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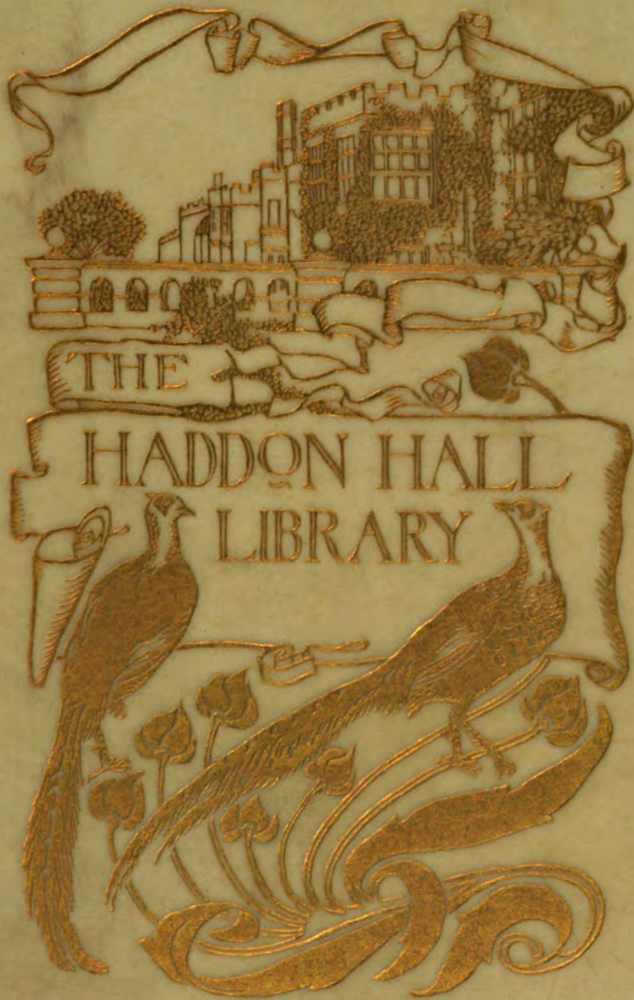

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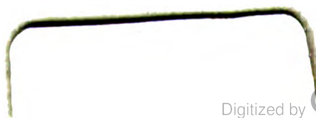

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Page 260

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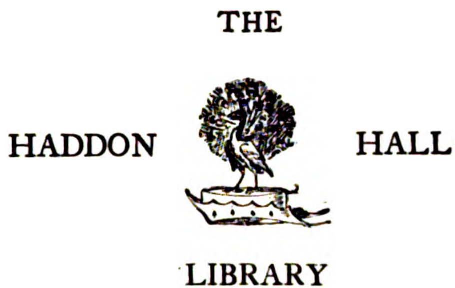

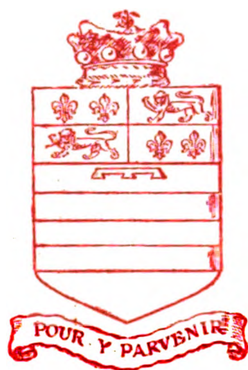

EDITED

BY THE

MARQUESS OF GRANBY

AND MR.

GEORGE A. B. DEWAR

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"WHERE THE BLACK CAP BUILDS."

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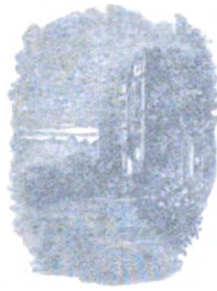

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WILD LIFE
IN
HAMPSHIRE HIGHLANDS

BY

GEORGE A. B. DEWAR

AUTHOR OF
'THE BOOK OF THE DRY FLY,' ETC.

