks, wheeling round their windy stations in the reeling elm trees, hold eager and excited conclave on the havoc that storm and rain have wrought in the ancient settlement. Ere long the dusky architects will set to work in earnest. Ere long there will rise above each long silent and deserted rookery, the familiar Babel of the city in the air.

Jackdaws sit and sun themselves on the roofs, and loiter round the gables in search of quarters for the season. In noisy troops they drift along the gray front of the old cathedral, debating, in their clear incisive way, where they shall collect the bushel or so of sticks for their respective nurseries—with small reverence for the stony lines of saints and sovereigns whose battered effigies have outlived the storms of centuries, and the leaden hail of iconoclast bullets.

But more striking still, visible everywhere, audible on every side, proclaiming to all whom it may concern that he is in want of a wife, there sings on every house-top the light-hearted and irrepressible starling. He is an odd-looking figure as he stands up there at the end of the gable, or on the top of his favourite chimney—now crooning his own quaint runes; now singing a mellow stave copied from thrush or blackbird; now whistling like any plough-boy, with his head thrown back, and shaking now and then his drooping wings, looking for all the world like an old gentleman with his hands under his coat-tails, laying down the law in the family circle.

At first sight he may seem a dull and sombre bird enough, of no special colouring, and slender claim to beauty ; and the city starling, like most town birds, is no doubt generally more or less tinged with the soot of his usual surroundings. But at this season of the year, wherever he may be—perched upon the smoke-blackened gable of a London roof or swaying on the topmost spray of the noble elm that overshadows the ancient homestead—he is in his nuptial dress ; and when the sunshine, flashing on his glossy plumage, heightens the changing lustre of the exquisite gorget of pointed green and purple plumes upon his silken breast, lights up the brown lines in his wings, the countless touches of white and amber scattered like points of flame over his burnished feathers, it were safe to say that few British birds wear a more brilliant livery than the common starling.

He is a bird that everyone may watch who will. He haunts the narrow grass-plot of the dingy city as well as the broad meadow of the open country ; he wanders by the windy sea, or on the upland pasture ; he finds shelter in a niche of the cathedral turret, or by the river in the whispering reeds. His home is everywhere. He has well been styled a Citizen of the World.

Starlings have not always been so widely dispersed. There are parts of the country where old inhabitants say that they were scarce half a century ago ; but of late years they have spread very rapidly.

There are no more industrious birds among the friends of the farmer. The rook plays a useful part, but it is the part of second fiddle to the starling; though it must be admitted that the latter is a terrible fellow when his energies are misdirected in a fruit garden.

Like many birds, he is fond of berries. In the mountain-ash trees especially, lighted here and there with the hectic flush of dying summer, and hung with clusters of scarlet berries, the birds in autumn hold high revel. Missel-thrushes descend in hungry crowds to the abundant harvest. Perhaps even a roving party of ring-ouzels may pay a flying visit. But, while a bunch of the bright fruit remains to plunder, the tree will be alive from dawn to dark with the flutter and the chattering of troops of eager starlings.

The song of the starling is not remarkable as a musical performance, consisting as it does of a strange inarticulate chatter, varied by whistling often not much more melodious than the creaking of a gate. But there is no bird more clever in imitating the songs of more tuneful minstrels, or indeed any sounds, musical or otherwise, that may strike his fancy. The town starling brings back with him from his country rambles into the hum of the city, the lapwing's wailing cry, the pipe of the blackbird, the sharp clack of the jackdaw, even the call of the curlew; while his country cousin on the barn roof will copy to the life the shrill cry of the wryneck in the neighbouring elm, the crow of the

cock in the yard beneath him, the chatter of a startled magpie in the field, even imitate the whistle of a passing train ere it disappears in the tunnel.

The starling is a careless builder. His nest is no marvel of patience and of art ; no exquisite fabric of moss, touched here and there with lichen, and harmonizing so well with its surroundings that it seems part of the very branch in which it is cradled. It is almost invariably placed in a hole of some kind, often under the tiles of a house. Here, it is in the hollow of an ancient tree ; there, a few untidy ends of straw hanging out of a niche betray its presence high up in the ruined tower of the dismantled abbey. Now it rouses the ire of the householder by stopping up the rain-pipe ; now it is under the brown thatch of the old farm gable. A favourite nesting place is a woodpecker's hole, new or old, and the starling is most unscrupulous in evicting the rightful occupiers who have had all the trouble of getting the house ready, even before they have used it themselves. In some such quarters, in a hollow in a little straw, are laid the five or more delicate pale blue eggs ; and, when the young are hatched, the cries of the old birds and the clamour of their insatiable brood proclaim the whereabouts of the nest to every passer-by.

In the Bavarian Highlands, where most birds are scarce, and where the swallow builds unmolested in the entrance hall of the village hostelry, the starling is a welcome retainer. A starling-box, a little copy of a

broad-eaved mountain chalet, reared aloft upon a pole, or nailed to a tree, or fastened to the wall of the house, is a regular fixture of the garden. The birds soon find out the quarters thus prepared for them, and should a rash pair of sparrows presume to start house-keeping in the apartment intended for their betters, as not unfrequently happens, they will be summarily expelled, and, as likely as not, their brood torn to pieces and swallowed by the offended owners.

When summer is past, the scattered families of a district collect in flocks, which, as the year advances, swell to such dimensions that armies of starlings have been seen which were estimated at millions. The evolutions of these aerial legions have been the theme of many writers, from Dante downwards. Now they are marshalled in close array, compact and regular as a Macedonian phalanx. Now the great mass melts into a thin column, glittering in the sunshine as it sways and bends like the shining coils of some huge sea monster. Now, as by preconcerted sign, they wheel with the roar of a myriad upturned wings. Now they scatter like a shower of falling leaves upon the meadow, where, with noisy chatter, and occasional bickerings, they make as clean a sweep of slugs, and flies, and beetles, as ever locusts made of the green corn of Egypt. The uproar of such a host assembled in a clump of trees before going to roost is a sound to be remembered. It is a Babel of chattering, whistling, scolding from a thousand throats at once. Now and

then, a bird here and there whistles loud a few bars of borrowed song. By degrees the sounds subside; the restless multitude gradually quiets down, and at last is silent for the night.

In the Fen country starlings roost among the reeds, and the damage they do to the sedges is of serious consequence to the farmer. Such flocks must be seen, or at least heard, before their size can be appreciated.

A party of yachtsmen, mooring their craft late at night among the Norfolk Broads, heard strange noises on the shore, presumably of birds. A gun was fired, and at once there rose out of the reeds a sound like the rush of a train at full speed—a roar as of a mighty wave, coming in before an Atlantic gale. It grew louder yet and stronger still, until it almost reached the pitch of thunder. Another barrel, and another, and another still, and each time there rose in answer the same mighty sound; the whirr of innumerable wings, the rush of wingèd legions rising from the reeds, with the cries of startled wild fowl trumpet-like through the deeper tone. An awsome thing to listen to in the darkness: a weird and terrible sound.

Next day a flock of starlings was seen that might well have played the chief part in such a chorus—a flock that stretched right across the sky overhead, as far as the eye could reach on either side, until its shadowy outline faded in the distance.

## THE PROMISE OF MAY.



YEAR by year, in the spring-time, all through the wild March weather, in the fickle days of April, and under the genial smiles of May, there descend upon our coasts, unseen, unheard, the legions of an invading army. It is a host that no Government Intelligence Department takes notice of ; which no system of coast defences can keep out. They come upon us in the dark—or at best by moonlight :

‘ The birds who make sweet music for us all  
In our dark hours, as David did for Saul.’

Already the advanced guards have appeared, here and there, in the southern districts. Already the white flicker of the wheat-ear is conspicuous on the bleak downs of Sussex, and the wide stretches of Salisbury Plain. Already the light-hearted little chiff-chaff utters his happy call-notes, in the reeling tops of unsheltering trees. Already the tree-pipit, after soaring high in air as if projected from a catapult, spreads wide his wings and tail, and descends slowly, singing as he sinks to his station on one of the weather-beaten bushes of some still wintry hill-top.

The swallows who have reached our shores have not brought summer on their purple wings, and their happy snatches of song seem out of keeping with the chill air of our unfriendly spring.

It seems strange that birds which have known the sun of Syria, or the clear skies of Algiers, should ever come back to the fickle climate of these chillier regions. One of them indeed does 'draw the line somewhere.' No nightingale ever yet set foot in the sister island. A true Irish grievance, for which, alas ! Home Rule will be found no remedy.

The phenomena of migration have always been an object of wonder—for a long time one of almost absolute mystery. The older writers on natural history describe how swallows pass the winter in holes, and beneath the surface of ponds and rivers. One of them even gravely propounded the theory that swallows in the winter retire to the moon. It is but fair to add that he abandoned it 'on the ground that the moon is too far off to be reached by our migratory birds, and because it is doubtful how they would find sustenance by the way for so long a journey.'

This state of things is altered now. We know where the migrants pass the winter ; and we know, too, just when to expect the return of the wanderers to their favourite haunts. They come at various intervals, according to the species, but with a regularity that hardly varies from year to year.

Swallows begin to come back in the first week of April.



One of these early comers lately caught in the streets of the Bavarian capital, numb with cold and spent with travel, bore upon his slender foot a thin plate of metal, stamped with the Imperial arms of Turkey. Nothing more, not even a date, so that whether he had come from Stamboul, or the beleaguered stronghold of Emin Bey, remains unknown. But he had come in advance of spring-time. Winter still brooded over the Bavarian Highlands, and fresh-fallen snow lay deep in the valley of the Isar—as it often does long after the arrival of the swallows.

A few days—sometimes as much as a fortnight—after the swallow comes the cuckoo. There will be the usual notices in country papers, of ‘an extraordinarily early appearance of the cuckoo in March,’ but the naturalist knows better than to look for it then.

Perhaps there is no bird whose note is more suggestive of the early days of summer than the cuckoo :

In April come he will ;

but

In May he sings all day.

The cuckoo of the poets is a wandering voice ; at best but a dryad, who calls unseen from the depths of the greenwood. There is certainly something strange about a bird whose parents make no nest of their own, and who has to depend on charity for his bringing up.

But he is a very real figure in the sylvan landscape,

and the naturalist knows well his barred breast and delicate gray back, and knows, too, that he can say a good deal besides his own name.

High up in the branches of some leafless elm he sits, with drooping wings and tail spread wide, and utters, with the clearness and persistent iteration that we know so well, his welcome and familiar cry, bowing each time with a precision which suggests his being moved by machinery, like the quaint but faithful effigies that proclaim the hours from gable windows of Bavarian clocks. Now and then he makes a noise for all the world like clearing his throat. Now with loose flight he leaves his perch, uttering a musical trill entirely unlike his usual monotonous song.

There seems no doubt that the cuckoo lays her eggs on the ground, and carries them in her mouth to the nest in which she means to leave them. Cuckoos have indeed been shot in the act.

The experience of the birdnester suggests, and the examination of a long series of specimens confirms the idea, that the tint of a cuckoo's egg varies with that of the intended foster-parent, and that it bears a strong resemblance to the eggs of the wagtail, pipit, whitethroat, or other bird in whose nest it is deposited. How is this to be explained? Does the cuckoo which was reared by hedge-sparrows lay eggs of a bluish cast, and does she choose in her turn hedge-sparrows' nests to put them in? Or do the eggs vary indifferently, and does the bird carry each one in her

mouth until she can match it to her satisfaction? Who can tell?

April has brought the shrike back to the old corner of the meadow, where last year she decorated the thorns about her nest, with the bodies of unhappy cockchafers and bumble-bees; has brought the willow-wren, and the whitethroat, and many another exile home from the warm south.

May will bring the swift across the burning sands of the Soudan, where bleach, alas! the bones of many a bold forgotten hero. The old fable of the Bird of Paradise is true of him, for his feet never touch the ground; and, should any mischance bring him there, those very pinions, that carry him through the air at a pace that leaves him no rival in the world of birds, from their length and their curvature, prevent his rising on the wing.

Late in the month of May, the fly-catcher, among the very last of the wayfarers, will find her way back to the arms of the ancestral vine that wanders along the sunny wall; will perch once more on the low bough of the same moss-covered apple-tree in the sunny orchard; will turn her bright eye up, down, round on all sides, and then flash off to snap up a fly that has ventured too near her station, as coolly as if she had never crossed the sea at all, or basked in the sunshine of a tropical sky.

In May the magnificent anthem of the nightingale fills with melody the Surrey lanes.

In May the exquisite song of the blackcap half tempts us to fancy that he, after all, is the chief of singers.

It is in May that our wandering musicians delight us with their sweetest lays.

But though the world is long in waking from its winter sleep, there are signs that tell us spring is near.

'The leaf-tongues of the forest, the flower-lips of the sod :  
The happy birds that hymn their rapture in the ear of God,'

cheer our souls with the unmistakable promise of the coming May.

The trees, indeed, are bare, and the leaves of most of them will, for weeks to come, still remain fast sealed within their purple buds. But the branches of the elm, whose delicate twigs stand clear-cut in exquisite tracery against the sky, are fretted with powdery blossoms. The swaying boughs of the larch are jewelled with bright crimson tassels. The downy plumes of the willow scatter gold upon the dusky moths that crowd in the twilight about their honeyed fragrance. The amber buds of the chestnut are unfurling into soft green fans, though it will be long ere the broad-armed trees, hung all over with their pyramids of blossom, hum like mighty hives with the music of the bees. The tall poplar is already touched with points of gold, that shimmer in the sunlight until the whole tree is like a trembling flame.

The copses are aglow with life and colour. Patches

of wood-anemones are scattered like drifted snow under the bushes, with here and there among them the brilliant colour of the early orchis.

The thickets have a tinge of vivid green ; and all around there springs a forest of bright pointed leaves, heralds of the bluebells that in May will gather in a purple mist far and wide in the cool green shadows.

Daffodils have long been in their prime, and still flame among the thickets, and wander out through the stragglng hedgerow into the pastures round the old manor-house,

Till the broad meadows seem to blaze—  
Fields of the Cloth of Gold.

Primroses cluster thick along the banks, and all the lanes are conscious of their soft perfume. Violets, nestling in the cool rank herbage along the edge of the copse, betray themselves by their fragrant breath.

Even the cold heart of the city feels the generous glow ; the sunny slopes of the Riviera are plundered of cool white lilies, bright anemones, and sweet narcissus, to light the grayness of the London streets.

But in accents plainer than the mute faces of the flowers, the voices of the birds are full of the coming of the spring. And everywhere, in all the countryside, undismayed by sullen skies and bitter weather, the light-hearted minstrels swell their merry throats with music all the live-long day. The happy skylark,

poised high on quivering wings, scatters over the fields his floods of melody from earliest dawn, till

‘Pallid evening twines her beaming hair  
In duskier braids around the languid eyes of day.’

The actual time that a skylark remains on the wing is but brief. The bird usually descends after a flight of from five to ten minutes—rather less than more.

Quite different are the ways of the woodlark, whose rich but broken warble is uttered from time to time as he soars in wide circles, sometimes half a mile in diameter, and he will stay in the air for more than half an hour at a stretch.

The thrush and the blackbird—two of our finest musicians—are now at their very best.

The robin’s tender strain, the wren’s brief lyric, the roundelay of the chaffinch, the rhythmic song of the yellow-hammer, with now and then the laugh of the light-hearted woodpecker,—each lends its own rare colour to the chorus.

But still we are only on the threshold of the season. We look away from bare brown branches, and from wet April fields, whose red is just melting into green, to the flowery month of May. In May, at least, the sky is blue and fields are fair. Then these sober meadows will be jewelled with golden cowslips. Then the wild cherry will light with its pearly blossoms the depths of the dusky coppice; the hedges will be crowned with the splendour of the hawthorn.

Down in the lowlands the ditches will glow with

bright marsh marigolds, and on the banks will gather in a soft lavender cloud 'the faint sweet cuckoo-flowers.'

Alas! when May has come with all its bloom and sweetness we shiver in the cool twilight, and sigh for the sun of summer and the green canopies of June. We look in vain for the leafage of the elm, we miss the perfume of the lime. We think that after all it must be in June

'When all the world is young, lad,  
And all the trees are green.'

Ah! it is the old story:

'Life still ebbs away.  
Man is ever weary, weary,  
Waiting for the May.'



### A RIVER PATH.



**I**N the pleasant month of May the flyfisher begins, by many a mountain stream, to ply his gentle craft. The angler, reappearing as he does each spring like a bird of passage, returns like the home-coming swallow to the well-beloved, secluded haunt.

And now perchance, as, with rod in hand, he turns his face once more towards the scene of many a glorious day of toil and triumph, he pauses a moment on the ancient bridge that spans the Dart, and leans over the rude parapet for a first glance at the familiar river.

The time-worn arches of the bridge are draped with ivy, and the crevices of the masonry are outlined with tufts of tiny ferns. The massive piers against which the waters fret with ceaseless murmur project up stream like rams of fighting ships. For these battered buttresses, about whose feet the silver ripples now are playing with soft caressing touches, have felt the shock



of many a willow trunk that, torn away from the bank far up the stream, has been hurled against the stonework with all the fury of an angry river whose peat-stained waters, swollen ten or even twenty feet above their peaceful level, have left heaps of drifted rubbish, high and dry among the alder-tops, to mark the tide-line of the winter spates.

Just in sight, at the bend of the stream, is a chain of deep pools, where lie some of the finest trout in the river ; here and there among them no doubt a veteran of stubborn fight, wearing still, as trophies of victory, points of rusting hooks, and frayed ends of broken collars.

The fisherman's eye kindles at the recollection ; his grasp tightens on his quivering rod ; and, in spite of old experience and fixed resolve, there will flit across his fancy visions of the last struggles of that mighty fish, whose end he has so often planned in vain.

There have been blank days in his past records—and blank days are still in store for him while trout survive and rivers run—days of biting east or coming thunder, when he ransacked his fly-book to no purpose, and changed his cast in vain ; when he was fain to lay aside the useless rod, and stroll idly up the stream, listening to the birds, or watching the trout playing in the clear shallows.

But those idle hours by the river with its beauty and its music, its life and its unfailing charm, may rank among his brightest memories.

How often, from the noble beech woods that rise steeply from the shore, has he listened to the crow of the pheasant, and the coo of the ringdove !

How many a time has there sounded in his ears, above the murmur of the river, the sudden cry of a dipper, from his station on a boulder out in mid-stream, his white breast standing clearly out against the moss-covered stone, over its double in the water below it !

The dipper is a conspicuous figure on these mountain streams. His dark coat, and snowy gorget, his loud clear cry, his musical song, his straight and rapid flight, are as familiar to the fisherman as the very leap of a trout. His whole life is passed on the river. In its waters he finds his food ; on its banks he makes his home.

The dipper, like the wren, builds a domed nest, with a scarcely visible entrance at the side, and vies with that clever little architect in the cunning devices with which it hides its habitation.

Here, in a hollow in the bank, skilfully concealed among the roots of a pollard, it is faced with a few dead leaves. Now, behind a cascade of water, it is a pile of green moss, a foot or more in diameter, that looks as if it had grown there quite naturally.

On a little grass within—sometimes almost the only dry part of the fabric—are laid the seven beautiful white eggs.

Against the low cliff that skirts the creek over

yonder, bounded by a tongue of land, dense with willows and birches, a dipper makes its nest every year, under an overhanging root of mountain fern, whose scented fronds are now just beginning to uncurl.

On the ground below plumed sedges cluster thick, and tufts of cool green wood-sorrel nestle at the feet of the willows. The creek is alive with darting trout. A yellow wagtail is pacing daintily up and down the shore.

Hark! the cry of a dipper. There he goes, right up to the nest; but he is off again without pausing a moment, and settling on a stone in the swiftest part of the river, he begins to sing—a loud, clear, yet soft, and altogether delightful piece of music, with tender passages and half-whispered love-notes in it, meant for her ear alone who listens unseen from her moss-built sanctuary. Now he breaks off with the loud alarm note that the angler knows so well, and on rapid wing sweeps round the bend of the river.

The merry and innocent bird is still in many places ruthlessly shot, as a destroyer of fish-spawn; but repeated post-mortem examinations have proved beyond question that its food consists of small mollusca and insects—especially of the voracious larvæ which really are such deadly foes to the ova.

It is a clever diver, using both feet and wings under water, like a penguin. It has even been asserted that the dipper could walk on the bottom of a stream, as

easily as on dry land, and the idea seems not yet altogether abandoned.

Beyond the dipper's nest runs out a long spit of sand, a favourite landing-place for the otter, whose footmarks, with those of his brother angler, the heron, are even now clearly printed on the yellow surface.

Here the path skirts a wide reach of the river, bordered with royal fern just bursting into leaf, and tall willow herbs, that give promise of a fringe of purple along the green margin.

A solitary sandpiper starts up at the approach of footsteps, and flickers down the shore, whistling his three mournful musical notes.

A kingfisher darts across the shining level where

The swallows skim o'er the silver rim,  
And dimple the magic glass,  
From the deeps below rise breasts of snow,  
To meet them as they pass ;  
And they flash and dip in the ruffled wave,  
And a moment they float and quiver,  
Through the widening rings, which their purple wings  
Beat out of the crystal river.

As the angler strolls leisurely along the dubious path that crosses the sunny clearings among the thick, gray growth of young oak-trees, vipers, basking on stony banks, glide rustling away into the thickets ; startled rabbits hurry under the shelter of the luxuriant rhododendrons, whose warm belt of colour skirts the bird-haunted cliffs which here break the round swell of the valley.

From the steep slopes of the ravine comes the faint roar of frequent waterfalls, rushing down unseen through the still leafless wilderness of ash and oak trees—relieved here and there by the bright green of feathery larches, or a group of sombre firs, harbour for crow and kestrel.

In the summer-time, these headlong streams will be breast high with noble royal ferns, lighted here and there with the red torch of the foxglove, and, like all the river-side, set thick with yellow broom.

The sides of the valley grow steeper yet and higher. It must be full five hundred feet from the gray tor up yonder to the broken glimmer of silver that roars along at its feet.

High overhead a buzzard sails in wide circles. Now, on his mighty wings, the noble bird drifts leisurely up to the broad ledge where, safe beyond the reach of all but the most daring of climbers, his eager nestlings wait for his return.

Over the rocks about the nest are strewn the spoils of the chase—a ringdove or two, a hare, the remains of half a dozen rabbits, perhaps even a blackcock. For a buzzard that has young to provide for makes sad havoc in his forays, though comparatively harmless at other times, and contenting himself for the most part with humbler quarry, after the manner of the kestrel.

About the windy ramparts of this robber stronghold stretch away the breezy uplands of the moor. Here

and there rise the orderly masses of granite that seem

‘ Piled by the hands of giants  
For god-like kings of old.’

Here, the brown expanse is seamed with the deep workings of long forgotten miners ; there, are faintly traced the hut circles of still earlier dwellers on the heath.

Few figures now are seen on these broad solitudes, beyond the wandering herds of ponies. But these sad-coloured wastes that will flame with golden asphodel, those leagues of dreary moorland that will glow with the tender hues of the heather, are the favourite covert of the blackcock. Yonder bright-green morass set round with sombre rushes is the haunt of snipe and curlew.

At times the strange alarm of the ring-ouzel from his perch on some stunted thorn-tree breaks the stillness. A pipit flits restlessly among the furze. A solitary raven wanders across the waste. Far up in the blue sky sounds the faint carol of a soaring lark, just audible above the sigh of the rustling sedges, and, save for these, there lies over all the bare brown moorland the silence of a desert.

BY LEAFY WAYS.



THE fickleness of our English summer has ever been a theme for satirist and cynic, and of all seasons of the year June is perhaps the most inconstant.

But when she is in her right mind she is the Queen of months ; if others keep a more even temper, no other wears a face so fair. And although at times she is coy and wayward she is always prompt to make generous atonement by moods of added sweetness.

No other season can compare for a moment with—

‘ . . . . the grace,  
The golden smile of June ;  
With bloom and sun in every place,  
And all the world in tune.’

Untouched by the scythe of the mower shines the golden glory of the meadows.

The lanes are white with hawthorn. Wild roses blossom fresh each morning along the dusty hedgerow.  
(The woodland paths are lighted with clumps of fiery

lychnis; the gromwell adds a touch of imperial purple; there is a broad flush of valerian among the stones of the ancient camp,

Where the brake and the tufted grass are high  
On the low mounds where warriors lie :  
And, in the shade of cloisters dim,  
Unconscious birds sweet requiems hymn  
Over the nameless slain.

Peering out of tangled thickets, or clustering about the feet of ancient trees, nestle patches of woodruff, the fragrance of whose withered leaves, pressed among the pages of some cherished book, calls back memories of old delights, suggests new dreams of love and sunshine.

And while woods and highways brighten thus under the lavish brush of Nature, the clematis is twining its white wreaths about our trellises; our gardens are magnificent with the rich clusters of the lilac and the drooping gold of the laburnum, and the air of twilight is heavy with their perfumed breath.

The woods have reached their prime. Broad-armed beech, blossoming chestnut, and stately elm are draped in their perfect foliage, their cool and varied tints undimmed as yet to the monotonous tone of the later summer. Noble oak-trees, ever the monarchs of the glade, bear up on their tall gray columns a swaying roof of sunlit green.

We are apt to associate mistletoe with the oak; but, however it may have been in the days of the Druids,



not twenty oaks are known in England on which it grows in our time.

Mistletoe is particularly partial to the apple, but it grows freely on the hawthorn, poplar, mountain ash, and many other common trees. It is easily propagated by crushing a berry into a crevice of the bark.

(The oak is very subject to the ravages of insects,—sometimes hardly a sound leaf can be found on the whole tree. Among its enemies are various flies, which, by making punctures in which to deposit their eggs, produce oak-apples, and similar growths on the twigs and leaves. One of the commonest, or at least most familiar, is the ‘nut’ or ‘Spanish’ gall used in making ink; but it is not native here, and has not been long known in England.

The fly which causes the bright red ‘currant’ galls, so conspicuous in the early summer, furnishes an instance of that strange phenomenon called alternation of generation. These galls in their present state contain grubs, which in time will turn into flies; but these flies will not resemble their parents, and indeed were long classed in a separate genus. The females—no males have yet been found—deposit their eggs on the underside of the leaves, giving rise to small flat tufts called ‘spangles.’ The flies which emerge from these spangles will be of the original type, and by puncturing the tree will again produce ‘currant’ galls. )

By the time the foliage is at its best; when, lit with

flying gleams of sunlight and barred with soft blue shadows, and balmy with the breath of trees and flowers, the green vista of the woodlands is like a vision of enchantment, <sup>yet</sup> we miss many of the songsters who but a month ago seemed to have no thought but to fill the glades with music.

( Most birds leave off singing, to a great extent, when their days are filled with their family cares. And now, on every hand, from banks and thickets, and from holes in ancient trees, come the cries of hungry broods.

Many infant aeronauts are ready for their first flight, and after standing long on the edge of the nest, whose circle has so far been the limit of their small experience, and watching with wide wondering eyes the skilful evolutions of their anxious parents, the timid children of the air spread doubtful wings to fly.

Some birds are singing yet. A still unmated black-bird whistles loud his mellow musical notes. The rippling song of the willow wren is as light and breezy as if no thought of household cares could weigh heavily on him, and as if the dainty nest down there on the bank below him were no concern of his. The blackcap, too, as he flits here and there in the cool shadows of the underwood, still sings a few rich bars, whose exquisite melody seems just in keeping with the sylvan scene. Overhead, among the branches of the beech, wood-warblers utter little gushes of song, and the chiffchaff calls all day among the rocking tops.

Now in the far recesses of the woodland sounds the  
coo of a ringdove, where

‘In some nook of shadowed swaying greenness,  
her

. . . calm voice deepeneth the holy hush.’

The cuckoo still is calling, but at longer intervals. His utterance is less clear than it was ; he stammers now and then, and his voice is apt to fail him at his second syllable. We shall not hear him much longer. He will soon be silent altogether, and some moonlight night will vanish unseen. The young birds stay much later than their parents,—even as late as September.

In many a little woodland circle the appearance of a young cuckoo, like an elfin changeling, has been attended with dire results. For one of the earliest concerns of the newly-hatched stranger is to make room for himself by shouldering his foster-brothers and sisters over the edge of the nest, to perish miserably on the ground. He by this means absorbs the undivided attention of his nurses, who, long after he leaves the nest, full grown and strong of wing, will follow and feed him ; and, with the assistance of their equally infatuated friends and neighbours, will slave from dawn to dark for their young monster, while with gaping mouth and widespread wings he cries unceasingly for food.

Satisfactory reasons for the parasitic habits of the cuckoo seem yet to seek, although it is just a century

since Jenner made known, as the results of careful observations, his discovery that the young cuckoo did actually turn out the other nestlings, and stated further that a hollow in its back—which disappeared when the bird was a fortnight old, was evidently intended to assist in this process of summary eviction.)

The rambler in the greenwood may think himself alone, but there are many anxious observers of his every movement; keen eyes follow him as he strolls unconsciously along. A woodpecker watches him from behind a sheltering stem. A shrike leaves a half-impaled cockchafer struggling on a thorn, and drops silently into the depth of the hedgerow. A squirrel, lying flat along a bough overhead, peers curiously down through his leafy covert. A party of young weasels, rolling over and over and purring like kittens at play, pause in their frolic and crouch in the long grass, watching sharply as his steps go by.

A troop of jays, making their first venture out into the great green world, and crying querulously as they leap lightly from tree to tree, catch sight of a moving figure, and steal quietly away into more distant cover.

By no means so noiseless are the manners of the magpie. A note of alarm from one of the old hands is instantly answered from all directions by the sharp, clear, and ~~scurrilous~~ <sup>scurrilous</sup> responses of the whole excited family.

There is never silence in the woodland.

In the gray light of morning, long before the first faint flush of dawn, the magnificent anthem of the song-thrush sounds triumphant over all the voices of awakening earth. The songs of birds, the hum of myriad insects, the rustle of innumerable leaves fill the air through the long summer days.

And when the sunlight has faded from the landscape,

. . . . when the brooding twilight  
Unfolds her starry wings :  
And worn hearts bless with tenderness  
The peace that evetide brings ;

when the louder voices of day are hushed, the ear is conscious of softer sounds—the little, ceaseless stirs among the leaves, footfalls perhaps of tiny night-roving creatures ; the drone of a night-jar like a ghostly spinning-wheel in the dim shadows ; a stave or two from some restless nightingale ; snatches of a sedge-warbler's song ; perhaps even the note of a cuckoo.

The louder sounds of night are the shrill cries of bats, that flutter like phantoms down the darkening lanes ; the faint halloo of some wandering owl ; or the croak of a heron, flying over unseen in the darkness.



### A RISING GENERATION.



**T**HROUGH the long days of summer, under the pleasant skies of May-time, and in the sunny weeks of June, day by day fresh multitudes of birds leave their nests, and enter upon the battle of life.

Woods and hedgerows are astir with troops of newly-fledged birds, whose querulous cries and peculiar dress are easily distinguished from the clear notes and perfect plumage of their parents.

What a world of wonder meets the wide eyes of these young children of the air!

For some of them, alas! what disenchantment is in store, in the rains of November and the snows of January.

There are birds who know their fatherland only in

its summer dress ; who leave us ere earth puts off her jewels one by one, before the last roses wither, and while the woodbine still scents the country lane. Well for those whose family traditions prompt them thus to forsake our misty island for a brighter sky, and to stay beyond the sea, until the sun once more stirs the pulses of the slumbering land !

The nests on which so much skill and labour were expended are in use no longer. The green hammock of moss, which far back in the month of May, the gold-crest slung under a swaying branch of her favourite fir-tree, is empty now. The eight small eggs—smaller even than those of some humming birds—have long been hatched ; and the tumultuous crowd of fledglings, who wear no mark of sovereignty yet, no touch of gold upon their tiny heads, have left the nursery for ever.

Troops of tits, emerging from unsuspected chinks in walls and trees, are playing all day long at follow the leader in the woods and orchards.

The tits are clever builders, all of them, and few birds choose such unlikely spots to build in.

The blue-tit makes his nest in a hole—often with an entrance so narrow that it will barely admit the finger. But sometimes the spout of a disused pump will take his fancy, or an empty bottle hung in a tree to drain. Now he hides his handful of moss and hair in the pocket of the very scarecrow, whose outstretched arms and fluttering vesture rouse no terror in his fearless soul.

A pair of these bold little birds lately took possession of a West Country letter-box, and, regarding with disgust the letters with which the postman persisted in littering their habitation, they carried them off as fast as they appeared, and dropped them over the neighbouring hedge—an irregular mode of delivery that would have cost the old postman dear, had not a watch been set and the real culprits discovered.

Young jackdaws, not yet masters of the art of flying, flutter from point to point of the cliffs about their nest, or perch in noisy companies on the pinnacles of the old cathedral.

Even now the starlings are beginning to muster. Down in the marshes there are troops a hundred strong. In a few weeks, the dusky clans will have gathered into those vast armies whose orderly array and skilful evolutions are a feature of the autumn landscape.

In a corner of the orchard, a party of young woodpeckers, hardly yet able to fly, are climbing about among the trees, digging into the soft wood, splitting off pieces of loose bark, and bringing to light shining chrysalids and juicy caterpillars lurking underneath.

In their younger days, their development is accompanied, as might be expected, by a rapid rise in the temperature of their blood, which changes in a single week from 97 deg. F. to 106 deg. F., when they are sufficiently matured to climb out of the hole.

Swallows and martins, whose graceful flight and



gushes of musical song are so familiar earlier in the summer, are busy with their first broods. These will soon be ready to shift for themselves, and the parents will then begin to think about a second family.

The swift, who is different in nearly all its ways, and indeed is not a swallow at all, or even a near relative, has but one set of eggs in the year—only two or three at that—and these take up an unusual amount of time. For, although hatched in June, the young will be fed by the old birds almost until the whole family are ready to leave the country.

The swift comes to us late from his winter retreat in Africa, and, for a month or more, spends nearly all his time in the air, now soaring high overhead, now with half a score of dark companions careering round his haunts with exultant screams, at a pace that proves beyond dispute his empire of the air. The swift never intentionally alights on the ground. Its whole life, except during intervals of rest or when hatching its eggs or feeding its young, is passed on the wing. Not only is all its food taken thus, but the very materials of its nest are caught up as the bird skims along the ground.

It is not easy to estimate the speed of flight ; but it has been said that a swallow can probably cover at least seventy miles within the hour ; an eider duck ninety ; a peregrine falcon, in pursuit of prey, a hundred and fifty.

But the powers of the swift are undoubtedly much

greater. No bird can pass him on the airy highway. His speed has been estimated at no less than two hundred and forty miles an hour. A wonderful performance, truly, for a bird whose weight—although its curved and narrow wings measure as much as eighteen inches across from tip to tip—does not quite reach an ounce!

Most of the birds that for half the year haunt the sea-shore retire to a distance to breed; some to upland moors inland, some to Norway; some travel even as far as Siberia before they find a spot to suit them.

A few, however, remain, and the ringed plover, for example, not unfrequently brings up her family on the edge of her native beach. She makes no nest. In a little hollow in the shingle above high-water mark are arranged, with perfect symmetry, four rather sharply-pointed eggs, which, tinged with pale buff and splashed with brown and gray, match so well with their surroundings that they easily escape the eye.

All along the shore rise in broken outlines the picturesque sandhills, among whose rustling sedges the evening primrose and great sea convolvulus bloom. Clumps of sea-holly, yellow poppies, white patches of campion and masses of golden stoncrop relieve with their varied tints the monotonous piles of gray shingle, strewn with dry sea-wrack, fragments of shells, broken spars, and all the strange flotsam and jetsam of an ocean beach.

A wide sweep of ribbed and yellow sand, palpitating

in the heat, stretches away to the heaving tide lazily lapping the shining silver of the shore. In the distance, dimly seen across the broad brown water, rise the faint far outlines of the hills of Devon.

Suddenly a bird gets up with feeble flight, and uttering a cry of distress. It is a ringed plover. She is hurt : follow her a few paces. Her wing is broken ; she will be easily caught. But still she contrives to keep just out of reach, and fluttering a few yards now and then, lures her pursuer on and on round the point ; when, rising on swift, undamaged wings, and whistling a cool clear note of triumph, she sweeps away far inland, and makes a wide circuit back to where she left her little family covering among the pebbles.

In the steep side of the Holm that lies like a gray cloud down on the horizon, a brood of young falcons are even now looking down on the clamorous gulls busy on the reefs below them. The rocky ledge is strewn with fur and feathers—relics of many a red-handed foray.

The old birds range far and wide for their fierce brood. The little farms on the mainland know them well. Many a young pigeon goes over from their dovecotes to the island, in the clutches of a peregrine.

It is an ancestral nesting place. From this niche in the dark rock, stained with warm touches of lichen, hung with clusters of golden samphire with here and there a patch of blossoming thrift or a few tall spikes of sea lavender, generations of these noble birds have

looked out over the troubled sea ; have seen the sun go down behind the far horizon, and watched the flying colours fade out of the fiery sky as the world of waters grew cold and dark under the veil of the descending night.

Traditions of this ancient haunt go back to the high days of falconry, when young eyasses taken here were sent even into Scotland to be trained for the chase.

No spoiler now harries their lonely eyrie. He must have been a bold climber who ventured down that perilous overhanging steep, at whose base leap up for ever the surges of the hungry sea. Here, safe in their rocky fastness, year by year the fierce young falcons spread their strong pinions, and plunge down from the rocky threshold, with

‘ The sudden scythe-like sweep of wings that dare  
The headlong plunge through eddying gulfs of air.’



## A COLD-BLOODED RACE.

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THE lover of the country, knowing well by sight the companions of his woodland walks, and remembering that nowhere else is there so much life as in English lanes and meadows, is still conscious that the heath and the greenwood have many tenants whose ways are wide apart from ours—whose lives are passed, as far as most of us are concerned, unseen and unknown; timid creatures that hear afar off the rustling of footsteps and steal silently away into their secret sanctuaries.

There are many night prowling animals which are rarely observed at all.

A fox is seldom seen except when hard pressed by the hounds.

A badger does not often see the light of day until, scratching and struggling, he is dragged ignominiously from his holt.

Not until dusk does the active little hedgehog venture out to hold high revel under the friendly shelter of the night.

It is seldom that the shrew-mouse is seen, though the rustling leaves often betray its devious course, and its tiny voice is a familiar woodland sound.

Rarely does the mole come up from his underworld into the glare of day, and shamble awkwardly across the path that is too hard to burrow under.

The stoat and the weasel, conscious perhaps of a black record, and fearful of retribution, hold themselves aloof, and we seldom do more than catch a hasty glimpse of a brown coat, and long, slender body, as one of the murderous race flees at our approach.

Even the owl is more often heard than seen, and it is not often that we have the chance of examining the quaint features of a bat.

But there is a whole tribe of wild creatures scattered over the country, who, though not rare, are little known, and who must be comparative strangers to society in general.

Frogs and toads are familiar enough, and the latter are encouraged by all gardeners who know their business. Still, the toad is not a general favourite, in spite of the lustre of his lovely eyes.

The beautiful newts that inhabit the horsepond are still under the ban, and fearsome tales are current, in country places, of the terrible efts that will bite a piece out of your hand, and spit fire into the wound.

On the dry heaths there are active little lizards, clad in mail, like miniature alligators, much smaller and less brilliant than their handsome cousins who sun

themselves on the walls of Pompeii, or bask on the grassy slopes of Bavarian hayfields, but still graceful, agile little creatures.

And there is the slow-worm—a lizard without legs,—in his youth an especially charming object, with his golden-brown coat and black dorsal line.

We hardly think of ranking the turtle among our fauna, though now and then one of these burly monsters has drifted by mistake into British waters. One which came ashore in Dorset not long ago, weighing nearly seven hundredweight, may have been washed overboard from a vessel.

That the little water-tortoise of the south was once an inhabitant of our fens, empty shells remain to testify.

But snakes are our most important reptiles.

The occurrence of a 'new' snake in Hampshire, some years ago, attracted no little attention. It was the *Coronella lævis*, a common German species. It is still met with occasionally along our southern coast. The Rev. J. G. Wood considered it slightly venomous; but Buckland held the contrary view.

This snake, it may be observed in passing, is the only species found in Malta; and it is said, moreover, to be the only snake that can hold on by its teeth—a very interesting fact when taken in connection with Luke's account of the beast that hung on Paul's hand,—remembering, too, that the word 'venomous' does not occur in the Greek text, but was supplied by the

translators. The natives would doubtless be no better informed than our own rustics, who find poison-fangs in every reptile.

But *Coronella* is a rarity,—the ringed snake and the adder are the snakes of the country.

The latter is not often two feet in length ; the former seldom much exceeds three. Country people talk of snakes five feet long, but the length of an uncaught snake must be regarded in the same light as the weight of a lost fish. A snake forty-five inches long is seldom heard of.

The ringed snake is ever a lover of the sun, and you will find him any bright afternoon in summer, basking on his favourite south bank. Just over the hedge, that skirts the old neglected orchard, is a fringe of coppice that forms a safe retreat for him.

Among the tall cherry-trees the blackbird will sound his mellow pipe as evening darkens, and when the light of sunset has faded from that gray wall of limestone cliff ; but just now the birds are silent ; they have crept out of the hot sun into the cool covert of the leaves.

Tall Canterbury bells peer out of the hedgerow ; yellow St. John's wort, and pale blue scabious raise their heads among the long grass.

Lying on the bank, half hidden in waves of bracken, is an old stump scarred by insect-hunting woodpeckers, and tenanted by a whole population of its own. In front of it is a hollow where grass snakes love to lie.



You must move with stealthy tread. At the first sound the timid creature will be off, and you will hardly have caught sight of the olive-brown coils before the long and winding form has glided swiftly away among the rustling bushes.

He has no weapons to rely on ; and if disturbed on the bank of a river thinks nothing of taking to the water, where his movements are even more graceful than on land.

There he is! Beginning to move already. Lay your stick gently down on him and take him up in your hand.

He is a beautiful creature. His bright eyes and glittering tongue ; the—to a naturalist, as, perhaps, to the unhappy frog—fascinating expression of his face ; the cool skin—not slimy, as some suppose, but quite pleasant to the touch ; the yellow collar round his neck, and his varied markings, have a charm in them that no one can realize unless he has suffered one of these graceful reptiles to twine itself about his hands, fondled the smooth armour of its glossy head, and allowed the long black tongue to caress his finger.

The ringed snake has teeth that can draw blood if he is very much provoked. He seldom uses them in defence ; but woe betide the frog whose hind leg is once caught in that fatal trap ! There is no escape for him, and slowly, but surely, he will pass out of sight, furnishing a sufficient meal perhaps for weeks.

The ringed snake, like all the race, is fond of the

sun, but may often be found in a low-lying meadow, where among the damp grass he may chase the light and active frog upon his native heath.

But the adder haunts the dry hillside, the stony hedgerow, the warmest corner of the coppice.

A favourite nook of his is in a heap of stones gathered up long years ago by patient hands, in vain attempts to reclaim the sterile pasture. All around is the bare hillside, dotted with masses of briar or straggling hawthorn, on whose swaying boughs the warm-breasted linnets sing to each other in the late summer afternoons. Here, patches of tall columbines cluster on the edge of the slope. There, a group of slender orchises mock the shape and markings of the bee. The gromwell twines its wandering sprays about the stones, and its rich purple blossoms still shine among the dark foliage.

Yonder among the brambles is a cast snake skin, good evidence that we are near the viper's haunt. It is almost perfect, even to the coverings of the eyes; but it is inside out, just as its owner wriggled out of it when his new mail coat was ready underneath.

There's our friend! his broad body flattened out on the warm stones, and arranged in a wavy form that is quite different from the attitude of the ringed snake. Down the middle of his back is a very conspicuous chain of black spots, forming a sort of zigzag line.

Adders are sometimes said to be deaf. Certainly they often permit a very near approach without moving.

Perhaps the consciousness of power makes them more deliberate than the harmless snake, which has no weapon beyond the power of emitting a not very agreeable smell. The adder is much more irascible too, and sometimes the first notice of its presence is given by an angry hiss.

Hold him down with a stick. Now watch your opportunity and take him up by the tail. There is no danger whatever. A snake so held cannot raise its head more than a few inches towards the hand that holds it.

On its head is a mark like a V; the other way up perhaps it might do for A; though 'naddre' is said to be the original spelling, corrupted from 'a naddre' to 'an adder.'

He will strike if a stick is offered him, showing his weapons—two long teeth that are generally folded away along the roof of the mouth. These make an extremely fine puncture, hardly visible at the moment. Presently a pain sets in like a bad wasp's sting, accompanied by a dull, throbbing ache, soon extending up the arm, while the bitten hand swells and becomes discoloured.

Oil applied to the spot, and ammonia taken internally, are the general remedies; but the wound sometimes keeps open like a burn from phosphorus, and heals up with difficulty.

The bite of an old adder in hot weather is no doubt a painful affair, but only some half-dozen cases are on record in which it has proved fatal to human beings.

BY QUIET WATERS.



JUST as some mysterious impulse stirs the swift, who has spent his brief summer in these northern latitudes, to leave our shores in August, and journey southward to the far Soudan, so at the same season the old restless spirit impels the roving Englishman to look out his maps, and his Murray or his Baedeker, and join the outgoing stream of his wandering countrymen.

To one man the beaten track, the comforts of civilization, and the charms of society are indispensable elements in the contemplated journey.

Another hastens to lose himself among new scenes and unfamiliar manners ; he loves to get away from the sound of English speech, and as far as possible beyond the range of the telegraph and the post-office.

To accomplish these ends men will cheerfully undergo severe privations ; will face hunger and hardship among Alpine snows ; will live for weeks upon

BY QUIET WATERS.





milk and *fladbröd*; and will endure without flinching the torments of those clouds of mosquitoes of which it is said that you may write your name in them and read it quite plainly for five minutes afterwards.

But, without going so far afield to isolate one's self from one's fellows, there may be found within the bounds of our own island a little world of quiet and seclusion, where life may be made as primitive as you please; where the railway, if not distant, is unseen; and where a postal delivery is a matter of uncertainty.

The Broads of Norfolk have become very popular of late, and a whole fleet of craft of every style of build and rig navigate now their devious waters.

But the yachtsman is alone in all the crowd. He carries his sanctum with him, and when he is disguised in what he regards as an appropriate costume—a compromise between the garb of a Normandy fisherman and an English bargee—he looks with indifference, not unmingled with contempt, on the tribes of his fellow-creatures who, on similar pleasures bent, meet him as he sails along.

There are various way of doing it. You may carry your party of ten in the luxurious wherry with its piano and the mirrors and satin-wood of its gilded saloon.

You may cruise with half-a-dozen jovial comrades in a roomy and well-appointed yacht.

But best of all is the little craft whose fittings are suggestive of a doll's house; where everything is

packed away like a Chinese puzzle ; in whose cabin it is impossible to stand upright ; on whose hard and narrow bunks three kindred spirits may sleep the sleep of the weary and dream of Tullamore—a craft which can go anywhere and do anything.

How refreshing is the cool air of morning, as you crawl on deck when the east begins to brighten ! The mist is still lying on the low lands on either side, and all along the river rises the soft grey vapour.

Yonder stands a heron, still, silent, and watchful, with an eye to fish for breakfast. Startled by the sudden glimmer of a red cap, he raises his long neck a moment, then draws it in, spreads his broad grey wings, and leisurely drifts farther on round the bend of the river.

A party of moorhens out in mid-stream take wing and fly across to the shelter of the reeds, trailing their feet behind them in lines of broken silver on the glassy surface.

But now the galley-fire is lit. After a time a pleasant fragrance of coffee begins to pervade the yacht.

On the swing table in the little cabin are arranged the mob of odd cups and plates that do duty for a breakfast service.

And then the start is made. Perhaps there is a good wind—two reefs in the mainsail even, a steady man at the tiller, and a ready hand on the mainsheet.

The next day may be calm. There is no breath



even to float the lazy ensign. The sails flap idly this way and that. The ship drifts gently with the stream. You bask on the cabin roof with a book in your hand, or, perhaps, a gun across your knee, and reflect that time was made for slaves.

There is plenty of water-way for the yachtsman, long stretches of river, whose course doubling on itself makes steady sailing difficult at times, and increases the monotony of the broad level lands bristling with windmills like the coast of Holland.

There is more room on the Broads themselves. Fair sheets of water some of them, with trim lawns, and stately houses, and well-timbered parks.

Others less wide, encircled with noble trees, through which show, here and there, the red roofs of peaceful farms with fields of ripening corn stretching far away on every hand.

Others again are shallow and weedy, with low and treeless shores fringed everywhere with a dense forest of reeds and bulrushes, the harbour of coot and moorhen, and the sanctuary for the brown water-rail who loves to hide within its shadows.

For the lover of nature and of solitude there are other lakes, less known and more difficult of access.

The narrow dyke half concealed by the tall rushes will admit nothing larger than the dingy. Fleets of white lilies, at anchor in the soft setting of their shining leaves, rustle against the sides of the skiff. Long festoons of weed cling fast about the oar blades ;

perhaps a great mass of pond weed bars the way altogether. Thickets have grown over the entrance; the very trees bend down into the water.

At length we are clear. Round the lake there rises a green wall of foliage. The shore is dense with tall reeds, in whose recesses rise the strange voices of unseen water-fowl.

A brilliant kingfisher flashes off from his station on an over-hanging bough; a water-rail steals silently away at our approach. A party of crested grebes sailing in and out of the tall clumps of giant rushes utter strange warbling cries. Sedge-warblers climb about among the slender stems, or balance themselves on the feathered plumes of the sedges.

Suddenly, with a chorus of musical notes, a little company of birds alight close at hand among the tops of the reeds.

The soft and brilliant tones of their exquisite colouring, and their strange metallic call-notes as they swing from their unsteady foothold on the swaying stems show them to be no other than bearded tits, the most characteristic birds of the district.

He is a happy man who is fortunate enough to catch sight of these exquisite little creatures as with graceful, dexterous attitudes they search eagerly for food.

Driven from its haunts by the draining of the fens, no longer a tenant of the Essex marshes, a rare straggler up and down the country, the bearded tit is

still an inhabitant of the Norfolk Broads. It grows rarer every year, and no doubt in time will be remembered by old inhabitants with the crane and the bittern, the ruff, and the avoset, whom science and labour have driven from their haunts among the marshes.

But not alone for the naturalist and the sportsman are there attractions among these lakes and rivers. The eye of the artist dwells with delight on the ancient boat-shed, with its rough and unhewn logs, and its tiles weathered to every shade of red and brown.

Within lies the battered skeleton of some nameless craft. A little yacht in the creek close by is nearly hidden by tall sedges, and flags, and forget-me-nots.

Behind is a group of ancient cottages about whose gables vines cling lovingly as if with sheltering arms.

Beyond, on the shore, an old fisherman is at work tarring his house-boat, which lies helpless on its side like some strange sea monster stranded by the retreating tide ; while his boiling tar seethes and smokes as he grimly stirs it, until he looks like a figure out of some weird incantation scene, and one half expects to see the column of smoke grow denser and take shape, and become an Afreet terrible of face and speech.

Then as evening darkens you shorten sail and prepare to make all snug for the night.

You make the yacht fast to the bank in the dark, helped a little by the moonlight, in a lonely spot far

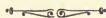
away from sight or sound of man, unless it be a gaunt windmill that rears its spectral arms against the sky.

The lamp is lit, the red curtains are drawn.

You go on deck for a last look before turning in. It is a night of perfect quiet. The river is as smooth as glass, and across the broad reflection of the moon the coots and moorhens appear for a moment as they paddle out from their covert in the reeds, now clear cut in ebony upon the polished silver, now lost again in the gloom. Now and then comes the croak of a heron fishing on the bank, or the leap of a fish or the splash of a water-rat.

Night in these solitudes is very still and silent. There is rarely any sound to break one's slumber louder than the ceaseless lapping of the ripples on the side, the weird cries of wildfowl flying over unseen, or the rush of some belated sail going past you through the darkness like a ghost.

## AS EVENING DARKENS.



HERE are many birds which are broad awake and busy from the first gleam of daylight until night comes down.

The flycatcher is at her favourite post early and late ; from dawn to dark the swallows fly ; the brilliant dress of the kingfisher gleams through the twilight like a touch of fire.

Others, like the woodpecker, retire before sundown. But there are many creatures who stir abroad only under the hush of night—who leave their haunts and come out into the world when the afterglow still

lingers in the west, and mists are gathering along the darkening hills.

In the gloaming the great book of nature opens on another play, with altered scenery and different actors.

Now, on a quiet reach of the river, the otter sallies forth with her cubs, from their fastness among the willow roots under the bank ; and they gambol and frolic in the water, and roll over and over like kittens playing on the hearth.

There are few destructive creatures that have not a useful part assigned to them in the economy of Nature ; and even the otter, with all his appetite for trout, renders excellent service to the angler by killing weak and sickly fish, and thus helping to keep disease out of the river.

Now all along the bank the water-rats come out from their burrows, and sitting at the mouths of their holes, or on the ledge that runs along the edge of the stream, eat their frugal supper of reeds.

Now one drops into the water, and with nose just visible above the surface, drifts noiselessly to the farther shore.

Time was when the water-rat was regarded as a dangerous beast ; a destroyer of fish, a plunderer of nests, a foe to mallard and moorhen, with a record nearly as dark as that of his cunning Hanoverian namesake, of whom indeed he is no relative at all. But he is a strict vegetarian, and no keeper need watch with alarm his gentle and innocent ways.

Here and there another much calumniated woodlander, the badger, has come out for his evening stroll. In spite of his dull grey coat, the white streaks on his head make him very conspicuous even in the dusk, but he is shy of being watched, and is withal very fleet of foot, and is not often seen in the open.

The bats that all day long have been hanging by their claws head downwards, and folded up tight and motionless within their leathery wings, emerge from dark niches in church towers, or hollows of trees, or the dim recesses of caves, and with noiseless flight flutter up and down, uttering now and then that faint, sharp cry which from its very shrillness many persons are quite unable to hear.

Whole tribes of insects avoid the daylight, and become active only in the dusk.

There are many moths which fly by day—the brilliant red cinnabar and the glossy burnet are fond of the sun.

The humming-bird hawk-moth is another daylight flier. Her attitudes are very suggestive of the bird whose name she bears, and one is not altogether surprised at her being sometimes mistaken for something more highly organized than an insect. Now on rapidly vibrating wings she poises herself before a flower, while her long trunk, held straight before her like a beak, is plunged into the honey-laden corolla. Now with sudden movement she darts away almost too swiftly for the eye to follow.

Others of her race fly only by night.

The death's-head hawk-moth, with its marvellous decoration of skull and cross-bones, is seldom seen unless reared from the great chrysalis—which will be turned up in numbers among the late potatoes. Cats sometimes bring this moth into the house, attracted, perhaps, by the faint sound which the creature makes.

Now the cricket and the grasshopper hold high revel.

Beetles of many kinds are abroad. Some of them leave the water and roam over the country until the glimmer in the east warns them to drop once more into the cool depths. Another beetle, the glow-worm, lights her lamp under the hedgerow to guide her mate—a plain, brown-coated little fellow who, though he has an advantage over his wife in possessing wings, has no power of giving light.

Now among the fallows sounds the shrill call of the partridge. From the cool shadows of the elms along the edge of the wood comes the pleasant murmur of the ringdove. The curlews are out along the shore. The dark forms of heron and wild duck drift across the still glowing west.

The nightjar leaves the stony, bracken-sheltered corner in her solitary orchard where she has lain close the livelong day, and sails in and out among the trees humming all the while her strange and droning cry.

In the long grass the corncrake, too, begins his harsh and ceaseless call.



His is no welcome serenade ; no discouragement will daunt him, no power can stop him.

After having been kept awake half the night perhaps by the monotonous chorus of these disturbers of the peace, you sally forth in wrath, bent on avenging your troubles in the blood of one of them at least. You creep stealthily through the long, wet grass towards the spot where a corncrake is calling ; the sound suddenly changes its direction, and comes from the right. You alter your course. Now it comes from behind you. You turn angrily round, only to hear it in the next field. Wet and miserable, you go back to the house, while on all sides of you your unseen enemies raise their voices in a malicious and triumphant chant.

The song of the nightingale is the sweetest of all the sounds of night.

He does not wait till nightfall. It is a faithful picture that the poet draws—

‘ A nightingale that all day long  
Had cheered the village with his song.’

But he has long been silent now, and if his voice is heard at all it is only as a harsh and angry cry at the approach of some intruder on his solitude.

But of all night-wandering birds the most familiar is the owl. Its large eyes with their wonderful mechanism of bony rings for altering their focus are specially adapted for seeing in the dusk. Its downy

plumage, with the edges of the quill feathers softened so as to look quite ragged, gives it the power of noiseless flight as it skims over the meadows to pick up mice and shrews for its quaint nestlings in their ancient tree.

It seldom leaves fur for feather, but a bird is no doubt taken now and then, probably when at roost.

The owl makes its home often in no very secluded spot. We pass and re-pass the old elm that has sheltered generations of owls within its spacious hollow, and seldom think perhaps of the staid and solemn family that doze within. It is in a grassy lane, where little heaps of grey ashes mark the site of many a gipsy encampment.

These straggling hedgerows are a very paradise for birds. Along these tangled banks, fringed with broad green hartstongue, whitethroat and willow-wren weave their fragile nests.

A moorhen drifting idly in and out of the reeds by the shore of a little pond by the lane starts at our approach. She quickens her pace, nodding her head in time to the strokes of her feet, flirting her white tail up and down as she swims. As we pass the stile she takes wing and flies across the water and splashes down into the thick growth of reeds that fringe the margin.

A little farther on an old elm tree leans out of the hedgerow. Behind its grey ivy stems the shy creeper builds year by year her cosy nest. Within the gnarled

and furrowed trunk is a great hollow worn by the wind and the rain of many winters,—the fastness of the owl.

Here, on dry fragments of rotten wood are laid each spring the round white eggs.

Here, each evening the old birds come out and hunt in the gloaming, and answer the calls of their friends and neighbours from all the country round.

The screech of the barn-owl is a weird and awful sound, like the scream of a murdered child. Coming suddenly down out of the dark overhead, it is enough to appal the stoutest heart.

But there is no terror in the musical call of the brown owl, heard in the soft twilight as it floats down from the coppice on the hill, from the tall elms on the edge of the meadow, or in the dark shadows of the sombre pines. In answer to some far-off call, there comes at intervals his soft halloo, now from yonder tree, now overhead—a wandering voice, the phantom cry of a bird unseen in the darkness.

## PARADISE OF BIRDS.



**I**T is late in the month of August. The hay harvest of this half-hearted summer, long delayed and sadly marred by rain, is over at length. The sun-browned mowers who, with measured steps, kept time knee-deep in the scented grass, swing their scythes no more. The last waggon, piled high with its fragrant load, rumbling on broad wheels down the narrow lane, has been cheered into the stackyard.

The fields are bare. Where but a short month ago was spread a living carpet, sweet scented, many hued, stirred by murmuring bees and the bright wings of roving butterflies, is now a smooth monotony of green.

It is the close of a pleasant chapter in the history of the year.

And now upon the short sward the birds descend; not as of late, singly or in twos and threes, but in troops whose numbers swell from day to day with new recruits.

Some of these gathering flocks—the clouds of

starlings, the flights of finches and yellowhammers—are made up of the united families of the neighbourhood. The armies that gather by the shore—the dunlins and the plovers—come in from remote breeding stations and distant moorlands.

There is not much music among the busy crowds. A party of linnets, that alight among a patch of thistles, twitter as they flit here and there, in sweet and tender notes, and chatter in pleasant chorus as they rise all at once into the air, but their breezy songs are ended for the season.

Longfellow says of the plunderers of the fruit-garden that the few cherries which they pilfer

‘are not so sweet  
As are the songs these uninvited guests  
Sing at their feasts with comfortable breasts ;’

but the truth is that the thieves say very little as they clear the bushes, except to quarrel over the spoil; and, save for the cheerful treble of the robin and the brief lyric of the wren, there is little singing in the harvest time.

Over the fields along the river sounds all day the cry of the lapwing.

Here a handful of these handsome birds alight on the fringe of sand which the fast falling water is leaving round a little island in the stream.

Another troop spreads out like a party of skirmishers over the meadow.

Now one of the old birds, standing on a little higher ground than the others, his long crest clearly defined against the sky, catches sight of the boat that with noiseless oars glides gently down the stream. Hardly waiting long enough for us to see the bronze green of his burnished wings he rises into the air with his familiar cry—not with the anxious solicitude of April, when with every device of feigned lameness or broken wing he sought to lure away the passing shepherd from the eggs or young on the bare ground near by ; but idly wheeling on his broad and rustling wings over the next hedge to seek quiet further on.

The young birds, not yet familiar with mankind, and ignorant of the far-reaching powers of powder, linger awhile, but at length they too take wing and follow their elders—broad dashes of black and white against the bright August sky.

At the edge of the field, where the shore descends steeply to the river, the bank is honeycombed with sand-martins' nests.

It is a marvel how such soft billed and feeble birds can cut their way even into this yielding material. Having found, by experiment no doubt, which layer is the easiest to work, they drive their tunnels to a depth of from two to as much as six feet, or even more, straight into the bank. Not seldom has the working to be abandoned from the hardness of the soil ; but when a suitable length is reached a slight nest is built

at the far end, where the patient miners rear in the darkness their little family.

Their labours are over now. The old birds and their broods are out all day together. Morning and evening are spent on the river, where, skimming over the surface among the eddying clouds of gnats—they themselves like gnats at a distance, each doubled by its reflection in the water—they dip their brown wings now and then with a light splash that dies away in widening rings of silver.

Sand martins always breed thus in communities; and house-martins too are fond of company, building their nests by scores under the broad eaves of a house, or about the arches of a river bridge.

The shore under the sand-martins' holes is fringed with clumps of tansy, among whose bright golden flowers flame tall spikes of loose-strife, with here and there a patch of yarrow, or a tuft of broom.

On the edge of the water a couple of sand-pipers are searching the rubbish stranded among the pebbles. They rise on the wing as we approach, the broad touch of white on their brown backs standing out boldly on the dark water. Their plaintive whistle is answered from the opposite shore, and two more put off to meet them as they follow the windings of the river.

The sand-piper is rather a solitary bird, and, like others of its race, mostly silent, except thus as it flits to a new hunting-ground.

Birds in general prefer company, and, even if they do not build in communities, will associate in small parties, if not in flocks, when the breeding season is over.

We are familiar with a few special names for these companies. We talk of a covey of partridges, a pack of grouse, a string of teal, or even a bevy of quails. But we do not hear in these days of a walk of snipe, an exaltation of larks, or a nye of pheasants.

Some are quite exclusive and keep pretty much to their own family circle.

Other birds again—and there are many such—are not sociable at all. Thus the robin, with all his winning ways, will brook no rival in his little territory, will allow no other bird to share his mistress's bounty, and will drive away, not always without bloodshed, any who venture on the forbidden ground. He is as pugnacious as a gamecock, and, except in the spring, is generally alone.

Hérons, too, although they breed in company, and pile their broad nests thickly among the trees of the heronry, are seldom seen in numbers away from home; and should a troop of them go down to the shore to fish together, they are as silent as a party of friars, and exchange no remarks at all beyond an occasional croak as they fly leisurely homeward across the moor.

The heron loves best the solitary stream that winds its devious way through the meadows past the mill.



Ancient willows sentinel its banks ; dark alders bend down over its waters. Along the shore the sedges cluster thick. Here, is a tuft of pale willow herb ; there, a belt of late-lingering forget-me nots. From far up the stream comes the murmur of the mill. Troops of cattle crowd to the shelter of the trees, or stand knee-deep in the cool water. Here, in a quiet nook, is the grey fisherman, waiting, silent and still, for a trout or an eel to come within range of his merciless bill. Here, on the sand, where the moorhen and the water-rat have left their light footprints, you will find the broad track of the solitary heron.

There are many birds as unsociable as he. We see for the most part one kingfisher on the brook, a single crow in the warren.

Not the bird of the Laureate's stately verse,

'The many-wintered crow that leads the clanging rookery home,'

but the lover of carrion, who has nothing in common with his orderly kinsmen.

The crow is an alien. He shuns even the society of his kind. He and his mate,—for, like many birds, crows are thought to pair for life,—build their great nest high in the mighty elm no man can climb, in a sequestered corner of the valley, or perhaps in the heart of a gnarled and twisted thorn-tree on the fringe of the moor.

No bird will trust its homestead under the shadow of those sombre wings, unless perchance it be a stout-

hearted misselthrush, who never hesitates to do battle for his own, and who would show a bold front even to the raven.

The voice of the crow harmonises with his character. A harsh and sullen croak it is, uttered now and then as he wings his solitary way homeward from some deed of mischief in poultry-yard or rabbit-warren.

The true lover of nature would plead even for the crow, but the tenants of the rookery please him more, and dear to his heart are its varied scenes and sounds. He loves to hear the clamour of the sable builders in the early days of spring; to listen for the first querulous cries of the young birds in their cradles in the tree-tops; to watch at dawn the sallying forth of the legions far out over the country; to hear their voices in the sharp air of morning from the fresh brown earth of the fallow on the hill; to watch their dark figures on the meadow where the withering turf betrays the presence of unseen enemies beneath.

The farmer watches them well pleased. Even if they have a way of paying themselves, and are not always so particular as they might be to a grain or so, they are his staunch retainers, and do him yeoman's service.

Then, when the sun is down on the horizon, they leave the meadow and go back to the elm trees under the hill. How clearly, as they wing their way far up on the brightening sky, their voices float downward

through the twilight air ! How sharply cut their drifting figures

On broad wings steering home ;  
As they seem to sink o'er the shadowy brink  
Of the sea of fiery foam,  
Where the sun has flung his golden shield  
Over the margin grey ;  
And the cloudy shore is flooded o'er  
With a line of gleaming spray.

## SABRINA FAIR.

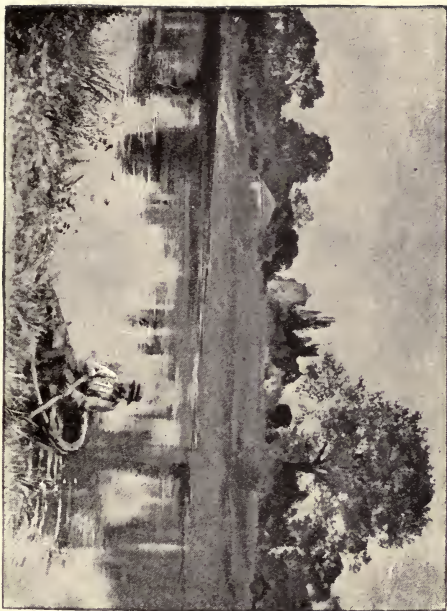


‘ Sabrina fair,  
Listen where thou art sitting  
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave ;  
In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair ;  
Listen for dear honour’s sake,  
Goddess of the silver lake,  
Listen and save.’

ON the upper reaches of the Severn the angler has had but a sorry time of it in these unquiet days.

He looks sadly down upon a fluctuating river, whose brown waters rise and fall with each change in the uncertain weather.

It is the story of the season. In the drought early in the year the stream fell far below its customary level. Week after week it shrank still farther away from its parched and crumbling shores. The narrow islands were bordered with a fringe of sand. Stumps of ancient trees, long submerged and black as ebony, raised their dark heads above the surface. Patches of



SABRINA FAIR.



shingle, appearing in the shallows, grew broader still, until, uniting with the shore, they formed headlands in the falling stream. The cattle strayed across to pastures on the opposite bank. No salmon could get up the river; the fishing records dwindled into nothing.

Then suddenly came the long spell of rain. The white pebbles melted away into the rising stream. The islands narrowed down and disappeared. Shivering aspens stood far out in the rushing river. Then at last the fish came up. Then, in deep pools and quiet reaches, a glimpse of silver and a mighty plunge told that a noble salmon had leaped from the brown flood into the air.

The rain ceased at length, and the stream went down. The islands showed again their disconsolate faces. Ere long the sodden grass grew green and fair, with a tinge it were faint praise to liken to the emerald. The grey willows shook the moisture from their mud-stained leaves. The water rats watched the deluge drain away from their thresholds, and, sitting each under the shadow of his own patch of meadowsweet, they munched their meal of reeds in calm content. The hopes of the fisherman revived.

But, alas! the river has not made up its mind. There is a storm somewhere far away among the mountains, and again the stream—which never yet has fallen to its summer level—swells high and covers up the reappearing way-marks.

And in days like these, when the water\* which has fallen a foot by the evening has risen two by the morning, the rod is of little use. The salmon will look at nothing you can offer them. The trout and the grayling make no sign.

In days like these, when the creel hangs on the wall and the rod stands idle in a corner, the angler turns for solace to the river.

He takes his fate with calmness born of long schooling in the gentle craft, nor bemoans with useless plaint the fickleness of the weather.

There is always the river, with the charm of its beauty and the magic of its song. The angler is like the gentle scholar the poet sings of, who

‘—wandered away and away  
With Nature, the dear old nurse ;  
And she sang to him night and day  
The rhymes of the universe.’

Many a lyric has she sung to him in the solitudes of mountain streams. Many a time has she soothed his soul with the babble of the water, the voices of the birds, the very breath of flowers. And so here, along this stately river, he turns for solace and companionship to the timid creatures whose bright eyes watch him shyly from the shore ; he listens to the great voice of the stream itself, here round some bold headland rushing strong, there rustling softly in its fringe of reeds.

It is at dawn that the river shows its fairest face.



The day opens with the soft haze so ominous of heat. Mist is still rising from low-lying fields ; trailing clouds linger round the crest of the Wrekin.

From the rude landing-stage yonder a party of fishermen are putting off in their punts. If the rod is useless there are other ways of catching fish, and these men in their clumsy boats may contrive to net a salmon or two when the oldest hand would throw his flies in vain. But it is hard work at the best of times, and this year has hardly been worth the candle—that is to say, the licence, and the net, and the worries of the water-bailiff.

The punts are worked against the stream until a point is reached above the place where late last night a salmon rose. The net is paid out. Each boat takes an end, and the two then manœuvre so as to sweep the pool.

In order to frighten the fish from getting past the ends of the net, stones are thrown into the water, and a great splashing made with an instrument called a 'splanger'—a pole with a disc of leather at the end. The net is drawn slowly into a shallow.

It is often blank. Now and then a pike, or, better still, a large trout is taken. Less frequently the plunging corks betray to the eager eyes of the fishermen the presence of better game, and as the net comes in a great gleam of silver proclaims that the king of fish is entangled in the fatal meshes.

To-day there are two of them. The old man in

command—whose weather-beaten face seems in keeping with the battered timbers of his boat—well pleased with his morning's work, gets in his tackle.

The long poles are stowed in the punts, paddles are got out, and the old craft drift easily down the swift current and disappear round the bend of the river.

Our way lies up the stream. It is six o'clock : a glorious morning. Broad meadows glisten in the dew. Long fields of grain are touched with the gold of sunrise.

Suddenly three wild ducks get up, with a prodigious splash, as we pass their quiet creek.

A swan, startled by the sound, spreads his broad white pinions, and paddles along the surface with his great black feet for fifty yards before he gets up way enough to trust to his wings alone.

A couple of dab-chicks farther on look round, and then dive out of sight, coming up a dozen yards nearer shore. Then showing their brown heads a moment only they dive again, and are seen no more, coming up, no doubt, in the safe shelter of the willow-beds.

A little company of goldfinches, which just now were carelessly chattering to each other in their sweet and breezy way, stop suddenly and begin to scold violently. A blackbird rushes screaming out of a thicket, where a wren takes up the cry and sounds an alarm at the top of her little voice. A score of shrill

little tongues join in the chorus, and excited little figures leap from bough to bough in hot pursuit of some unseen enemy.

There he goes! a stoat cantering along under the bank. Entirely oblivious of the hue and cry overhead, he pauses here to look into a rabbit-hole, there to peer into a hollow tree. Now, quickening his pace, he disappears, while the angry birds follow him still with cries of warning and indignation.

Yonder is a man fishing from a coracle. It is a strange coincidence that he has moored it just where Watling Street passes the river by a long disused ford. Under the picturesque little village, that clusters round the square tower on the rising ground, lies buried an old Roman town. Broad fields of barley ripen round the ruins of the little forum. Fragments of sculptured stone are built into the cottage walls. The very gates of the churchyard are hung from pillars that adorned a heathen temple.

For ever silent are the streets of that little colony. Unknown to that dark-bearded fisherman the dress, the speech, the manners of its lost inhabitants. But the boat he uses is the boat they used. Its build, its paddle, the manner of carrying it, have outlasted the changes of twenty centuries.

By this time the sun is high in the heavens. It deepens the warm red of the cliffs by the river, and whitens the canvas of the little tent some rovers have pitched by the shore.

The birds that chattered to each other as the morning broke are silent in the heat.

A kingfisher shoots like an arrow down the stream from his perch on an old punt moored under a willow. A few pigeons drop lazily into the ripening barley. A greenfinch alone breaks the stillness with that drowsy monotone so suggestive of indolence and sleep.

Not every peerless dawn is followed by a perfect evening. As the sun sinks in the west great masses of cloud that have long been gathering up from the southward spread themselves rapidly over the sky.

A few scattered drops mar the silver of the water. Then all the wide landscape is veiled by the grey robe of the rain. The river darkens under the leaden sky, while gusts of fierce wind ruffle it here and there with sudden flaw. Dark and chill the evening closes in, a lurid glare in the west showing where the sun went down in the angry cloud-wrack.

Or it may be that the day of sunshine is crowned by a peaceful twilight.

No breath of wind disturbs the silver stream. The low banks with their fringe of grey willows ; the cattle ruminating in the meadows ; the tall trees by the shore ; the few soft clouds that float across the clear wide heaven, are reflected in the magic mirror so faithfully that none can tell where the image ends and reality begins. In the wake of the boat the water is broken into alternate lines of silver and crimson. A belt of fir trees stands cold and dark against the glowing sky.

Turtle-doves, disturbed by the sound of oars from their roost among the alders, flutter noisily from their cover and vanish hastily on whistling wings.

Bats skimming over the surface like phantom swallows, and dipping down now and then with light touch even to the water, appear for a moment as they pass the boat.

But now the light on shore looks down with welcome gleam. The current will take us to our moorings.

'Drops the light drip of the suspended oar  
While chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol more.'

## ALL AMONG THE BARLEY.



'Come out, 'tis now September ;  
The Hunter's Moon's begun,  
And, through the wheaten stubble,  
Is heard the frequent gun.  
All among the barley,  
Who would not be blithe ;  
When the free and happy barley  
Is smiling on the scythe ?'

**WE** are on the threshold of the Autumn. Plain  
to read are the tokens of its coming.

Faint and shadowy lines they are which divide the  
other seasons. Winter, ever parting with reluctance,  
is apt to steal back in the night and leave his traces  
even on the flowers. It were hard to say when Spring  
has ended and the Summer set in.

But the story of Autumn is traced in bolder letters  
and more certain tones—its closing chapters even in  
characters of fire.

The air grows sharper and the days draw in. Longer  
still and heavier, lies the dew upon the glistening  
fields. Grey mists, that after sundown brood over

rich meadows like a fate, linger in the valleys like phantoms, sullenly retiring in the dawn.

On the hills there is the first warm flush of heather that ere long, mingling its purple with the gold of blossomed furze, will spread over all the broad brown slopes like the light of sunset. ✓

The trees begin to brighten as under the touch of Midas. The chestnut wears a tinge of gold. The hedgerow is lighted with the fiery foliage of the maple. The sombre tones of the woodland are broken with the young leafage of the oak—here pale yellow changing into bronze, there tipped with points of vivid scarlet.

Each gust of wind shakes down a shower of rustling leaves, and in all the air there is an odour of decay.

There are broader dashes of colour in the fields of corn, where, under the magic of the sunlight, green is melting into gold.

Through the long wet summer days, while the ruined hay lay rotting on the ground, while the farmer was chafing at the dull weather and the frequent rain, the corn grew tall and strong, until the well-filled ears wanted nothing but a spell of sunshine.

But, alas! the sky is leaden and the air is chill. Ours is a fickle climate, at the best. We know it well. The only disappointments it brings us are for the most part when the weather turns out better than we had hoped for. ✓

We have long abandoned to the poets the praises

of the Spring. We expect her to play us false. We are only too well accustomed, after welcoming the early primrose, to see the landscape whiten under a fresh touch of winter. Yes—

‘The Spring, she is a young maid  
That does not know her mind.’

And Summer too, for all the charm of her early dawns and pleasant twilights, her green draperies, and her wealth of flowers :—

‘And Summer is a tyrant  
Of most unrighteous kind.’

But we look away from all this with the firm faith that Autumn at least will be kind to us :—

‘But Autumn is an old friend  
That loves one all he can,  
And that brings the happy barley  
To glad the heart of man.’

But now that Autumn is upon us he deals his gifts with grudging hand. The days are marred with rain. The half-reaped fields are waiting for the sun.

Now and then there comes, as if by way of consolation, a perfect day, a day of Royal weather. Across the fair blue overhead drift a few soft dreamy clouds. A flood of warm sunshine fills the landscape.

Breast-high among the bearded grain stand groups of stalwart reapers. On every side there rises the whirr of the machine or the clink of a whetted blade. Along the hedgerows wait the feathered gleaners—



linnets and buntings in sober brown, finches and yellow-hammers in green and gold.

Here, too, are the footprints of the Autumn. Here, among the waving grain rises the graceful corn-cockle ; there, a patch of scarlet poppies shines like fire among the wheat.

In the meadow beyond, the long grass is aflame with autumn crocus—a blaze of colour in the noon-day heat ; in the twilight a soft, warm glow that clings about the slopes and in the hollows like a purple mist.

The field-gate opens into a lane, an old British roadway from ancient lead-mines to the sea. ✓

The camps, that guarded once the line of devious road, look down from the hills out of waves of bracken, now just tinged with brown, or through the orderly ranks of feathery larches. A flint arrow-head, a fragment of pottery, or a rusted weapon turned up here or there, are all that remain of the bold defenders of these ruined ramparts.

Centuries of wheel-tracks have worn down the ancient way far below the level of the adjoining fields. The elms that lean over it, through whose interlacing boughs filters a dim green light, are centuries old. Within their cavernous chambers, generations of owls have lived and died. Troops of birds find shelter in their friendly hollows. The straggling hedgerows, unchecked by bill or pruning-hook, are draped with trailing masses of bryony, or with pale festoons of

bindweed whose great white flowers hang like lamps among the graceful sprays. Brilliant butterflies flit here and there among the brambles, and yonder skims along on rustling wings that deadly foe of theirs the dragon-fly, brave with burnished mail.

Among the thickets cling the torn and empty nests from which long since the eager broods took wing. Not all are yet abandoned; there are still unfledged nestlings clamouring for food. But the world is peopled with the new generation; young robins with breasts spotted like thrushes, and betraying their real parentage by their speech and attitudes alone; goldfinches, too, resembling their brilliant parents only in the yellow of their wings;

‘ Linnet and meadow-lark and all the throng  
That dwell in nests and have the gift of song.’

Under the bank among the broad fronds of harts-tongue shine the bright berries of the arum. The hazel boughs are heavy with rich brown clusters. The dogwood and the wayfaring tree are beginning to show their bold autumnal tints. The mountain-ash is fully in its prime, hung all over with bright scarlet bunches—welcome feast to noisy missel-thrush and wandering ouzel.

✓ There is an orchard hard by, a wilderness of neglected trees, whose sour fruit just shows a tinge of yellow. It is the very sanctuary of birds. Here the jay hides her nest; here the woodpecker finds, year by year, the solitude he loves.

From the old gate yonder we can watch unseen. A bullfinch flashes out of the hedge as steps approach, and flies a little way down the lane, uttering at intervals his soft low notes. He is a handsome bird, with his glossy black crown, his dark slate-coloured back, and the exquisite flush of rose upon his breast. But for mischief there are few to match him. A party of bullfinches, united in a league of evil, will strip the buds from your favourite cherry before you are down in the morning; not, as might be thought, because they are attacked by insects; not even stopping to eat them, but scattering them in hundreds wantonly on the ground.

From an old elm overhead sounds the flute-like twitter of a nuthatch; and next moment he appears coming down the stem head foremost, hammering now and then in likely places with a noise it seems impossible so small a bird could make, in the hope of turning up some juicy larva for his dinner.

Listen a moment to that faint note in the next tree, like the feeble cry of a young bird. It is the creeper, another climbing bird; less dextrous indeed than his neighbour, but with charming ways. Unlike the nuthatch, he cannot climb down the trunk, but, having begun at the bottom and pursued his journey to the topmost branches, pausing here and there on the way to examine the crannies of the rugged bark with his long curved bill, he flies off to the foot of another tree, and begins again. ✓

Like the woodpecker, he is very clever at keeping out of sight, and if alarmed will glide round to the far side of the tree without apparently taking any notice of the intruder, and until the danger is passed takes good care to keep behind a branch in his upward course.

On a low bough of an apple-tree near by, sits a fly-catcher, motionless and forlorn. He is a stranger here. He comes from farther north, and is on his way to join his companions over the sea.

Short, indeed, is his stay in this country. The flycatcher that built this summer in your trellis has already departed, and his familiar perch on the garden seat will know him no more until May comes round.

He was not the first to leave us. The dark figure of the swift has long since vanished from the sky. Even the swallows who remain are but a handful compared with the great hosts, that, after lengthened mustering and high debate, have started for the south.

## THE MISTY MOORLAND.



**I**T is the very heart of the moorland. On every hand there stretch away to the horizon the hills and hollows of the wide expanse.

The heather is in its glory. Over the slopes there hangs a rich glow of colour, here brightened by the vivid tones of the heather, there softened with the fainter purple of the ling. Here a belt of gorse adds a touch of gold; there the ground is covered with the sober green of the bilberry. Scattered over the peat earth that shows darkly through the rents of the imperial mantle, are patches of grey lichen, tipped with scarlet.

But there is an overpowering sense of dreariness among it all. Greater than the wonder of its beauty is the wonder of its solitude. Vainly the eye wanders over the landscape searching for some signs of life ; there is no man, no moving thing. The faint cry of some restless bird serves but to emphasize the silence. It is the stillness of the desert.

At far intervals the ground rises, gently at first, then more abruptly, with here and there a block of granite lifting its grey head above the heather. At last the hill is crowned with a huge mass of seamed and weathered stone that towers over the country like a robber stronghold. Round its base soft mosses gather thick. A multitude of plants have found footing on its narrow ledges. Harebells hang their graceful blooms among the rifted stone. Niches in the rocky walls are the haunt of dove and jackdaw. Here on the windy summit rests the wandering raven, and with keen eye looks down on his wide hunting-ground.

The heath near by is broken with long hollows, the work of an ancient race of miners, of whom all other trace has vanished.

Here, too, in the very heart of the wilderness, is a haunt of birds. In the steep face of rock, that softened by the touch of time bears now no mark of miner's tool, the rockdove breeds. Quiet as our footsteps are upon the springy turf, the faint sound disturbs the timid tenants. Suddenly from the narrow cleft comes

a rush of grey wings, and a rockdove flies hastily up the hollow to the open moor.

The sound startles a ring-ouzel from his feast among the berries of a rowan, whose roots seem anchored in the living rock. His loud 'Tack, tack' of alarm is answered by a comrade, and the two wary birds fly off and settle farther on, their white gorgets standing out clearly against the dark heather. This is their native heath. Under the tall plants that fringe the hollow their nest was built—except for its situation, like that of the blackbird; and not even an expert can distinguish with certainty the eggs of the two species.

The outcry of the ouzels has disturbed a wheatear, who with a flicker of his white tail alights on the top of a heap of ore just visible among the bracken.

A sober-clad meadow pipit rises, too, with feeble note. Her call is answered by a pair of stone-chats, who, perched on the top of a furze bush, keep up for some minutes an uneasy chorus of 'Chat, chat' of wonder at this invasion of their haunt. The stone-chat is a smart little fellow, with his black head, his neat white collar, and his ruddy breast. Few birds are more clever in concealing their nests, and although by no means rare, the eggs are not easily discovered. The birds move away. The sounds grow fainter, and then cease. Once more there is silence in the deserted hollow.

These workings have long been abandoned. This part of the moor is far from the regular mining

districts. No clank of machinery breaks the stillness of these solitudes ; no sounds of labour startle the timid children of the heath.

On the high ground to the eastward stand the tall chimney and grey walls of a modern engine-house. But the dismantled buildings are empty and deserted. The crumbling walls know no tenant but the merlin, see no visitor but the rabbits of the warren.

There are few paths across the waste. The rough track to the mine is almost the only one an ordinary eye would discover.

An ancient way over the moor marked by tall granite crosses has been long disused. The crosses remain ; the road itself is forgotten.

No man knows the district if he cannot find his way without map or compass. But in a Dartmoor mist the oldest hand is helpless. With brief warning, close and thick the grey veil comes down. Every landmark is blotted out ; nothing is visible but a few yards of ground. There is nothing for it but to sit down and wait ; you cannot cross the Fox Tor Mire in mist. The path is hard enough to follow in full daylight ; now, a false step might mean destruction. Tradition says that many a hapless wayfarer has perished in that dismal hollow.

It is better now the mist is changing into rain. The light grows clearer. From the shelter of that great boulder you can watch the storm driving across



the desolate moorland, hear the rush of wind among the heather.

The bright green of the peat-moss, with that dark fringe of rushes, marks the course of a hidden stream—one of the countless channels that vein the bosom of the hills. Here in winter the snipe will lie in scores. It is a place beloved of wild duck, too; and just now there may be a curlew lingering about the scene of his birth.

By this time his fellows have gone down to the shore, and are stalking along by the edge of the sea, whose rim is at this moment just visible on the horizon.

Out on the moor we may find the nest. Not much of a nest indeed, but there are the empty shells still lying tucked one inside another.

The cry of the curlew is a musical, if a mournful, sound. But the bird has another note, and the voices of a company flying together are not unlike those of a pack of dogs. Stories are current, among the hills of Devon, of a ghostly huntsman, who with his viewless pack careers across the sky on wild nights in winter. The belated moorman hears in the call of the curlews the ominous baying of the 'whisht-hounds,' and shudders as he hears. For it is death to see them. Ruin will fall upon the house over which they linger in their flight.

The rain has ceased. The clouds clear off as swiftly as they formed; the sky is blue and fair. On

the sky-line a quaint figure on a rough pony beckons us up the slope. It is Bill Mann, best known of Dartmoor worthies. A flash of lightning, that thirty years ago set his little house ablaze, has left him lame; but he is a true son of the chase for all his lameness, and knows every fox and badger holt in the country side, and every likely pool on the river. Between his toothless gums is his inch of black clay. Round his battered hat are coiled carefully his favourite flies. It is not a bad morning, he says. He has marked down a pack of 'black'ock' on that rise in front.

He loosens the dog. After a bound of recognition the setter goes off across the moor at the top of his speed, as if there were no such thing as a blackcock within forty miles.

All at once, he stops short, stiffened in every limb; to use old Bill's favourite expression, 'as stiff's a gig.' We advance with firm and eager tread, our minds intent upon the dog.

There is a rustle among the grass of a little hollow, right under his nose. Up they get, with a great rush, two noble cocks. They are down, right and left.

The dog just glances at them. His work is not done. There are more yet. Slowly he advances some twenty yards further, his eyes riveted on a great patch of ling in front of him. There they go, a cock and two hens. The hens go by; we give them law. Except by accident, they are never shot.

But the cock has met his fate. He is down. He flutters a moment and is still.

Is there any man who never knew the pang that follows swiftly on the first keen flush of triumph, when, with a flutter of failing wings, the noble bird falls, struck down in mid-career; when the wanderer of the air is dashed a helpless heap of feathers on the ground?

Is there anyone who never felt a touch of remorse as the beautiful eyes, fast fading in death, gazed up at him, bold and fearless to the last?

The day wears on. After an hour's camp in a sunny hollow Bill finds us another pack. We do well. Ten fine cocks in all are slung on the saddle of the little pony, and there is an 'accident' or two hidden away somewhere among the baggage.

It is a good day's work. Ten birds, and five-and-twenty miles of moor.

As we strike across the heath and gain the old miners' path, and plod cheerily homeward down the hilly road, we wonder which is the greater happiness, which the nobler sport—five brace of birds earned by honest toil among these noble wilds, or five hundred shot down with the aid of a battery of guns, an army of beaters, and all the machinery of a sanguinary battue?

We have reached the edge of the moor. The dusk is settling down over the lonely hills. Long since the sun went down behind the low horizon. The

mist of evening rising faint and grey is reddening in the afterglow. Purple shadows gather on the darkening hills.

‘ Silence and twilight, unbeloved of men,  
Creep hand in hand from yon obscurest glen.

## FOOTPRINTS ON THE SAND.



I N the evening of the year, when in the woodland walk we miss the feathered wanderers who, in the silence of these moonlight nights, are returning to their winter haunts ; when no longer round our gables floats the graceful figure of the swallow ; when the twitter of the martins sounds no more from their nests beneath the eaves, there reappear along the sea those familiar forms whose presence lends such an added charm to the beauty of the shore.

The sea is to all men ever a delight. There are none who do not love its musical rhythm, its moods of storm and calm, the wonder of its rest, the terror of its rage.

Greater still is the charm which the lover of nature finds at every step along its shores. He loves the weeds, of bright hue and delicate form, which the waters have torn up from quiet depths and heaped among the shingle ; the strange creatures stranded by the tide ; the myriad shells that ocean strews along

the sand. The very markings by its edge, lines a child at play might have traced with aimless finger, are to him a picture-writing on the sand, in which he reads the story of tiny creatures whose home is in the waves.

But dearer than all must ever be the children of the air. Plainest among these fleeting records are the imprints of their feet. Here, run the devious tracks of the sandpipers that troop along the tide. There, in bolder characters are the footprints of the curlew. Scattered over the mud are marks that tell how oystercatcher and redshank, gull and heron, wandered up and down at sunrise, and left their sign-manual on the yielding surface.

In the early summer these traces are but far between. In the summer-time we look in vain for the white wings of the gull ; we see no clouds of sandpipers ; we seldom hear the whistle of the plover. As spring advanced they left us. Gradually disappearing from the low shores where they had spent the winter, they gathered round their crowded breeding haunts. They mustered in armies in the sanctuary of seagirt rocks ; they gathered in clouds along the steep sides of northern cliffs.

Some birds that haunt the wintry beach are content with the limits of our islands. Others find a summer resting-place no nearer than the shores of Siberia. But among them are some who do not move at all ; they spend the summer here ; they watch the vanish-

ing dunlins ; they see the flocks of scaup-ducks dwindling from the waters of the bay ; they hear no more the clamour of the gulls. But no impulse of migration stirs their pulses. They are content to stay, and by some solitary shore where no passing steps disturb their peace find a spot where they may rear their broods.

At the mouth of the tidal river whose mud-stained waters go to swell the brown flood of Severn, a mass of limestone lifts its head above the sea. The rugged surface is stained with vivid lichens. Tufts of purple thrift bloom among the sea-worn stones. The golden samphire that clusters about the summit shows the top safe above the highest tides. It is the sanctuary of the oyster-catcher. The fisherman, drifting down the stream to visit his nets out at sea, knows well the watchful figures of the old birds, whose conspicuous dress and long red beaks are so plain to see ; but the solitude of the little islet is rarely broken, and year by year the oyster-catchers lead down their little family to the river. There is no nest of any sort. The eggs are laid on the bare rock ; but sometimes the birds are found to smear them with mud, as if prompted by past losses to take some precautions for concealment.

On the mud that borders the island stands a shel-drake—a handsome bird, whose brilliant plumage makes him at once one of the most beautiful and striking figures of the shore. Here at least he is a

constant resident, though many of his clan come to us only in the winter to escape the rigour of a northern climate. Here, however, he finds a solitude to suit him, and stays the summer through. Somewhere by the shore he and his handsome mate, whose colours are as striking as his own, make their nest in a rabbit-burrow. At the far end, sometimes as much as ten feet from the entrance, some dry grass is collected; over this the duck arranges a bed of down, which, like the eider, she tears from her own body. Frequently the hole is among the sand-hills, in the shelter of sedge and sea-holly.

But often a safer retreat is found in the side of a hill looking down on the sea. Walled about with low limestone cliffs, whose grey buttresses stand out here and there among green waves of ivy, lies a little hollow open to the south. The bushes that clothe its sides are dwarfed and twisted by the wind. The plants that cover the parched and scanty soil are such as flourish in the sand. Here, is a patch of pale green wood-sage; there, a belt of rustling flags,—not the bright iris of the meadow-brook, but a flower of dusky hue with sombre colouring and unpleasing odour. Here, the yellow mullein lifts its tall head above the bracken. Here, hang the dark bells of the deadly nightshade. There, open the pallid petals of the henbane. Pleasanter to the eye is the white rock-rose, which in this favoured spot scatters its rare and graceful blossoms broadcast over the rugged ground. Bright butterflies



love the hot sun that beats into the hollow. Grass-snakes warm their cold hearts upon the heated sand.

A stoat peers out from a heap of stone, his head and fore-paws just visible over the edge of a rock. After a brief inspection he seems to think it best to avoid us; he drops down and disappears.

Here are the traces of the sheldrake—a few white feathers, tinged with brown, scattered on the grass at the entrance of one of the many rabbit-holes which here honeycomb the hill. Far inside the burrow the empty eggshells still lie about the disordered nest.

Long ere this the brood stole out into the daylight, and made their way down the rocks into the sea. Sometimes, in the early morning, you may meet them on the river. The old bird leads the way, the downy brood all in line after their anxious parent. At the sound of oars she turns her head a moment, and then quickens her pace. At her signal the little fellows in her wake hurry after her as best they may. The old bird at last reluctantly takes wing. Her brood hasten this way and that, dodging the oar-blades put out to stop them, and scudding along with quick beats of their little paddles. Some scramble up the bank. Others swim out to sea down the rapid current.

The rocky side of the down is a favourite haunt of the kestrel. Even the peregrine lingers here, and his keen wings are still the terror of the farm under the hill. More satisfactory tenants are the daws who crowd about the cliff-ledges and build their nests by

scores in the old rabbit-holes along the fringe of the down.

The wide stretch of mud below, whose shining levels wear a tinge of purple in the failing light, is dotted with the figures of unnumbered gulls, some in the pure white and grey of perfect plumage, others still wearing the brown dress of youth. Redshanks and curlews wade among the pools and line the edges of the long hollows worn by the retreating tide.

A troop of dunlins fly in close array along the edge of the water. Now they settle down upon the mud. Even at this height their musical voices sound above the faint murmur of the waves.

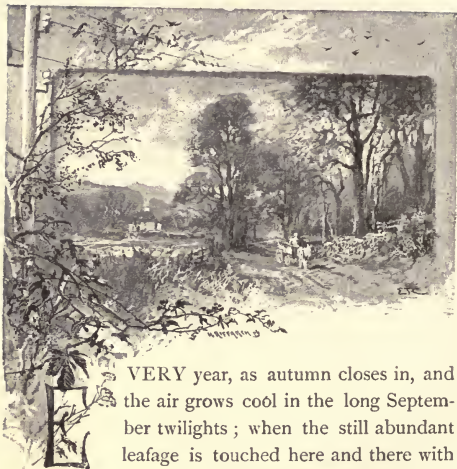
The lazy sea beyond them, scarcely broken by a ripple, stretches away to the dim horizon like a sheet of glass. In the golden splendour under the sinking sun there lies becalmed a single sail. The sea-line melts into an amber haze, through which shows now and then the faint outline of some distant craft. Along the bold sickle of the shore rise the broken ridges of the sandhills. Beyond them the blue lines of far-off hills. Between lie the wide levels of the moor; here, white with peaceful hamlets clustering round the grey towers of ancient churches; there, golden with ungathered grain, whose ripened sheaves await the harvest home.

On the bold headland yonder, whose rocky steep is kindling in the light of sunset, a grey ruin looks down upon the fruitful plain. Round the old walls there

rolls a sea of graves. The wind and the rain have dealt but hardly with the ancient stones. No kindly chisel clears the gathering moss with which Time has blurred the rude inscriptions. The iron tongues, at whose fierce summons all the country rose to face the fleet of Spain, hang silent in the deserted belfry. In a corner of the churchyard, thick with nameless graves, the form of many an ill-fated mariner whom the tide has laid upon the shore, has found a resting-place at last. No headstones mark their rest; they lie unknown—

‘husbands, brothers, sons  
Of desolate women in their far-off homes  
Waiting to hear the step that never comes.’

## THE PARTING GUESTS.



EVERY year, as autumn closes in, and the air grows cool in the long September twilights ; when the still abundant leafage is touched here and there with the shades of brown and yellow that ere long will ripen into gold and scarlet ; even the least observant of us notice a change in the woods and the lanes, and in the very streets of the city.

There are few who do not miss at least the swallow.

We remember, too, how the cuckoo grew hoarse, and fitful, and then silent, long ago. We are conscious that it is long since the nightingale, and the blackcap, and a score of sylvan minstrels, cheered the woodland with their varied strains. The landrail's inharmonious note has been unheard since the early days of summer. The swift vanished even before the fire was on the leaves.

One after another, these and half a hundred others of our summer guests have silently left their haunts in field and lane and woodland for a sunnier climate and a warmer air. They vanished, as they came, by moonlight ; and the late October moon will light only a few stragglers on their southward journey.

All, however, have not left us yet. On roofs and rails, and along the convenient resting-place of telegraph-wires, troops of swallows are still gathering, with no little interchange of gentle speech, and flutter of careless wings. They are on the eve of setting out for those far-off regions where no frost will mar the genial comfort of the sunshine ; and where no shortness of provisions will drive them from the ancestral homestead.

But we may expect to see them fairly often until the end of this month ; a few during October ; and, on the sea-coast especially, swallows and martins may be observed as late as the end of November.

The swift is much more restricted in the time of his arrival and departure. He is seldom here much

before May, and he leaves us in the beginning of August. Stragglers may linger in September; one only has ever been seen in November.

There is still some uncertainty with regard to the movements of the cuckoo. He disappears from the scene, to a great extent at least, when he loses his voice; and as far as the old birds are concerned it is no doubt true that

‘ In July he prepares to fly ;  
In August go he must.’

There is, however, a version which goes on :

‘ In September you’ll him remember ;  
But October he’ll never get over.’

And the young birds certainly stay much later than their parents. As late as the middle of August young cuckoos have been seen in the act of being fed by attendant wagtails. Your first impression will very likely be that a hawk is devouring a brood of young birds, and that the parents are uttering cries of distress. But on approaching the spot you will find that it is a cuckoo, not a hawk; strong of wing, and apparently well able to forage for itself, surrounded by a little group of industrious wagtails busily occupied in dropping food into its mouth; while the screams proceed from the cuckoo itself, as with outspread wings and gaping beak it calls continually for more. Now and then one of its slaves will get even on its back, so as to be able more easily to supply its wants.

The silence of the cuckoo in the late summer, and

its likeness to the sparrow-hawk, probably causes it to be often mistaken for that bird ; in country districts there are still some who believe that the cuckoo turns into a hawk in the autumn.

Its winter home is in Africa, in the north especially, though some even get as far as Natal.

This bird, like many of the migrants, has been kept in this country in confinement through the winter ; but it is worthy of note that captive cuckoos are said never to feed themselves, even although they may live late into the spring.

It has been confidently stated that the 'migratory instinct' was too strong to admit of this captivity : that whatever care might be taken to provide food and warmth for it, the hapless captive would, when the usual time for departure drew near, grow restless, and finally beat its life out against the bars of its prison. But some migratory birds, the nightingale for example, have been known to breed in captivity.

The corncrake migrates to the extreme south of Africa—a long journey for a bird whose powers of flight are apparently so feeble that, when flushed, it seldom goes more than fifty yards without alighting.

Although most of the tribe go away in September, corncrakes are often killed in the stubble in October, or even later ; and instances are recorded in which they have been found in a torpid state in holes, apparently hibernating, even in the month of February, so lately as the year 1882.

The migratory warblers winter in Africa ; some, like the blackcap, in the far south ; others, such as the nightingale, in the region near Abyssinia. Some even stay in the South of Europe, while, in the case of the chiffchaff, a few probably do not leave England at all.

The chiffchaff is, indeed, a faithful friend ; a guest who comes early and lingers late. Some birds desert us on the threshold of the changing season—almost ere the first fall of the leaf ; most of them before the autumn days draw in and the twilight air has a touch of frost in it. The cuckoo leads the way ; the swift will almost overtake her on her passage south ; the nightingale, the flycatcher, the redstart, and all the rest of the light-winged host, follow in their train.

But the note of the chiffchaff still resounds in the deserted glades. When the October sunset is red with the funeral pyre of the departed summer ; when the coral chains of the bryony and the golden leaves of the maple light up the country lanes ; when

‘—like living coals, the apples  
Burn among the withering leaves—’

still the chiffchaff lingers ; and far on in the year, in the mournful silence of the leafless woodlands, you may hear him still. He is the rearguard of the retiring legions ; he is in the van of the returning army. For when, in the early springtime, the copses have their first tinge of tender green, he will come back to us a humble, faithful, welcome visitor.



## FLYING, FLYING SOUTH.

THE genial sunshine of bright September days half tempts us to forget the stormy moods of an ungracious summer.

True it is that cold and clinging mists linger late into the mornings; sadly true that the days are shortening fast, and that evening airs are chill; that now and then there is a touch of frost upon the meadows, and a film of ice upon the pools.

But a look of summer lingers in the landscape; the woods still wear their summer dress. Worn and faded are the leaves, pierced and torn by myriad caterpillars, but still the trees are green, hardly touched as yet by the fiery fingers of the Autumn. The foliage of the beech is thinning fast; the dry leaves of the lime begin to rustle on the path. But there is not yet

‘The wonder of the falling tongues of flame—’

that crowning glory of chill October.

In the strange autumnal stillness the leaves hang

motionless in the voiceless woods, as if waiting for their fall.

The air is crowded with innumerable insects. Gnats in cloudy columns—short-lived children of the autumn—rise like phantoms from the river-path. Millions of *ephemeræ* spend in the twilight their brief span of life—born after sundown, dying ere the dawn.

Hosts of dusky moths hover round the lingering flowers.

The hush of night grows deeper as the grasshopper chirps at intervals his drowsy strain.

But careless of the noonday warmth, and not tempted by the store of insect life, the swallows—knowing perhaps by bitter experience how suddenly the food supply may fail, prompted by some mysterious sense of coming winter—have all, except a few stragglers, left us even earlier than usual. Even in August the movement began. No later than the middle of the month vast flights of swallows collected and started on their journey.

Led by no skilful pilot—not even guided by previous knowledge—they gained their first experience, for the young birds of the year, strange as it may seem, went first. The parents followed with their second broods.

Some stragglers still remain, who, here to-day and gone to-morrow, hurry southward in the track of the legions.

Swallows have been seen at Christmas ; still more rarely, in the two months that follow.

Fast and far the little travellers will fly. The road is long ; there are perils by the way. Cold and hunger will thin the ranks ; kite and falcon will harass the defenceless columns. Of those who reach the African shore some will stay to the north of the Sahara ; others will wander far to southward down the western coast ; many will winter even at the Cape.

They have been with us nearly half the year. In April, or even earlier, the vanguard crossed the sea. A few weeks of holiday followed their return. A few weeks on the river, a few weeks of the free life of the heavens, and then they settled down to the serious business of the season.

Last year's nest—perhaps their home for many summers—was repaired. Or if in the interval some Vandal had swept away the fragile walls a new one was commenced. It is a shallow structure, built of moist and kneaded earth, gathered up in the road or by the bank of a stream.

It is generally out of sight. Here in a disused chimney, there among the rafters of an outhouse, sometimes even in a well. Two cases are recorded in which swallows built in trees.

It is true that swallows sometimes build in more open situations ; but the nests over the cottage window, the clay-built homes that cluster thick along the eaves, are the work of another mason—the house-martin.

The birds have marked points of difference ; but unlike as are their ways, their plumage, and their song, they are constantly mistaken for each other.

They are often seen in company. Together they skim the surface of the pool, among the crowds of water-loving insects. Together they soar far up into the blue heaven, until the sight can scarcely follow their figures on the sky.

But the naturalist distinguishes far off their form and flight. He contrasts the long and deeply forked tail of the swallow with the shallower notch and shorter feathers of the martin. The throat of the swallow is broadly marked with chestnut, bordered with a band of deep blue black. The martin wears pure white on throat and body, and carries also a conspicuous patch of white over its tail.

The swallow is a familiar bird. Well known to us all are the sound of its voice and the sheen of its wings. But although every man knows, or thinks he knows, the harbinger of spring, it is rare to see either a swallow or a martin correctly drawn outside the pages of a book on Natural History.

Very different from either is the swift, who indeed does not belong to the family at all, and more resembles the humming-bird in his structure. His long wings are curved like a bow. His sable plumage is relieved by one faint touch of white upon the throat, hardly visible, save when at some turn of his rapid

flight, the bird hangs for a moment almost motionless in the air.

The swallow and the martin stay with us the summer through. They even linger in the autumn. But the swift is more a child of the south than either. He comes in May and goes in August. Brief indeed for him is

‘—the sun of summer in the north.’

The feet of the swallow, although small and slender, have a general resemblance to those of most other birds.

The tiny feet of the martin are feathered to the toes.

The foot of the swift, covered with bristle-like feathers, and with all four claws placed in front, is more like the paw of a small quadruped.

Although the swift never settles on a tree, and very rarely even on a roof, it often clings to the wall at the entrance of its nest, and its claws are strong enough to take a piece clean out of the hand of an incautious captor.

Little as we see of the swallow engaged in rearing its young, the habits of the swift are even less familiar. We see nothing of its nest unless we raise the tiles where, far up under the roof, the bird crouches on the scanty handful of grass and feathers she has caught up in her flight.

The life history of the martin is better known to us. We watch the graceful little builders clinging to the

wall of their unfinished nest. We see the two fairy-like figures nestling side by side within the hollow, and hear them whisper little staves of song.

The hen bird, brooding on her eggs, shows at times her glossy crown and a touch of her pure white throat over the rim of the nest.

Later still four little heads are seen looking out into the world. Then comes the first plunge into the air. All the neighbours take an interest in the great event. Now they sail up to the nest, poising in the air a moment with a twitter of encouragement; now advancing, now retiring, trying all they know to tempt the timid novices to spread their unproved wings; and when at last one of the little crew takes heart and launches out into the airy deep, with what a chorus do they welcome to their ranks the bold adventurer!

Now, young and old alike, swift and swallow and martin, have turned their backs upon our shores; loitering here in the sunny streets of Pisa, lingering there in warm Algerian highlands, but still moving south, until they rest at last in lands of endless summer.

The sight of the last swallow is like the first footfall of approaching Winter, ominous of rain and snow; of stinging east and bitter weather.

How we shall watch for his return! Many migrants come and go unheeded. We listen indeed to the cry of the cuckoo; we hear with rapture the anthem of

the nightingale. But there are scores of birds, who cross the sea and settle here for the season, of whom the world takes little heed.

But it is otherwise with the swallow. No bird is better known. No bird is so suggestive of the summer. No other calls up so vividly memories of Halcyon Days.

With what joy we watch the first solitary swallow on the April sky! It is a sign to tell us Spring is born. It is the time of violets. Copses are ringing with the songs of thrush and blackbird. Overhead floats the music of the lark. Then comes the swallow on his sunny wings back from his perilous voyage to the old roof whose thatch has sheltered him so long.

What sweeter sound of springtime than his matin song from the brown gable of the barn? What brighter touch of summer in the landscape than his figure high in air, floating on glad wings amid scores of happy comrades whose life is sunshine and whose speech is song?

## THE RETURN OF THE FIELDFARE.



WHEN the swallow and his clan have deserted for the winter their haunts among the smoke-blackened roofs of the city, no bird is found who, in any sense, fills their places.

Most of the starlings go away to join the legions that muster by the sea or on the moorland.

Only the sparrow stays. No one ever sees his sooty coat among the handsome dresses of his country cousins.

But out in the fields the case is different. We miss indeed the crowd of birds who came to us in the



spring, and have spent the summer here. We see no more the nightingale and the blackcap, the cuckoo and the redstart.

They have long been silent. They have vanished in the dark, unseen, unheard, and their going has been hardly noticed.

By the time we are conscious of their absence, the fields and the lanes, the hills and the marshes, have a new set of tenants, who drop silently into the vacant places. The midsummer play indeed is over, but we shall see a new set of actors among the winter scenery.

They are not a musical set; but they make up in movement what they lack in melody, and their presence goes far to console us for our lost companions.

Conspicuous among them all is the smart figure of the fieldfare, handsomest of familiar thrushes.

On the eve of the long winter he leaves his home, in Norway or Siberia, and comes southward to these islands, to France and Spain, wandering even as far as Africa. In mild seasons, when the summer lingers late into the autumn, the fieldfare does not reach us till October, and his appearance earlier is considered an omen of a harder year than usual.

When on the orchard-boughs the fruit glows red through dying leaves, when the hedgerow maple dons its dress of gold, we shall see, far up on the grey sky, the even lines of the invaders, and hear their voices floating downward through the sharp October air.

But we shall not see much of them yet. When the

wind has shaken down the rustling leaves upon the forest path we may mark them better. When the bare black boughs stand clear cut against the frosty sky we shall see their figures in the leafless elm, or watch them on the upland pasture, whose coarse herbage, browned with the sun of summer, is stiffening with rime.

Along a lonely hillside winds a grassy road, seldom marked even by the track of wheels, save when some lumbering waggon brings down the thin sheaves of the scanty upland harvest.

Over the broad hedges wanders the traveller's joy, whose seeds, like tufts of light grey feathers, mingle with the bright fruit of the wayfaring-tree.

Above the road rise the round shoulders of the hill, with masses of grey limestone showing here and there through a rough coat of gorse and heather.

Facing the far end of the lane rises a steep cliff, in whose crevices the rowan finds a footing, and the silvery leaves of the white beam mingle with the dark leafage of the yew.

Below the road broad fields sweep gently down to the moor. Here they are flanked with a fringe of larches; there a few storm-beaten fir-trees cluster about the rude earthworks of an ancient camp.

The tall straggling hedgerows are bright with haws; touched even with the vivid colour of the spindle or the jewelled clusters of the nightshade.

Over all there broods the silence of the autumn.

No sound disturbs the quiet save the scream of a jay in the shadows of the larchwood, the cry of a hawk as he drifts along the grey rampart of the hill, or the call of a woodpecker from the dim recesses of the orchard.

High up in the tall ash that leans out of the hedgerow sits a fieldfare, keeping sharp look-out on all the world below.

The finches and yellow-hammers take little heed as you move with quiet footfall down the grassy way.

But the fieldfare has eyes for everything. He is on sentry.

Scattered over the ground in the next pasture is the flock of his companions. There is a gate yonder from which you may watch them. But the sentry gives a warning call. The foraging party look up, and instantly take wing for the trees that skirt the meadow.

There are few shyer birds than the fieldfare when first he comes to us a stranger; and as long as the weather keeps mild it will not be easy to get within reach of him. But when the ground grows hard under the breath of Winter, and the hedgerow fruits alone afford them a scanty living, fieldfares become more bold, and venture nearer the abodes of man. Should the cold continue, they will go farther south, and we shall see no more of them until they pass us in the spring on their homeward journey.

Hewitson, who was the first Englishman to describe the breeding haunts of the fieldfare, found the birds building in companies—hundreds of nests together in

the forest. It is quite common, however, to find them singly, though several are often found within a few yards.

The nest, made of grass and twigs, and stiffened with mud like that of the blackbird, is built in a tree, but from necessity, or perhaps merely from choice, is sometimes placed on the ground.

No precautions seem to be taken for concealment. The great structure is often so close to the road that the traveller may look into it as he passes.

But farther north, among the wild arctic fiords or in the solitude of the Lofoden islands, the bird finds a spot that to us at least seems more in keeping with her love of quiet.

Land on the shore of one of the little bays among the islands. Cross the beach among the boulders, fringed with rich brown seaweed, the haunt of gull and cormorant,—as the broken echinus shells strewn about will testify, and stroll up the little valley that winds away among the sterile hills.

Huge masses of rock, torn by frost and tempest from the rugged crests on either hand, lie piled along the sides, half hidden among the cool foliage of stunted birch-trees.

All the valley glows with the rich green herbage which the fierce sun of the brief northern summer and the warm waves of the great ocean current make so strangely fair. Knee-deep rise the grass and ferns along a little stream that idly wanders seaward under

a canopy of waving green. Tall globe-flowers mark with their golden bells the devious course of the rivulet.

Under the shadow of a boulder, where to the barren ground clings a thick growth of tiny Alpine heaths, there is a quick rustle as of some moving animal. Two lemmings—graceful, gentle creatures, suggestive half of dormouse, half of guinea-pig—roll over and over down the slope and frolic almost at your feet. You lean down to watch them closer, but the bright eyes catch sight of a moving figure; the little fellows have vanished into their hole.

A heap of broken egg-shells shows that grouse have nested here, and no doubt plenty of willow-grouse and ptarmigan are crouching even now among this broken ground.

The sound of footsteps disturbs a bird from the clustering birches that spread their lace-like foliage over the stream. There she goes! A fieldfare. And among the branches, not six feet from the ground, is the nest. The four eggs in it are not distinguishable from those of the blackbird.

These are the second brood. The first, like those of English thrushes, were hatched much earlier in the season.

The young birds will not see much of their native land this year. But few weeks remain to them before they must turn their faces to the south.

It must be a hard climate from which they

are driven thus to the tender mercies of an English winter.

What a spot the old birds fixed on for their home ! For six weeks the sun never sets upon their island. Six weeks of daylight shine upon their happy valley. Day after day there meets their eyes that wonder that greeted the astonished gaze of 'Othere, the old sea captain,' when

'Round in a fiery ring,  
Went the great sun, O King,  
With red and lurid light.'

What a vision of glory is this sunlit midnight ! The amber of the twilight sky shades into soft purple down on the horizon. The sea, a fiery opal in the light of the level sun, shines in ever-changing tints of green and orange and crimson.

A line of blue lies like a rare setting to the wild islands, the faint far outlines of whose innumerable peaks lie bathed in softest tones of rose and amethyst.

Above all is the wonder of the unsetting sun, whose path of glory lights the glittering waves.

## THE SUMMER OF SAINT MARTIN



WE are midway through the autumn. The time is far advanced, and winter lingers at the gate. But, as we look across the landscape, we find almost more of summer in it than of autumn still. We have indeed felt the print of icy fingers; flowers have long been fading at the fatal touch, and hilltops have been white with early snow. But just as we begin to think that winter is upon us, the air grows soft and gentle, and there broods over the land the glamour of the Indian summer.

‘The summer and the winter here,  
Midway a truce are holding;  
A soft, consenting atmosphere  
Their tents of peace enfolding.’

It is a time of rest and calm. Ended are all the trials and troubles of the wayward season. The harvest has been gathered in, and in orderly array the corn-stacks cluster round the quiet homesteads. In

the silent orchard alleys there shine, like glowing embers, heaps of fallen apples.

The woodlands even yet have hardly donned their fullest splendour, but we read the story of the season on the leaves of many a noble tree. Some there are still draped in summer green, save that a single spray hangs here and there, shining among the sombre foliage like beaten gold.

The beech grows red in the warm October sunshine. The great wood pigeons that feed upon the fallen mast fly up as steps draw near, and shake from the rattling branches a shower of colour with their flapping wings.

One noble lime still wears, blended in exquisite harmony, its varied tones of green, and brown, and amber. Another, more gorgeous still, is perfect in its dress of gold.

Day by day the black poplar strews fresh glory on the path. The perfume that clung about its opening foliage lingers no longer round the dying leaves. Its neighbour, the stately walnut, whose grey arms are growing quickly bare, is fragrant to the last, and its brown and shrivelled leaves are scented still.

The fans of the horse-chestnut are glorious in crimson and gold. The great trees are ablaze with colour, and the rich brown of their ripening fruit shines through the rough green shells.

Starling and missel thrush have cleared from the mountain-ash the coral clusters of its brilliant fruit but the tree has not lost its glory yet ; the russet leaves



have a softer beauty of their own. The broad leaves of the plane, here pale yellow, there brightened with a touch of crimson, now deepening into brown, are falling fast.

In the voiceless woods, where the warm hues of beech and maple shine like the rich windows of some vast cathedral, the trees stand motionless in the scented air. A faint breath of wind, that just stirs the topmost twigs upon the elm, brings down a shower of leaves that patter like drops of hail upon the branches. Elsewhere, a solemn stillness, broken only by the faint sound of falling leaves. First comes a little movement overhead, as the leaf loosens at last, and for all time, its hold upon the parent bough ; a moment of silence again as the little waif floats gently down, and then a rustle in the underwood as one more touch of colour is added to the ever-changing carpet of brown and scarlet, of russet and of gold.

Nor is the glory only overhead. The tiny leaves of the burnet are turning crimson. Trailing sprays of bramble glow with vivid tints. Brilliant fungi, brown, and red, and yellow, lend their colours in the place of vanished flowers ; others, pale and delicate, are strewn like seed pearls among green waves of trailing moss.

The frosts that gild the maple and the lime are bringing from the north a host of winter visitors. It is the season when, fleeing from the terrors of the black and bitter north, there streams over the sea, night after night, the vast array of hurrying fugitives. At the close

of day, and when through a golden mist the sun sinks in the west ; when soft grey clouds that bar the quiet sky swiftly take colour and glow like plumes of fire ; when after a brief gleam of glory the dark comes down upon the silent fields ; when roofs, that drip with dew, shine like sheets of silver in the splendour of the moon, there sets in, through the tranquil hours of night, the rush of innumerable wings.

On moonlight nights, when skies are cloudless and the air is clear, the birds pass high overhead, far beyond the range of sight or sound. But dark or cloudy weather compels them to fly lower down in order to find their bearings. For the path of migration is no vague, mysterious road, followed unconsciously by some blind impulse of unreasoning instinct. It is a path discovered by experience, and followed year by year with the help of familiar waymarks which the birds can see far down beneath them as they fly.

It is no doubt a prompting of instinct which leads the young birds, who never yet have left their native land, to start before their elders and drift aimlessly over the sea towards hitherto unknown regions in the southward. But those who know the way stay later, and probably follow some recognised and regular route.

In fair weather the movements of the birds of passage are seldom seen. It is on dark and stormy nights—nights of rough weather and of inky gloom—that the lighthouse-keepers, hundreds of whom are on

the watch, become aware of the passing of the vast array.

On such a night the air is crowded with myriads of flying forms, wheeling round the lantern, coming up like phantoms out of the darkness, seen for a moment in the glare, and then disappearing in the gloom. The air is filled with screams, and cries, and strange unearthly voices, and the rustling of innumerable wings. Thousands of birds are taken while dazzled with the light ; thousands dash their lives out against the fatal splendour. Sometimes, even, hurled through the glass by the tremendous impulse of their flight, they fall lifeless on the light-room floor among the fragments of the shattered lantern.

During the migratory period, which lasts only for a few weeks, birds are continually making the journey, but there are two great flights each season, separated by an interval of a fortnight or more. The migrants seem to care little for rain or darkness, or even for unfavourable winds ; but it has been observed that the passage of the great flocks is frequently the signal of approaching storms, and that they often take advantage of a lull to leave their summer quarters. The worst of weather will not delay them long, and this long spell of calm will no doubt have brought troops of birds from the chilled regions of the north.

Already the bright eyes of the woodcock have been seen in the covers. Already the bay is dotted with the dark figures of scaup-ducks. The widgeons have

ound their way to the pools among the marshes, and strings of teal are reported from the river.

It is an ancestral haunt. A thousand years have left but little sign in this quiet corner of the world. Among the stately elms, that cluster under the hill which skirts the moor, rise the square tower and massive masonry of an ancient priory. Rich meadows and wide belts of fertile corn-land stretch away across the level plain. Over the yellow sands there comes the murmur of the sea.

‘There twice a day the Severn fills :  
The salt sea water passes by,  
And hushes half the babbling Wye,  
And makes a silence in the hills.’

About the spot there cling dim memories of the past. Phœnician captains moored their galleys in this little river. Kelt and Saxon struggled for the mastery of those wooded heights.

Long since scattered are the sandalled friars. For three long centuries the dark rafters of the old banqueting-hall have rung with no sonorous chant, or stave of reveller’s song. The fish-ponds of the Priory are choked with reeds. No stout-limbed churls clear now the channels of the old decoy.

But among the brown and rustling flags that fill the ditches still descend long flights of wild-fowl. Troops of widgeon that have left their summer home at the setting in of the long Arctic night hide among the tasselled sedges that wave along the banks.

Still from their ancient nesting-place, among the noble trees that clothe the steep sides of the hollow in the distant hills, come down the herons. They fish in the self-same ditches where, in bygone days, their startled ancestors spread mighty wings to escape the swift rush of the Prior's favourite falcon. Like the friars, they too have fallen from their high estate. But although no longer followed by the shouting chase, protected by no stern penalty of jealous laws, still by the quiet reaches of the little river, in the moorland ditches, and along the level shore, these ancient solitary anglers watch and wait.

‘A GREAT FREQUENTER OF THE CHURCH.’



**I**N the later days of autumn, when the berries are dwindling on the hedgerows, and the insects have died by myriads in the frosty air ; when the birds, which have not followed the custom of their fathers and gone southward to a sunnier climate, begin to feel the pinch of poverty, some of them collect in companies and wander up and down in search of food ; others

are driven in from the fields to the dwellings of man, and lose for a time their accustomed shyness.

Some there are who always hang about the farm-yard and the cover merely for the sake of plunder, and are at constant feud with the farmer, like the caitiff crow and his handsome cousin the magpie.

Others, again, like the hawfinch, always keep so far aloof from sign or sound of labour that we hardly realize their presence at all until even their shyness gives way before the rigour of some bitter season, and in their extremity they, too, have to look for corn in Egypt.

A few birds constantly court the company of man ; some of them nest beneath his roof-tree ; most of them are more or less dependent on his labours for their living. The farmer and the rook, for instance, play into each other's hands ; and were it not for the convenient shelter of roofs and rainwater pipes, the sparrow and the starling would go far afield to find a place of rest.

Less common and conspicuous than the rook, but a zealous worker on the farm, and a faithful friend of man, is the light-hearted jackdaw.

He constantly associates with his sable kinsmen. He will follow the plough with the rook, and roam the sea-beach with the crow, but his quicker movements and his sharper speech distinguish him easily from the former ; and although his character is nothing to speak of, and his thievish ways are beyond denial,

he is yet no sharer in the dark deeds of the latter.

The history of the jackdaw, from the popular point of view, consists largely of stories told to his discredit concerning purloined spoons and misappropriated jewellery, together with scraps of amusing speech.

His robberies are no doubt real enough, but his articulation is seldom distinct, and one may well be sceptical with regard to such anecdotes as that which relates how a jackdaw was caught redhanded in the kitchen; how the angry cook threw over him some scalding broth; how the disconsolate bird moped and pined and tried to hide his featherless crown, until one day, seeing a bald-headed gentleman among the guests at dinner, he hopped upon the back of his chair and cried, with recovered cheerfulness, 'So *you've* been at the pickled cockles!'

The jackdaw is given to wandering far in search of food, and often accompanies the foraging parties of the rookery.

It is a mingled crew that gathers on the upland fields where the only sign of man's dominion is the rich brown earth of newly-turned furrows.

From their ancestral elm-trees under the hill come the solemn rooks, stately of gait and deliberate of speech.

A party of rockdoves, after wheeling round and round the field, settle down in a corner by themselves.



Here, a few lapwings run up and down, or sail across the sky with melancholy cries.

There, is even a flock of gulls driven inland by the rough weather, their white plumage contrasting strongly with the dark dress of their companions.

And, scattered over the broad field, a troop of jackdaws forage busily among the furrows.

One is at work so near that you can even see the white iris of his eye and the grey patches in his coat. But he has caught sight of you as you crouch behind the wall. He rises with a warning cry.

The timid doves vanish swiftly on their sounding wings.

The rooks rise all at once and drift slowly away with loud and solemn caw.

The jackdaws, hastily collecting in a troop, chatter gaily as they fly, and, with rapid beat of their dark wings, make for the ravine whose rugged steeps are just visible over the shoulder of the hill.

Jackdaws are fond of building in the rocks, whether inland or by the sea, and one cannot help being struck with the picturesqueness of the spots they fix on for their dwellings.

Their breezy haunts, high up in these grand old cliffs, are overgrown with a very jungle of trees of every shade, that wreath their arms about the rifted crags. From their homes in these cool recesses the birds look out hundreds of feet sheer down to the winding road below.

Along the valley of the Dart, where every wall of sandstone shelters in its deep crevices a colony of daws, the very ground is sometimes honeycombed with their nests.

As you make your way slowly up the steep slope that rises from the river, the birds fly out one after another from their holes, and, collecting on the bushes that fringe the cliff overhead, are loud in their expressions of disapprobation as you stoop to examine their burrows—expecting, no doubt, a confiscation of their portable property—a valuable collection of bits of string, scraps of carpet, and nameless odds and ends.

It is not often that the nests are actually made in the ground. Still more rarely do the birds build among the boughs of trees ; probably not more than two authenticated cases of their doing so are on record.

A favourite spot is the tower of a country church, and on the worn stones of the turret stairway the jackdaws pile their heaps of sticks—sometimes literally a cartload to a single nest.

In one instance the belfry was so choked with the rubbish collected in less than a week by a pair of these industrious architects, that the buried bell had to be dug out by the sexton before it could be rung.

Now, the jackdaws people with their dusky figures the dismantled keep of some ruined stronghold.

Rising above the clustering hamlet that long ago  
gathered in its shadow, its

—crumbling walls look down,  
That played a stake for Charles's sake  
In the game of Church and Crown.

The ivy that holds in friendly grasp the failing turrets  
shelters in its knotted coils a multitude of birds.

Starlings pile their untidy nests in a hundred  
niches.

In hollows torn, perhaps, by Roundhead shot, the  
jackdaws rear their clamorous young.

One is tempted to fancy that the daws which tenant  
the unnumbered nooks in the great cathedral wear an  
air of mystery and reserve, that harmonizes well with  
their surroundings. There is an old-world look about  
them. One can half imagine that there are legends  
handed down among them of the historic pile in whose  
shadow they and their ancestors have for centuries  
found sanctuary; that as they flit among the stony-  
eyed effigies of saints and warriors that people all  
the noble front, their speech is of old memories  
and bygone days. Laud and Still, Ken and Wolsey,  
ruled in the solemn aisles beneath them. In the  
cool arcades of the cloisters trembling monks have  
talked with bated breath of the ill deeds of King  
Harry.

Across the moor, in the ruins of the famous abbey,  
again the daws have made a settlement.

Trailing creepers, that glow like fire under the touch

of autumn, hang graceful wreaths round the ruined windows. The roofless halls are hung with green waves of ivy that cling about the broken arches and twine lovingly round the shattered columns. A fringe of fern-leaves hangs from every crevice. Wallflowers bloom upon the graceful capitals.

Vandal hands have been laid upon the noble fabric. Its sculptured stones are built into half the houses of the little township. The very roads are paved with its costly fragments.

It is the island valley of Avilion. Still

‘it lies

Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns  
And bowery hollows.’

But the summer sea is now only a gleam of silver on the far horizon.

And in the spring-time, when the great acacias, that lean as if to caress the ruins with their gentle touch, just show signs of budding green; when the swaying boughs of the beech that screens the roofless chapel are bright with opening leaves, the jackdaws come back from their winter wanderings and build their nests here, in the niches of the ruined tower; there, in cosy nooks among the ivy. Now they settle down for the season on the broken stairway that hangs midway up the wall.

Over all there cling the memories of the vanished years. The voice of Dunstan echoed in this empty hall. Beneath that turf the bones of Arthur crumbled

into dust. Up yonder hill the last Abbot went without flinching to his shameful doom. The armed rabble of 'King' Monmouth lit their camp-fires in these very walls—

And the troopers saw, by the wandering glare.  
Grey, shadowy monks on the ruined stair ;  
And trembling swore, the owls o'erhead  
Were the restless ghosts of the angry dead.

## SYLVAN MINSTRELS.



THE woodland ways, still glorious in their rich October dress, are yet sorrowful in their silence. Amid all the splendour of the crimson and the gold we miss the music of the birds. We miss the mellow song of the blackcap, the hasty symphony of the white-throat, the gentle cadence of the willow-wren, and the voice of many a sweet songster beside.

It is true that there is no lack of life among the trees. Here, a brown squirrel is racing over the branches; or, seated on some level bough, with his brush curled over his back, scatters the chips of fir-cones on the ground beneath him; or, peering from behind the stem, watches with bright black eyes the advance of the intruder. There, a merry party of long-tailed titmice chase each other from tree to tree across the wood. Little troops of gold-crests, clustering about the pine-tops, raise their tiny voices rejoicing in the sun. Now, the soft call-note of a bullfinch hardly breaks the stillness; now, the whole wood is ringing

with the screams of a family of jays ; here, chimes in the chatter of a magpie ; there, rises the alarm note of a missel-thrush like the crash of breaking boughs in wintry storms. No, there is no lack of movement, but there is a dearth of music.

There are birds which sing, more or less, throughout the year—like our familiar and faithful friends the robin and the wren. But the spring-time is the musical season.

When the eggs are hatched the singers break off one by one, and devote their energies to their family cares.

The male bird, who sang over and over again all his rich store of melodies to cheer his mate in her long and patient vigil, has time for music no longer.

Hard indeed must the pair toil to keep their insatiable nestlings supplied with food. From dawn to dark it is one continuous labour.

And when the hush of night has settled down upon the woodlands ; when the glow has faded from the west, and soft blue shadows gather in the landscape, the little minstrels are fain to snatch a few brief hours of sleep before the glimmer in the east shall rouse once more their hungry brood.

In the early spring, commencing even before the grip of winter is fairly loosened from the land, the song-thrush is the chief musician. Not half-hearted and fickle, like the nightingale ; not given to breaking off in the middle of a bar, like the blackcap ; but, from the top of a wayside elm, or from the shelter of a spreading

beech-tree, he will pour his wonderful music by the hour together—a soft, delicious, perfect piece of melody.

He has tuneful kinsmen, too. Who does not love to listen to the blackbird's few mellow bars in the evening twilight? He has a critical taste for strawberries, to be sure, and he is a parlous fellow to be left alone in a cherry-tree; but he is a noble minstrel, and he earns his wages.

The wild song of the missel-thrush again is a welcome addition to the orchestra; and the flyfisher, who is wise enough to see in him a friend, and not a foe, would be loath to lose, from lonely streams, the company and the melody of the sprightly dipper.

The nightingale, at his best, is a superb and peerless minstrel. But the songster of the Surrey lanes and the pleasant Hertfordshire woodlands might be of another race altogether from his brother in the west. In the combs that nestle among the broken ramparts of the Mendips, the nightingale is usually but a capricious and feeble performer. There is not the keen rivalry which in the home counties brings the finest singers to the front. He is on the Marches of his dominions too, and perhaps he feels himself a stranger, and his heart is elsewhere.

But if the nightingale has no peer, he has some musical companions, who, for the most part, have gone with him now in the track of the summer.

Listen on the edge of some quiet coppice when the



hawthorn is out. From the cool depths of a tangled thicket comes a soft and flute-like song—tender and sweet, and full of melody—it is

The blackcap's breezy strain ;  
That airily floats, in liquid notes,  
Through the shafts of the leafy dome,  
Where, deftly laid in the woodbine-shade,  
Is swinging his fairy home.

And, through the hedgerow near him, filters the hurried song of the white-throat. Now, he flickers a few feet into the air, singing all the while. Now, he balances on a spray, swelling his little throat with music until it seems positively to glow. Now, he disappears in the hedge, and croons a quiet melody to himself so softly that you fancy him in the next field, until, disturbed by the approach of footsteps, he dashes from cover, with angry notes of alarm and indignation.

Hard by, a sober hedge-sparrow sings his modest lay. He stays with us all the year. He never grows discontented with the cold, or the shortness of provisions. He is deliberate in his ditty, as a steady stay-at-home might be expected to be. His is a simple strain ; there are no variations in it ; but we accept it thankfully, remembering the constancy of the singer.

The skylark too, a prince of song, spreads his quivering wings not only over the rich May meadows, but a sunny day even in October will tempt him up towards the blue heaven, in such an ecstasy, that the

footsore wanderer on the dusty highway pauses and turns to listen to a strain, which carries his thoughts back, perchance, to his own brighter days among green fields and pleasant lanes ; and when at length he turns back to the reality of his dreary tramp, he may even hum a stave of some long-forgotten ballad about the flowers, and the birds, and the spring-time.

The voices of birds which have no gift of song may be heard the whole year through. Such are the *Corvidæ*—the crows.

The whole race, from the raven to the chough, have voices harsh, monotonous, unmusical ; and their gorgeous relatives in the far East, the birds of Paradise, are no better off. When Dr. Johnson, in 'The Story of a Day,' relates how the ears of Obidah, the son of Abensina, were delighted as he 'pursued his journey through the plains of Hindostan,' by 'the morning song of the bird of Paradise,' the statement is open to much the same kind of criticism as that which Cuvier is said to have bestowed on the Academicians' definition of a crab ; for the bird is not found in India ; and its morning song, as described by Mr. Wallace, is '*wawk, wawk, wawk ; wok, wok, wok.*'

There is not much in the woodlands of 'the woodpecker tapping the hollow beech-tree.' The familiar green species finds his food chiefly on the ground but his voice is often heard—a merry voice enough—a reveller's laugh, in spite of Buffon's idea that woodpeckers are a melancholy race.

They are common in many places, but are no more to be seen by the careless observer than the Dryads themselves. At the sound of footsteps they will shrink behind sheltering branches or climb high up into their leafy citadels ; and it is only the quiet, patient watcher who does much more than catch a passing glimpse of the gay green livery and the gallant crimson crest.

There are many other birds which, although not endowed with song, help to cheer the woodland ways with merry throats.

The year will have barely opened ere the great titmouse and his genial friends will raise their ringing call-notes in every lane and wood and orchard, clear and musical in the sharp January air, like the clink of iron upon the village anvil.

There is music in the fierce cry of the kestrel as his keen wings bear him up to his fastness in the rocks ; in the joyous screaming of a troop of swifts as they revel in their empire of the air ; in the very drone of the nightjar, sailing over the meadows in the dusk to pick up a moth for his supper ; and in the solemn stillness of a moonlight night, there is music in 'the lonely owl's halloo.'

## WINTER VISITORS.

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ALTHOUGH no longer on our coasts descend the keels of the Norsemen, and although sea-rovers are as rare as the sea-serpent, yet each autumn there comes on us still from the hungry North a host of clamorous invaders. The wide stretches of level land along the shores of rivers, the muddy flats left by the retreating tide, are peopled anew by the wild fowl that deserted them in the spring. From Norwegian fjelds and forests, from the wide plains of Siberia, even from near the Pole itself, great flights of these winter visitors are trooping fast. Once more the snow lies deep upon the marshes that in the brief summer of the North awoke and kindled into life, and glowed with rich rank verdure. Once more over the desolate wastes there reigns the silence of the dreary winter.

Along the Eastern coasts we may watch at early dawn, high up on the grey sky, the long columns of the invading army.

Flocks of geese in the orderly grey wedges that delight the heart of the wild-fowler; strings of teal

and widgeon ; companies even of the great whooping swan, whose mighty pinions sound so strangely as they pass by night ; vast crowds of snipe, greenshanks, dotterels, plovers—perhaps even a few phalarope, are borne along with the waves of the great inroad.

From our own moorlands, as well as from remoter breeding stations, comes down the curlew, at the sound of whose plaintive cry you will put in a wire cartridge, and lie down in your boat.

Armies of ducks, frozen out of their Arctic feeding grounds, settle down on the brown waters of broad river mouths.

On every muddy shore flocks of sandpipers, returned from their haunts by the Polar Sea, gather into clouds that sail up and down the wintry beach with musical and mournful cries.

Now they stand out a myriad points of silver on the cold grey heaven ; now they are lost again as they wheel with the precision of a troop of cavalry ; now 'they pour along like a fire that sweeps the whole earth before it ;' now they settle down on the shore and run this way and that probing the mud with their long bills in search of food, and leaving mazes of light footprints on the yielding surface.

Flights of woodcocks, suddenly descending like a waterspout from their airy highway, alight spent and breathless on the land. Then scattering over the country they return to their haunts of the previous autumn.

Woodcocks, like many other birds which seem to belong more to the winter than the summer, breed in our islands to a limited extent, but this fixed population is always largely recruited by a great influx of strangers.

Not only is the coast thus taken possession of. There is not a country parish in which troops of field-fares are not quartered for the winter; which is not visited by flights of redwings. While in more secluded districts the woodcock and the snipe are lying; perhaps a hawfinch or two, or little company of siskins, may settle down, while the resident population even of goldcrests is augmented by additions from beyond the sea.

A much rarer autumn guest than these is the cross-bill, a bird which is not often seen in sufficient numbers to attract attention; but there are quaint allusions in the old writers to its appearance in these islands in vast flights, when the damage done by it in the apple-orchards proved its seemingly malformed beak to be a very serviceable weapon indeed.

Siskins again are somewhat irregular in their visits. They appear in numbers one winter, and then years may elapse before they are seen again in the same district.

The haunt of the siskin is among the alder-trees that fringe some quiet stream far from sight or sound of man. As you draw near no birds are visible; everything is still and silent, but before you reach the

trees a little troop of siskins fly up from the alder-seeds that lie scattered on the ground, with strange metallic notes, and alight among the trees farther down the stream.

Give them a few minutes to settle down again, and then steal along in the shelter of the old willow, whose rifted trunk leans over the water. There they are, the whole tribe of them, busy among the catkins, clinging in ever-changing graceful attitudes to the brown clusters that hang among the swaying boughs.

It is well for them that they have found a sanctuary like this. Too often, alas ! our feathered visitors meet their death within our borders. We show no favour to the oriole ; we give no shelter to the waxwing.

And as long as there are those who think that the possession of the stuffed and mounted skin is more to be desired than the delight of watching the living bird in the enjoyment of its freedom, and write with pride to the papers of their 'success in bagging' a whole flock of rare visitors, there is small hope that the bustard will once more run free on Salisbury Plain, of that the crane will come back to his long-deserted haunt among the fens.

To the true lover of Nature the pleasure lies, not in promptly slaying each new and too trustful feathered stranger, but in watching the manners and customs of the children of the air.

He is willing to lie quiet in the shelter of some friendly screen of leafage, while the wary coal-tit carries

into her own particular chink those materials out of which she and her mate will frame their soft and cosy habitation.

He will face the wet grass of a late June morning, and lie hidden in a ditch to watch the kestrel take her plunder to her fierce brood high up in the limestone cliff.

For him the woodland ways are full of ever new delight. Each hedgerow has its feathered tenants; each ancient tree is the haunt of one or other of his gentle vassals.





#### ADAPTED PLUMAGE.



THE cold hand of Winter not only cuts down the late lingering flowers, and scatters the few last leaves upon the woodland path, but leaves the white print of icy fingers on the very plumage of the birds.

The feathers of some, such as the snow-bunting, he touches lightly here and there as with a few flakes of early snow. Others, like the ptarmigan, whose sober colouring has all through the summer matched so well the browns and greys of the heather, and the lichen of her home among the mountains, he clothes with a dress as white as the very snowdrift which enwraps her winter home.

The ptarmigan is with us a Highland bird, not being found in England at all. In other countries, where not strictly Arctic in its range, it frequents mountainous districts, generally at a great height above sea-level.

The white birds so conspicuous in our winter markets are chiefly willow grouse. They are larger than ptarmigan, and are without the black stripe which crosses the eye of that bird.

Although there are but few species whose garb is thus completely altered in the winter season, there are many in whose plumage a marked change takes place, generally in the direction of more sombre tones and less conspicuous colouring. The linnet, for example, loses the vivid touch of crimson from his glossy crown; the flush of carmine from his delicate breast. And the twittering companies which fly over the winter stubble are dull indeed compared with their appearance early in the year, when the rival songsters, each on the top of his favourite furze bush, fill the air with sweet snatches of most ethereal song.

It is, indeed, in the spring, in the pairing-time, that birds are at their best and brightest :

‘ In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin’s breast,  
In the spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest.’

When the broods have flown begins the annual moult, often accompanied by some change in appearance.

There is also towards winter a thickening of the feathers as a defence against the cold.

A series of careful observations, made under the idea that one cause of migration might be that some birds possessed warmer blood than others, seemed merely to show that birds of powerful flight have a higher blood-heat than less active species. The swift, for example, measured no less than 107 deg. F.; but that was no more than could be said of the green woodpecker.

At the approach of winter the oyster-catcher—plain enough to be seen at all times with his black and white dress and his bright red beak, as he wanders over the beach at low water, making himself still plainer by his strange cry—gets himself a white band across his dusky breast.

Several of the plovers and sandpipers lose their dark and conspicuous markings. The phalarope, whose summer attire is faced with red, comes to our shores in a delicate suit of white and grey. All these and many other changes, seen at their extreme in the ptarmigan, are no doubt meant as aids to concealment in a bare and wintry landscape.

The plumage of birds in general, especially of those which make their nests on the ground, will be found to harmonize to a great extent with their usual surroundings. The dress of the snipe, for instance, clouded as it is with shades of brown and streaked with markings like a few casual blades of withered

sedge, is most happily assimilated to its haunts among the dry grass of windy moors, and the rustling flags on the fringe of quiet pools.

It was well said by Bewick that at a little distance the woodcock appears 'exactly like the withered stalks and leaves of ferns, sticks, moss, and grasses which form the background of the scenery by which it is sheltered in its moist and solitary retreats.'

Another bird of particularly quiet and inconspicuous plumage is the nightjar. A shy and retiring visitor, a very late arrival from the south, she goes far afield to find a place where she may bring up her small family without fear of interruption; and when she lies close among the stones of the hillside, or the dry grass of the upland pasture, screened by tall clumps of bracken, she is hardly distinguishable from the ground.

It is a red-letter day in the life of the young naturalist when for the first time he flushes a nightjar from her eggs. Without a sound to betray her flight, she glides away with apparent difficulty, and settles on a neighbouring tree, whence, perched along instead of across the bough, she watches the proceedings of the intruder. Should he follow her, fancying her to be lame or unable to fly far, she will lure him on like a lapwing. But if he has kept his eyes on the spot she rose from he may be fortunate enough to find, at his feet, laid on the bare ground without a feather or a straw by way of nest, those two exquisite eggs, like white

marble veined with soft shades of grey, which will rank among the fairest prizes in his cabinet.

The colours of the lapwing are not much of a protection to her, but her eggs are often hard to find on the burnt grass with which they harmonize so well. All around are the brown stretches of the moor—or, perhaps, the breezy level of the old Roman encampment. High overhead, against the blue April sky, sail the 'wanton' lapwings, on broad and whistling pinions. Now they turn over and over in the air, now they sweep down close at hand, now they alight at a distance and make believe to be visiting their eggs. Now they fly round with shrill cries of lament and protestation, louder and more vehement as the steps of the intruder approach the longed-for spoil. Finally, they accompany him off the ground exulting in his defeat and their escape from plunder.

The comparatively sober colour of hen birds in general is no doubt to protect them from observation while sitting on their eggs. The cock bird always takes care of himself. Who has ever known the glossy mallard or the handsome eider stand by his wife and family at the approach of danger? He is off at once, while the staid and sombre duck, full of anxiety, does her best to hurry her brood into a place of safety.

Just as decorative plumage pure and simple reaches its highest pitch in the adornment of the Birds of Paradise, so the extreme of contrast is here presented between the male and the female.

It is not twenty-five years since Mr. Wallace's two magnificent specimens of the Emerald Bird of Paradise delighted the eyes of visitors to the Zoological Gardens. Most of us have to be content with the skins alone; and even then, dried and distorted as the finest specimens must always be, few objects in nature will bear comparison with their marvellous beauty. The soft and delicate tones of the colouring—the emerald throat, the yellow crown, the rich brown of the wings and tail, the wonder of the flowing plumes which fall round the living bird like a shower of gold—all these render the Great and the Lesser Birds of Paradise two of the finest gems in the vast treasure-house of Nature. This description applies to the male alone; his wife is of a plain and sober brown—uniform enough to satisfy the soul of the primmest Quakeress of the ancient school.

Birds which lay their eggs in holes are less exposed to danger, and the difference between male and female, if it exist at all, is much less strongly marked.

The green woodpecker is a case in point. He is a handsome bird. Although the bright colour of his forester's dress harmonizes very well with the tone of his haunt among the orchards, and although his solitary ways keep him mostly out of sight, yet once observed, his crimson crest and yellow tail-coverts catch the eye in a moment. And his wife, except for an extra patch of red on his cheek, is as gay as he. She and her brood, however, in their hollowed home

deep in the heart of a tree, are safe from the keen eye of prowling weasel or marauding hawk, and need no protection from subdued colouring.

The kingfisher, another hole-breeder, is more brilliant still ; and here again the hen bird vies with her mate in the brightness of her colours. Under a glass case, perched stiffly on a twig in what the bird-stuffer regards as a natural attitude, he is rather an ungainly object.

But in his haunt by the sylvan stream he is the eye of the picture—the finishing touch to the landscape.

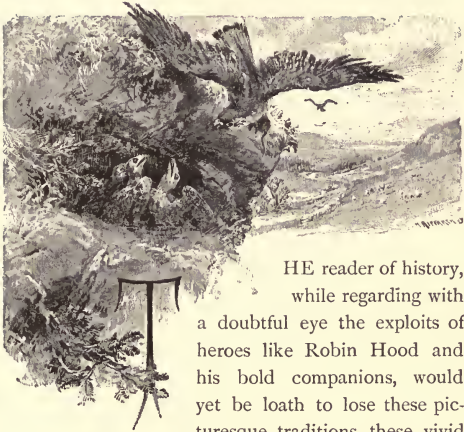
The little river wanders through rich meadows, that in summer are bright with purple spikes of loose-strife, and the golden wings of the flower de luce. There is a devious footpath over rustic bridges, but wayfarers are few and far between. Dark alders lean over the banks ; forests of tall sedges cluster lovingly round the roots of the grey willow trees. There is no sound but the drone of the old Norman mill and the plash of water over the ancient wheel ; or now and then the cry of a creeper in the great sycamore, or the leap of a trout, or the plunge of a water-rat. It is a place

Where timid rail and moorhen hide  
In the tufted sedge by the riverside ;  
Where dusky coots, with careless oar,  
The silver pools drift idly o'er ;  
Where the grey heron looks silent down  
On the trout that flash through the shadows brown ;  
Where fiery marsh-flowers stoop to lave  
Their golden bells in the whirling wave.

Suddenly, from his unseen station—a flash of blue light along the brown water — darts a kingfisher. Down he goes ; there is a gleam of red and azure among the silver of the scattered spray ; then, with a minnow glittering in his beak, he goes back to his perch on the low bough hanging over the water, to beat the life out of his prey before swallowing it. Or maybe he carries it off to the steep bank below the weir, where, half hidden by ferns and trailing ivy, and screened by the great elms which join hands across the stream, his expectant brood, standing up like storks at the mouth of their hole, scream a chorus of impatience and delight at the appearance of dinner.



## OUTLAWS.



HE reader of history, while regarding with a doubtful eye the exploits of heroes like Robin Hood and his bold companions, would yet be loath to lose these picturesque traditions, these vivid touches of colour—scattered all too sparingly in the staid and sober chronicle. With similar feelings the naturalist contemplates those outlawed clans of birds and beasts which are viewed askance by the world at large, which the farmer shoots without trial, and the keeper hangs up

without hope of reprieve. He knows how he would miss from the landscape the bold colouring of the magpie, the bright plumage of the jay, the marvellous poise of the kestrel; and knowing that, in spite of all that may be said to their discredit, their virtues are much greater than their vices—that some are quite innocent, and that even the crow is not so black as he is painted—he, at least, would let the hawk go by and spare even the magpie from its doom.

It is true that the teaching of the village school and even the machinery of the common law have done much in their defence, but there are still whole races—the birds of prey, for instance—which are more or less under the ban.

The keeper is for the most part beyond the reach of softening influences. There rot upon his gallows the remains not only of the sparrow-hawk and the magpie, the owl and the kestrel, but even of the woodpecker and the nightjar—birds capable of doing rather less harm to the game than the Babes in the Wood.

The royal eagle is indeed no longer ruthlessly shot or trapped wherever he may appear; in some of the deer forests protection is even afforded him. But to the buzzard and the peregrine no such mercy is shown; and those which are not slaughtered in the supposed interests of game-preserving, become the prey of the dealer and the collector. The latter has much to answer for. Although rewards are no longer

offered by rural vestries for the heads of kites and crows, the price that the collector cheerfully pays for a good specimen—a price which might make the worthy churchwardens turn in their graves, is an even stronger inducement to bring down every strange bird that may appear in the parish. The kite, once common in the very streets of London, is now so rare that we have but little chance of studying its habits at all in this country.

The buzzard happily still survives among the Welsh mountains and in similar districts. On parts of Dartmoor it is quite a feature in the landscape, when sailing slowly in wide circles on its broad and stately wings it calls now and then to its mate with a strange cry which is audible when the bird itself is almost lost in the blue.

Mice and beetles are probably its chief food for most of the year, though its requirements are greater when it has young to provide for. A buzzard seen to alight on a hillside in Wales rose into the air with a long snake writhing in its grasp.

The noble peregrine, although no longer finding shelter as it once did in the towers of Westminster Abbey, lingers in many places on our coasts. Making its home in the steep face of some sea-beaten cliff, it rears its brood in defiance of the boldest climber; and, sallying forth from its rocky fastness, it will flutter with terrible effect the pigeons of the farmer's dovecote; while the partridge and the teal have small

hope of escape from the rush of its untiring wings, and the fatal stroke of its resistless talons.

The commonest of the race, the kestrel, far from being a foe to the farmer or the keeper, is a staunch ally. No poacher is he; no harrier of hen-coops; even the lark and the linnet may for the most part go free for him. His game is usually nothing more ambitious than moles or field-mice; while the chafer and the dor-beetle furnish perhaps even the greater part of his diet.

The kestrel will often take possession of the abandoned nest of a crow, but is fond, when he can get it, of a fortress in the rocks.

In a niche high up in the cliff, half hidden perhaps by ancient whitebeam and rowans, which cling with roots like talons to the battered crags, and fringed with the grey-green tongues of limestone-loving ferns, the rich brown eggs, the coveted spoil of the young collector, are laid and hatched with no more nest than the earth which decayed leaves or winter storms have strewn lightly over the stony surface.

From such an eyrie the keen-eyed hawk looks far out over the landscape. Sweeping down upon the lowlands with a few beats of his strong wings, he lingers a moment perhaps in the dark fir-trees in the lane below, then drifts leisurely down the valley on his morning raid. Now he poises in mid air. His wings spread wide and motionless to catch the breeze, or rapidly vibrating in the still ether; his broad tail

expanded to the full, the sunlight glowing on his chestnut back. Suddenly closing his pinions, he falls like a stone.

Rising again, he continues his foray, hovering here and there over coppice and meadow, stooping down at times upon his hapless quarry, and at last bearing his booty up to his fierce eyasses in the cliff.

All a-row upon the threshold stand the bold young brood, and await with eager screams their sire's return.

Scale the rocks and visit the eyrie. The old bird floats overhead with wild outcries of defiance. The undaunted brood ruffle up their feathers, throw themselves on their backs in the farthest corner of their cave and make a brave show of fight with beak and claws. Before them lies the untouched repast—a mole. Scattered under the nest are innumerable pellets—the undigested remains of many banquets, consisting mainly of the fur of small animals, and glittering with the elytra of *carabi* and dor-beetles; traces of feathers few or none.

The sparrow-hawk is a bird of quite another way of living. His method of hunting is less picturesque, perhaps; his quarry is more ambitious. He skims swiftly over the fields, and just clearing the hedge, pounces on the unexpectant finch or bunting who is pluming himself on the other side. He has a way of suddenly appearing in a farmyard and snatching up a stray chicken. Even a ringdove is not too large for

him, and he will overtake a partridge in the open field. No bird, indeed, is safe ; a few bright feathers scattered by some lonely path mark the fate even of the jay and the green woodpecker.

The sparrowhawk will sometimes attack a crow. The duel is fought in mid-air. The hawk skilfully wheeling about his sable antagonist makes now and then frantic clutches at his back ; the lumbering crow, with hoarse notes of anger and defiance, does his best to meet his active enemy on the point of the bayonet. And so they drift over the crest of the hill and disappear.

Both birds have a bad character. Have they been quarrelling over the division of plunder, or has the extremity of hunger driven the hawk to attack a bird larger than himself?

He is, in truth, a bold marauder. Instances have been known of his dashing through a window in chase of a lark or sparrow that had taken sanctuary from its fierce pursuer even within the dwelling of man. One was caught in a drawing-room in the act of dragging a canary through the bars of its cage.

Few rustics when armed with a gun will let an owl of any sort go by scot-free. They shake their heads when told that they are killing a useful destroyer of vermin.

‘ Men have no faith in fine-spun sentiment  
Who put their trust in bullocks and in beeves.’

Some years since a row of stately elms was the

pride of a West-country village. They might have been saplings when Monmouth marched his men through the parish on the way to Sedgemoor. They were known in all the district as 'the place where the great white owl do bide.' In an evil hour the owner, with an eye to filling his pocket, had the trees cut down. Within the hollow trunk of that particular elm which had been the home of the owls was a heap of bones and fur—the long accumulated relics of many a moonlight foray. Careful search among these remains brought to light some half-dozen skulls of small birds amid a very charnel-house of crania of mice and moles.

Another band of outlaws with characters worse even than those of the birds of prey are the crow and his dark companions.

They are all of great use at times, but their lives are mostly stained with rapine and murder.

There is something weird and gloomy about the king of the race—the raven. It is hard not to read in his dismal croak an omen of evil. His iron bill is a terrible instrument of destruction to lambs in outlying pastures of Exmoor; and woe betide the unhappy beast that, worn out with age and hardship, sinks down exhausted on the open moorland. In this case, however, superstition is a powerful factor in his preservation.

The countryman of the Mendips, where the sable bird is still sometimes seen, willing enough to risk his neck in plundering the cliff-built nest of hawk or rock

dove, will not touch the eyrie of the raven. Stories are even now told, with bated breath, of the fate which befell men, still remembered in the village, who had dared to rob the nest or shoot the birds.

The services of the rook are now generally recognised. His hands are not altogether clean in the matter of newly-sown grain or potatoes, but he is an angel of light by the side of his cousin the crow, who, according to the popular account, only takes to killing grubs when eggs are scarce and it is not the season for chickens.

But the magpie is the Ishmaelite of the race. If his hand is not against every man, every man's hand is certainly against him. He knows it well. He builds himself a mighty fortress in the top of some tall fir-tree, or in the heart of an ancient blackthorn, and he bars the approaches with outworks of thorns and sticks until the whole tree bristles like a hedgehog. He is a bold and barefaced bandit, of whose ill-deeds most raisers of poultry have to complain.

The jay, however, is not far behind in evil reputation, both in the farmyard and the cover. He is a handsome bird ; indeed, we have few to match him ; and that is no doubt another reason why he is so seldom spared. Now that the fashion seems to have been firmly set against the wearing of wings and feathers—that long-lingering relic of barbaric adornment—the poor jay may have more chance in the struggle for existence.



Bad as is the character of the *corvidæ*, there can be little doubt that their services in destroying mice, grubs, and beetles, for more than half the year at least, far outweigh the harm they do.

‘ Even the blackest of them all, the crow,  
Renders good service as your man-at-arms,  
Crushing the beetle in his coat of mail,  
And crying havoc on the slug and snail.’

But they have, one and all of them, a black mark set down against their names in the memory of the farmer. The magpie is shot for plundering the hen-roost; the jay pays with his life the penalty of his taste for peas; the crow dies without mercy as the foe of leverets and weakly lambs; even the rook is suspended *in terrorem* over the corn he laboured so hard to save; while the jackdaw, convicted of nothing particular, gets his death as an aider and abettor of his inky relations.

## SOME BIRD MYTHS.

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THE first keen touch of winter leads to our doors the fearless and familiar robin. His appearance is so consonant with our ideas of Christmas that we regard him as a natural feature in the leafless landscape—a sort of recognised property in the winter scenery of poet and of painter. We think of him too as a bold-hearted bird, who will face the cold blast and the bitter snowfall; a faithful vassal who stands by us when less constant friends depart. This part of his character, it must be confessed, is somewhat overdrawn; for he too is a migrant and a rover after all.

As the cold grows sharper and the food supply consequently shorter, crowds of redbreasts cross the sea, and some of them probably go as far even as the oases of the great Sahara. Those individuals, who, from previous experience, rely on the provision made for them on friendly doorsteps and window-sills may stay with us; and many interesting instances are recorded of redbreasts who have boldly quartered themselves for the winter in dwelling-houses, and have even taken their meals with the family.

For those who thus remain there is in the popular mind an idea of sacredness which protects them, not only from the rustic fowling-piece, but mostly even from the stone that startles the house-sparrow into voluble profanity.

The reason for this protection and encouragement is obvious. Old myths and half-forgotten legends are indeed quoted to account for it ; but these are rather to be considered as a result than as a cause. It seems much more probable that the robin's claim to indulgence lies rather in the attraction of its pretty and confiding ways. Its 'sprightly bearing, its red breast, its bright black eye, its confident air, and the knowing turn of its head win for it more favour than any ancient myth or mouldering tradition.

Nor is it likely that any belief, conscious or otherwise, in the story of the 'Babes in the Wood,' influences the English peasant in his dealings with the robin. That famous ballad appeared, according to Percy, in the first year of the seventeenth century ; but a similar idea is found in the 'Cornucopia,' a work of some years earlier, where it is stated as a well-known fact that the redbreast was in the habit of covering with moss the bodies of the dead. Again, Webster writes, in 1638 :

'Call for the robin redbreast and the wren ;  
Since o'er shady groves they hover,  
And with leaves and flowers do cover  
The friendless bodies of unburied men.

Two distinct legends account for the colour of its breast. One is associated with Christ's Crown of Thorns. Another story is that the robin scorched its breast in bringing fire down from heaven to rekindle the cold hearths of mankind. One legend, embodied in Whittier's beautiful verses, tells us that the robin burnt its tender little bosom while carrying drops of water in its beak to relieve the anguish of the souls of the lost.

It is said that the wren, associated in myth and rhyme with the robin, is still in some places looked upon as its mate. The reason for this strange idea lies perhaps in the similar friendly way of the two birds. Both constantly haunt the abodes of man. The songs of both, from wintry dawn to sunset, enliven the dark days when no other minstrel finds a stave to sing. Their easily recognised figures are familiar to us from childhood; their very names are household words.

Some writers—as early as Aristotle—describe the wren as the king of birds, and various accounts are found in folk-lore of the contest which gave him this dignity.

The feathered tribes, assembled in solemn conclave to elect a king, agreed to honour as their lord, that one of their number who should fly the highest. The eagle easily distanced all comers, and when even his great wings were weary, and he could fly no higher, he prepared to claim the crown. Thereupon a wren,

which had hidden itself away among the feathers of its mighty rival, left its retreat and soared a few feet further into the air, and by this trick obtained the royal title.

It is doubtful, however, whether the common brown bird is meant, or the gold-crest—the smallest of British, and, indeed, of European birds, which wears a visible symbol of sovereignty—a dash of gold—upon its tiny head.

A curious custom once prevailed in parts of France and in several places in the British islands, and is said to be not yet entirely extinct, by which wrens were hunted every year on Christmas Day, and, on the day following, the lifeless bodies of the little birds were carried through the streets in solemn procession by boys, who went from house to house asking for money and singing :

‘ The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,  
St. Stephen’s Day was caught in the furze ;  
We hunted him up, we hunted him down,  
We hunted him all about the town.  
Although he is little, his family great,  
I pray you, good people, give us a treat ’

—with other verses varying in number and substance in different districts. It is said in explanation of this custom that a wren flying in the face of St. Stephen’s gaoler awoke him as the protomartyr was in the act of escaping.

The wren probably gets no credit from the Catholic

population, from the story that the sleeping sentries of King William's army were roused, and the Orange army saved from destruction, by the noise which a party of these little birds made in pecking crumbs from a Protestant drum-head.

✱ Like the robin, the wren is said to have injured itself in a public-spirited attempt to bring fire from heaven. Its feathers having been all burnt off, the other birds lent it some of theirs, with the single exception of the owl, who for its selfish and ungrateful conduct was banished from society, and has ever since been obliged to wait till nightfall before he can stir abroad.

Owls have never been popular birds. The gloomy and retiring habits of most species, and the blood-curdling screech of some of them, have earned for the whole tribe an evil reputation. We read in Pliny that, on two occasions, a large owl having made its appearance in the streets of Rome, a solemn ceremony was performed by the whole city to avert the catastrophe foreshadowed by visits from such awful-looking monsters.

Not a few bird-myths are connected with death or ill-fortune. Even in this matter-of-fact age there are probably many places where all hope of a sick man's recovery would be given up if a crow, or even a rook or a jackdaw, flew over the dwelling. In the Orkneys the same belief attaches to the ring-ouzel, and there are districts in England where the sudden appearance

of a white pigeon is thought to herald the approach of death.

There are not a few even of educated persons who, mindful of the old rhymes, would feel more relieved on seeing a second magpie cross their path. The couplet :

‘ One for sorrow, two for mirth,  
Three for a wedding, four for a birth,’

is familiar to all ; but a variety of consequences is predicted from seeing five or six, and one version even goes up to ten :

‘ Five for silver, six for gold,  
Seven for a secret not to be told,  
Eight for heaven, nine for hell,  
And ten for the devil’s ain sell.’

In other days at least, and perhaps the belief may still linger here and there, the storm-tossed sailor felt hope die out within him as he watched, flitting among the white wave-crests of the angry sea, the dark figure of the stormy petrel. For he saw in this little bird—which takes its name from Peter’s attempt to walk on the water—a phantom from the nether world. According to one legend, it was the restless ghost of some dead-and-gone sea-captain, condemned for his cruelty to wander thus for ever, like Vanderdecken, over the waste of waters ; or, more ominous still, the soul of a drowned mariner wailing over his unconsecrated grave.

In the ‘Metamorphoses’ we are familiar with many

instances in which mortals were, according to the poet, transformed into birds. A myth is said to be still prevalent in Denmark to the effect that lapwings represent the spirits of departed old maids, while green sandpipers are the deceased bachelors. These birds haunt the same marshy places, and when the lapwings, sailing slowly through the air, wail in mournful strains,

‘O why wouldn’t you? O why wouldn’t you?’

the sandpipers in clear and ringing tones make answer:

‘Because we dared not, because we dared not,’

followed by a chorus of mocking laughter from the unrepentant crew.

In some of the mining districts of the North of England the cry of the golden plover is dreaded as a portent of coming evil. The colliers say that the voices of these birds—the wandering spirits of the Jews who assisted at the Crucifixion—are always heard before disastrous explosions in the pits; and the men will even refuse to descend to their work when they have heard, floating down through the darkness, the mournful whistling of a troop of plovers.

A brighter myth is linked with the humming-bird. In the Aztec mythology humming-birds were the souls of heroes who, having died in defence of the gods, were conducted into the kingdom of the Sun, and



wore, by command of that deity, a dress worthy of their fair renown.

To even the soberest of mortals 'Halcyon Days' will suggest bygone seasons of calm and quiet; hours of peace and sunlit happiness; will carry the memory back perchance to some sweet river idyll:

' . . . in some forgotten June  
When they both were young together;  
Heart of youth and summer weather  
Making all their holiday,'

and yet perhaps forget—if he ever heard of it—that strange myth that Pliny wrote of, and that Montaigne embellished with touches of his own, how the kingfisher—the Halcyon of Ovid's story—builds her nest in the depth of winter; and how 'the very seas . . . know well when they sit and breed. And the time whiles they are broodie is called halcyon daies; for during that season the sea is calm and navigable, especially on the coast of Sicilie.'

We smile at the credulity of an age which could believe in the legend. We ourselves have no faith in the old superstition; but many a doubtful voyager 'On life's dim unsounded sea' would echo the wish breathed in the tender lines of the quaint old poet:

' Blow, but gently blow, faire winde  
From the forsaken shore;  
And be as to the halcyon, kinde,  
Till we have ferried o'er.'

## WHEN WOODS ARE BARE.



**I**N these dull December days the woodlands wear their least attractive dress. Brown and faded leaves linger late upon the larches ; a few fiery sprays of bramble cling about the tangled thickets ; festoons of bryony, shorn of their

dark foliage, wander here and there among the bushes, and hang their chains of rubies in the wintry sun. But the red tresses of the beech lie thick on all the slopes with the glow of a rich sunset; the last leaves of the oak have floated gently down in drops of golden rain; the spoils of elm and sycamore, loosened by the frost and scattered by the storm, are spread over the earth like the pall of some barbaric chieftain.

Among the leafless trees the children of the forest, who all the summer long found a safe asylum in the greenwood, whose very presence was hardly noticed in the quiet autumn days, now make themselves plain enough to the least observant of wayfarers.

There is a stir of wings in all the tree-tops. The thickets are haunted by troops of eager and industrious foragers. On the ground is the rustle of innumerable tiny feet turning over in quest of insects the brown and yellow leaves.

One of the plainest to be seen of all the company is the jay. In the spring-time he is shy and quiet, hiding himself far aloof in the green depths of copse or underwood, or among the shadows of an unfrequented orchard. His voice is rarely heard. He flits silently away at the approach of danger, and his bright wings are seldom seen beyond the limits of his cover.

In the late summer, when household cares are over, he and his family leave the shelter of the woods and join the clans in their raids upon the ripening grain. In the winter these parties are by voice and dress

quite a feature of the wood. The white tail-coverts of the jay, and the dark plumage of his wings and tail, make him a striking object even at a distance as he flits in his lively way from tree to tree. Seen near at hand, the colours of his gay attire proclaim him what he is, one of the most beautiful of our native birds.

There is no idea now of vanishing in silence. One of the party, suspicious of danger, sounds a note of alarm. The harsh scream is taken up by each in turn until the whole glade is in a tumult. Then the noisy crew retire deeper into their sylvan haunt through the thick undergrowth of ash saplings which rise like a mist among the trees.

Less frequently noticed, because less common and much shyer and quieter than the jay, our three resident woodpeckers are much more easily seen now among the leafless branches.

The lesser spotted species is perhaps not so rare as it is often thought to be. Gould even said that it might be found in almost any large group of elms. But from its habit of frequenting the topmost boughs it is probably often passed by unnoticed.

The green woodpecker, although a recognised woodlander, is more partial to scattered timber than to the depths of the forest. His home lies rather among the grey wilderness of a West-country orchard, in the tall elms that cluster in a corner of the meadow, or the broad-leaved chestnuts of the solitary copse.

Follow the footpath that leads past the church and

winds along in the shadow of the hill. These bare rough banks are thick in spring-time with forests of pale primroses, and the fresh green leaves of the sorrel. On the shoulder of the hill up yonder is a clump of feathery larches, among whose green spring shadows the shy ringdove weaves her careless nest. Farther on along the hillside rise the rugged outlines of the grey limestone ramparts, in whose recesses rockdoves breed, and among whose ancient yew-trees the bold kestrel makes her home.

High up in the west, their great wings dark against the saffron of the wintry sky, a party of herons drift slowly out to fish among the moorland ditches.

All at once, from the dim shadows of the wood yonder, where brown waves of bracken cluster round the roots of stalwart beeches, and bright fungi hang like coloured lamps about the moss-grown tree stumps, comes the cry of a woodpecker. The next moment he sweeps down from his cover to the tall sycamore that stands like an outpost on the edge of the wood. Scattered gleams of sunlight flicker on the golden stem, as the branches sway gently in the wind,

As a sylph of the air had traced them there,  
And then dashed them away with her wing.

The bird alights half-way up the tree, his figure sharply outlined on the rare December blue. Clinging with powerful claws to the trunk and supporting himself with the stiff feathers of his tail, he peers into the

chinks in search of insects ; or, swaying his whole body to add force to the blow, he splits away the bark with his strong beak, or digs deep into the soft wood where it is beginning to decay. The sunshine glows on the gold and green of his forester's livery, and touches with an added fire the vivid crimson of his crest. Now he looks up to answer the hail of some brother of the craft,

And his jovial shout peals gaily out,  
Like a stave of a drinking song.

There is a stir of footsteps on the leaves. He stops his work and waits as still as if carved in wood. A dead stick snaps under an unwary footstep. In a moment the bird glides behind the trunk, and climbing higher up, watches from behind a branch the movements of the intruder. The steps draw nearer. The woodpecker sweeps silently away from the other side of the tree, skirts the long, tangled hedgerow, and shows for a moment like a gleam of gold ere he vanishes among the grey shadows of his favourite orchard. There is a hole in the stem of the old pollard ash in the hedge yonder that may have been his nest.

Many birds make their homes in holes in trees ; but the green woodpecker cuts his out for himself, generally in the very heart of a living tree. He does, it is true, make plenty of shallow, irregular cuttings in rotten wood, in search of the grubs and beetles that

burrow in the soft material ; but the excavation intended for a residence is cut round and true at the opening, and sometimes descends two feet into the solid timber. Nest, in the ordinary sense, there is none. The exquisite ivory eggs are laid on a bed of chips at the bottom of the hole.

Exceptionally powerful muscles are provided for the beak which has such work to do, and it has been observed that when the woodpecker strikes a blow its eyelids close at the same moment.

This curious sympathetic action, which seems to have escaped the notice of writers on ornithology, is evidently to protect the eyes from flying chips.

The bird is extremely shy ; it is not easy to watch the operation of nest-making. It would be interesting to clear up the vexed question whether the chips are, or are not, removed from the ground under the hole so as to avoid discovery. Professor Newton states that he has never known it done ; but many occupied nests have been found from which all traces of the work had, from some cause or other, disappeared. The birds, in such cases, may have been prompted by painful experience or family tradition.

Few birds use their nests for shelter after the young have flown ; but woodpeckers appear to sleep in their holes as a regular thing, and in some instances they return to the same tree to breed year after year. One case is on record in which a pair of these birds, or

their descendants, tenanted the same hole for thirty years in succession.

Another hole-builder, but in a different style, is the nut-hatch. He selects a hollow ready-made, and if the entrance is too large for his fancy he reduces its size by plastering it up with mud.

Not, however, like the hornbill Mr. Wallace writes of, who imprisons his mate in her nest with a rampart of mud; feeding her indeed, but keeping her thus in custody until her one chick is safely fledged. What experiences of heartless desertion there must have been to have brought matters to such a pass as this!

The nut-hatch is even more of an acrobat than the woodpecker, for he seems to run down a tree with greater ease than up it; and when he alights on a branch at some height above his nest he positively appears to trickle into his hole.

He is a pretty bird, both in his dress and his manners; and when in the winter, emboldened by the scarcity of food, he even joins the sparrows who flock round the door for crumbs—not unfrequently driving all other birds away—or, clinging in graceful attitudes to the dark foliage, he plunders the yew-tree of its brilliant fruit, his charming ways render him an ever-welcome visitor.

But of all the dwellers in the wood by far the most numerous and most easily seen are the titmice. A party of long-tailed tits, as many as thirty strong, fly



from bush to bush across the underwood. Their skirmishers search among the few last leaves that linger in the tree-tops; they investigate every crevice of the rustling ground. They keep up a continual chatter as they go; their fluffy little round bodies and strangely long tails singling them out plainly enough from the rest of the busy company. They are everywhere at once. The wood is alive with them. And all the while there swing from swaying boughs or rocking pine-tops the other members of the clan—the great tit, with his bold and brilliant colouring; the blue tit, with his smart blue bonnet; the marsh tit, and the coal tit, with their neat and quiet tints.

They are a merry crew, gifted with blithe and musical voices. And among them all the great tit, in particular, is the lyric poet of the spring. In the early days of January his clear sonorous call rises above the shrill treble of the robin, and the stammering pipe of the yet unpractised song-thrush. And in the sweet sunshine of happy April days his voice chimes in like the lilt of a swinging chorus, when, with music from a hundred throats,

The quivering air thrills everywhere  
One rippling sea of song.

## THE BIRD'S-EYE VIEW.



A FAMILIAR figure on the wintry sky of these dark December days is the roving kestrel, so plain to see now in the leafless landscape. Now he drifts across the moor ; now he pauses to hover on quick-beating wings ; now he sinks downward through the frosty air to rest for a brief space upon the ground.

A flock of redwings scattered over the meadow cower among the grass in terror as the keen wings sweep overhead, or with shrill notes of alarm hurry to the shelter of the nearest hedgerow. A troop of lapwings too, gathered in a motley crowd along the edge of the pool that lies in the long hollow of the pasture, catch sight of the flying figure, and rise hastily with anxious cries as the dreaded wings draw near.

But the hawk has no eyes for them. He is on the watch for humbler booty, and the thrush and the lapwing have little to fear from his sharp bill, unless he is driven by the scarcity of his usual simple fare to fly at higher game.

A party of linnets, busy in a clump of thistles, rise into the air with a musical chorus, and, instead of fleeing for shelter, give chase to the unoffending hawk. Now, they gain on his deliberate flight, and swoop down so as almost to brush him with their wings ; now, they scatter right and left at some movement they think may mean pursuit. They follow him a field or two, and then retire, exulting in what they seem to regard as his discomfiture.

A kestrel rarely turns when thus pursued, but a sparrow-hawk is apt to take the thing less calmly, and will sometimes avenge his injuries in the blood even of a brace of his impudent assailants. A cuckoo is often mobbed in a similar manner ; and a belated owl venturing out in daylight is pursued by half the birds of the parish.

As we watch the skilful evolutions of the kestrel, his pause, his hover, and his swift descent, we are tempted to wonder how so small an object as a mouse or a beetle can be seen from such a height above the ground. The wonder grows in the case of larger birds of prey—vultures especially, who from a height perhaps of thousands of feet descry the wounded deer or dying sheep when they themselves are far beyond our ken.

One of the commonest experiences of a desert march is the sudden appearance of vultures when some unfortunate beast, exhausted by the journey on the burning sand, has fallen out of the line and been left to perish by the way.

It is a treeless waste ; no mountains even, except as a dim line on the horizon ; but hardly has the dying beast sunk down, when from every side, coming out of the clear blue heaven, are seen those tiny specks that dilating as they fly, grow into great evil-looking vultures swiftly descending to the feast ; while the survivors, knowing well the ominous rush of those terrible wings, press on with eager haste, throwing fearful glances back, and wondering if the morrow's dawn will shine upon their whitened bones—one more link in that fatal chain of skeletons that marks the way across the waste.

It was long supposed that the marvellous power of the vulture in discovering a dead body lay in its sense of smell. A writer of the thirteenth century, in speaking of the faculties of animals, gravely asserts that a vulture can smell a carcase at a distance of 500 miles. Others, bolder still, declared it was no matter even if the sea should intervene.

The experiments of Darwin, Audubon, and others, however, have shown that birds depend much more on sight than smell, if indeed the latter faculty plays any appreciable part at all. Captive vultures have been known even to stand upon the canvas which concealed a piece of putrid meat, without discovering what lay beneath it until the covering was purposely torn.

The condor—the great vulture of the Andes—has been known to fly at a height of 15,000 feet. Perhaps

even at 2,000 feet a soaring bird would be unnoticed by, and perhaps invisible to, the traveller, while it is quite likely that a number of vultures would remain at that height, at wide intervals no doubt, forming a chain of observation extending far over the country. One bird swoops downward. The movement is followed by others in their turn, until the news of plunder has been spread perhaps for fifty miles.

Most of the higher orders of animals, no doubt, possess in a state of nature far-reaching powers of sight. The hunter who has followed the chamois among its native mountains knows well the keenness of its vision. But it is probable that birds excel all other creatures in this as in the power of flight.

The epithet 'lynx-eyed' is based upon a misconception. The word does not really refer to the beast at all, but to Lynceus, the Argonaut, the hero of the Calydonian Hunt, whose power of finding treasure in the bowels of the earth first brought the word into existence.

Even the smaller birds have vision far before our feeble powers. If we watch a flock of starlings picking up without a moment's pause a harvest from the meadow, and then, driving them away, examine the spot which they found so productive, we shall in all probability see nothing but the grass of the field where the industrious and keen-eyed birds were gleaning a sufficient feast of flies, and grubs, and centipedes, too small for the casual observer to discover.

The eyes of birds when compared with those of other animals present some marked and palpable differences. They are much more variously coloured; the iris is of all hues, from white to black. It may be red or blue, brown or yellow. The eye is large in proportion to the head, especially in the case of late-flying birds who need to make the most of the dim light of evening.

Among several singular points of internal structure the most remarkable is the presence of a jointed ring of bone, which lies in front of the eyeball, round the iris. It consists of a number of segments or plates firmly united together, but still admitting of some amount of movement at the will of the bird, who by this means is supposed to be able to alter the shape of the crystalline lens, which lies behind the ring, and thus to vary the focus of its eyes.

Were the eyes of the kestrel constructed like our own, we might well expect that it would lose sight of so small an object as a mouse in its descent. We find that birds of prey have large eyes, with these bony rings particularly broad and strong; and by this arrangement can keep their prey in view. The swift, again, whose keen wings carry it through the air at the rate of some miles in a minute, has a similar provision, both as regards the size of its eyes and the development of its sclerotic plates.

A curious modification is seen in the owls, whose eyes are encased in rings, or rather tubes, each con-

sisting of fifteen separate pieces of bone, and strongly resembling the eyeglass used by a working watch-maker.

The development of this focussing apparatus is equally marked in birds that are in the habit of diving in pursuit of fish.

Watch the white gannet as he sails on long keen wings over the restless sea. He has caught sight of a fish. Pausing suddenly, he hovers like a hawk, though his narrow, pointed tail seems ill adapted to steady him in the air. Now falling swiftly—perhaps a hundred feet—the gannet disappears in a cloud of spray. It usually stays under but four or five seconds, but is capable of much longer immersion, and indeed is provided with space for the storage of air—perhaps for breathing purposes—three times as great as that in the human lungs.

The better to follow its prey under water, the gannet has very large eyes, and its sclerotic rings, composed of twelve plates of bone, are especially broad and thick.

Those who have chased in vain the divers that in summer are seen upon the Broads of Norfolk will have had ample evidence of the keen vision of a diving bird.

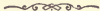
It is on 'The Queen of the Broads' perhaps that the yachtsman, climbing out of his berth at daybreak, sees the graceful figure of some large bird, very low in the water, drifting along among the coots and moor-

hens that have come out from their covert in the reeds. It dives now and then, coming up with a fish in its beak.

You cast off the dingy and pull gently towards the bird. He takes no notice at first, perhaps ; but before long you observe that he comes up farther away after each dive, and as you quicken your stroke he hurries too, paddling swiftly away, and again diving out of sight. You have put on a hard spurt while he was down, and he comes up within range. There is a flash and a sharp report ; you have surely got him now. But there is nothing there but the widening rings that tell how the bird, warned by the flash, was safe beneath the surface ere the shower of shot swept harmless over his head.



## THE WINTRY SHORE.



AMONG the many sea-fowl which are seen at various times about the broad river mouths, on the yellow sands or along the rugged steeps of our long and wandering coast line, there are not a few which are to be regarded as a sort of floating population, changing with the changing season.

Some, like the terns, are seen here only in the summer. They come to our shores to breed, and leave us again in the autumn.

Others retire to inland moors, or even to Arctic latitudes, for the summer, and return when the breeding season is past.

As for the rest, there are, scattered up and down the coast, a number of stations where sea birds gather from all directions at the pairing-time. When the young are hatched these colonies break up and the birds distribute themselves again round the islands.

Conspicuous at all seasons among the gulls that stand out like points of light along the cliff-ledges is

the dark figure of the cormorant. It is most abundant on a rock-bound coast, but there are few parts of our seaboard where it is altogether a stranger.

Perhaps its most characteristic position is some isolated fragment of rock at a little distance from the land. Well out of range, even at low water, its dark sides picked out with tufts of samphire, and with stains of lichen relieving the rich reds and browns of the sea-worn stone, rises the stern outline of 'The Shag Rock.'

Side by side along the narrow ledges stand the sombre figures of these toilers of the sea; some still in the brown livery of their younger days, others in the velvety black that marks the attainment of their third season. Now one leaves the ranks, and stretching out its long neck like a duck flies heavily along the water to another station.

A floating buoy or an old mooring-post by the shore makes a favourite resting-place; and it is not uncommon to find some particular point held year after year by the same bird—not always without fighting for it.

On the broken mast of some ill-fated vessel, covered with clustering barnacles, and with a few frayed ropes still trailing idly in the water—one of those sad suggestions

'Of ships dismasted, that were hailed,  
And sent no answer back again,'

a solitary cormorant will rest for hours, upright as a

sentinel on guard ; looking for all the world like some spirit of evil, meditating mischief.

It is a dexterous diver in pursuit of fish, and after long-continued immersion—remaining under water sometimes as long as fifty seconds—its feathers become so drenched that it cannot fly. It will then stand erect upon some favourite station with its great wings spread wide to dry in the sun, looking at once weird and gigantic in a failing light.

A cormorant which was fired at while thus standing at ease disgorged a dozen good-sized fish before it succumbed to a second shot.

This habit of lightening itself for quicker escape has probably given rise to the strange idea about the bird's powers of rapid digestion. 'A shag,' said a Cornish fisherman, 'is a very quare bird. If you see one swallow a fish, and shoot him, and open him, the fish is gone. A shag, you see, is so hot inside.'

When a cormorant is fired at, the whole flock will sometimes fall into the sea as if shot ; but on rowing to the place to pick up his booty, the astonished sportsman will very probably see half a dozen black heads just showing above the water where the birds are swimming for dear life. In confinement the bird becomes very tame, and often much attached to its master. Many stories are told of the boldness and rapacity of such captives. One attacked a pointer so fiercely that the dog died of its wounds. Another

swallowed the head and neck of a tame duck before the unhappy bird was rescued by a bystander.

A more expert diver even than the cormorant is its white relative the gannet. The breeding haunts of this bird are limited to a few stations, all of which are on the Scotch coast, except one on Lundy and one in Kerry. The largest colony, on the island called Sula Sgeir, near Lewis, is estimated to number 300,000 birds.

The gannet lives on fish, and the quantity of herrings consumed annually by the united efforts of the birds on the five northern stations exceeds the entire take of the whole fishing fleet of Scotland, and is said to fall little short of one thousand millions.

The gannet moves south in the autumn, and is to be seen during the winter months along our southern shores.

When in pursuit of its prey it poises in the air like a hawk, and, falling with a force that strikes up the water all round it in a cloud of foam, it disappears for some seconds below the surface. By floating a fish upon a small plank, the bird is often killed by the fishermen, who use its flesh merely for bait. Not noticing the plank, the gannet swoops down upon the fish, drives its beak deep into the board, and breaks its neck with the shock.

Gannets are often taken in the herring-nets, sometimes at extraordinary depths. As many as ninety

have been brought up at one time in the meshes of a single net.

The prim figure of the puffin, with its quaint, upright attitude and curious red bill, is not a familiar object in winter. The bird is found throughout the year on some parts of the coast ; but when we read that the Scilly Islands were held in the fourteenth century under the King as Earl of Cornwall by an annual payment of three hundred puffins at Michaelmas, we are forced to think that the birds must have been pickled.

The guillemot and the razorbill, also, though not unknown in the winter, are much more numerous in the summer months.

An egg of a kindred species to the razorbill, the great auk or gairfowl, was sold by auction in London lately for no less a sum than £228. These remarkable birds, so helpless on the shore that in their ancient haunts sailors were accustomed to drive them by scores along a plank into a boat, yet so dexterous in the water that a six-oared galley has followed them in vain, must now be reckoned among the things that were. A hundred years ago they were already becoming scarce. It is more than twice that time since they were common on the coast of Greenland, on islands near Newfoundland, and around the shores of Iceland, where the last birds seen alive were captured in 1844.

Three specimens only are all that are known with

certainly to have been taken in British waters during this century.

There is faint hope of their survival in some of their remoter haunts near Iceland, and although it has been suggested that the gairfowl may have retired northward, and that in some unexplored region round the Pole it may yet be rediscovered, there is only one doubtful record of the occurrence of a great auk within the Arctic Circle.

The commonest of the larger sea birds on the wintry shore are the gulls. Some of them pass through so many alterations of shade and marking that it becomes a little difficult to recognise with certainty any particular gull at all seasons.

The herring gull, one of the commonest and also one of the largest of the tribe, takes nearly five years to acquire its perfect tones of white and grey.

The black-headed gulls lose their dark hoods in the autumn moult and resume them in the early spring.

It is in its immature plumage that the graceful kittiwake is slaughtered in thousands for the sake of its prettily barred wings. It is a widely distributed species, and has far more claim to be called the 'common' gull than the bird which passes under that name; it is, indeed, doubtful whether the latter breeds in England at all.

The kittiwake is often used for food, and is celebrated in some places as a sort of tonic. A story is

told of a man who ate six to whet his appetite for dinner, and then complained that he was no more hungry than when he began.

Like most sea birds, gulls are fond of keeping out to sea, but in rough weather are often driven inland. In allusion to this there is an old rhyme current in the North of Ireland :

‘Sea-gull, sea-gull, sit on the sand ;  
It’s never fine weather when *you* come to land.’

Sea-birds are perhaps seen at their best on a low shore when the tide is going down. Each fresh patch of sand or shingle that is left bare by the retiring waves is occupied by clamorous gulls, or silent, eager waders busily searching among the sand and stones for the rich harvest of the sea.

Here a party of oyster-catchers, smartly dressed in that conspicuous ‘arrangement in black and white’ which earns for them the appropriate name of sea-pies, settle down on a mussel-bank which is just beginning to show its long dark back above the surf. Picking their dainty way over the sand and mud, they turn over with their bright red beaks the masses of olive sea-weed that shine like gold in the warm sunshine, and peer into every crevice for razor-shell or star-fish that may have been stranded among the stones.

On a strip of bright sand a little troop of ringed-plovers silently alight, and hurry along by the edge of

the water, showing now and then as they raise their heads the neat black gorgets that cross their snowy breasts.

Roving here and there among the pebbles a company of turnstones are hard at work, their red legs and bills brilliant in the sunlight.

A cloud of sandpipers, after sailing a long way up the beach and then sharply back again, apparently unable to decide where to look for their dinners, suddenly settle down and spread out like skirmishers far and wide over the yellow sand.

Rocking idly on the waves a few herring gulls are floating over their snowy reflections in the green water. Hard by them stand a pair of stately herons waiting perhaps until the tide goes down. Farther out a cormorant is diving for his dinner.

Along the edge of the sea wander a troop of curlews—variest of all the dwellers on the shore. Should one of them sound an alarm the scattered flocks of dunlins and plovers raise their heads and hurry closer together. The oyster-catchers stop their work and prepare for flight. If the warning is repeated the whole crew rise on the wing with plaintive cries, and, breaking up into parties, move farther off to remoter hunting-grounds.

Suddenly from behind the headland sweeps a rolling sea-fog: a great white cloud of seething vapour. The bright sunlight, that but a moment since seemed like the soul of a balmy April day, is veiled under the



shadowy canopy. The air grows chill and damp. The touches of gold melt away from the shining sea-wrack. The warm tones fade from the rich brown boulders, the silver settings from the glistening pebbles. The troops of waders, far out along the falling tide, grow indistinct and disappear. The plovers, as they run across the sand, vanish in the mist. The plaintive call of the curlew, the musical trill of the oyster-catcher, the melancholy voices of the gulls float faintly over the shingle, awesome and mysterious, like phantom voices in a shadow land.



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