LONDON
J. M. DENT & CO., ALDINE HOUSE
29 & 30 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.
1899

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I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO

MY BROTHER

THE OWNER OF DOLES WOOD, HAMPSHIRE

WHERE WE HAVE SO OFTEN ROAMED

AND SHOT TOGETHER

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	IN HAMPSHIRE HIGHLANDS	1
II.	FROM SARUM TO WINCHESTER	18
III.	THE SWEET OF THE YEAR	33
IV.	THE WOODLANDS' MEDLEY	61
V.	ANGLING IN HAMPSHIRE	94
VI.	A BIRD'S-NESTER'S NOTES	137
VII.	AMONG THE BUTTERFLIES	182
VIII.	THE SILENT TIME	199
IX.	IN THE AUTUMN FIELDS	222
X.	WINTER SPORT AND WILD LIFE	243
XI.	WINTER SPORT AND WILD LIFE (*continued*)	269
	INDEX	297

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

'Where the Blackcap builds' . . . . . *Frontispiece*
From a drawing by R. W. A. ROUSE

Page

On Bransbury Common 24
From a drawing by R. W. A. ROUSE

The Nightingale 60
Drawn from life by RALPH HODGSON

'The Queen of Chalk Streams' 96
From a drawing by R. W. A. ROUSE

The Redstart and Lesser Whitethroat 150
Drawn from life by RALPH HODGSON

'Hampshire Highlands' 210
From a drawing by R. W. A. ROUSE

'The Breezy Common' 260
From a drawing by R. W. A. ROUSE

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WILD LIFE IN HAMPSHIRE HIGHLANDS

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'These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky, with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows—such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of childhood left behind them.'

GEORGE ELIOT.

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CHAPTER I

In Hampshire Highlands

The house stands in a small park or clearing in the midst of the great oak and hazel woods which climb steadily up one of those rounded chalk-hills that, alternating with broad and sweeping valleys, form such familiar features of our North Hampshire scenery. A home built in the centre of dense and secluded woodlands miles from a town, almost miles from a village—should it not be a paradise for the lover of the wild life and sports which have such a hold on the affections of English country people? It is one of the objects of this volume to try and show that in a home like this, one out of very many in southern shires not less

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happily placed, no portion of the year can be without its delights for the field naturalist, or for the sportsman who is content with a small and perhaps mixed bag, and sets much store by charming south-country scenes and the pleasures of observing a great variety of wild life.

The woods lie in the north-west corner of the county, not far from where the hills or downs of chalk reach their highest point. This north-west is the least known corner of the county, rather perhaps through the difficulty of reaching it than through its lack of interest. In the south-west of the county there is the region of the New Forest, so widely known and appreciated; in the north-east Strathfieldsaye, Silchester, and Eversley, a village bound up for ever with the name of Charles Kingsley, are all far-famed places; whilst in the south-east of Hampshire the districts around Petersfield and Havant are well visited by pleasure-seekers and holiday-makers from the large and growing centre round England's naval capital. But the north-west corner of Hampshire is not one which the compilers of guide-books and the promoters of excursions have taken much into account.

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Perhaps for the tourist in a hurry and the sightseer it has no very striking feature. It has no Silchester teeming with remains of Roman greatness; no private residence of such superb Jacobean beauty as Bramshill House, in the eastern corner of the county; no great naval centre like Portsmouth or military centre like Aldershot; nor, finally, is it so well pierced by the iron roads, which bring the tourist and the sightseers, as are other parts of the county. And yet this north-west corner, bordering on Wiltshire on the west and Berkshire on the north, is both an interesting and a beautiful district. There must have been a day when the tide of battle swept over nearly the whole country hereabouts. You need not go to the highest point in the woods to see standing out clear-cut from the surrounding country the marks of many a fierce struggle. Danebury and Quarley are among the hills with summits now covered only with a few clumps of trees, that had at one time great entrenchments, and were the heights, no doubt, round which the combat often deepened. These entrenchments were probably British, but elsewhere traces of the Roman rule are not wanting. There are

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portions of roads leading from and to such places as Winchester, Silchester, and Cirencester, of an unmistakably Roman origin; whilst in Egbury Hill by Whitchurch, on the Test, some believe they see the famous Vindomis. They who live much in the past, indeed, might find still greater interest in the strange remnants of a race compared with which the Roman seems but of yesterday, unearthed years ago at the village of St. Mary Bourne, close to this same Egbury, the stone implements of what is called, I believe, the newer flint or neolithic age.

This land of chalk was once, and compared with many parts of the country is still, a land of woods. The whole of north-west Hampshire was covered with woods some centuries since, though no doubt the New Forest in the south even then was by far the greatest in size and importance within the county. The wood with which this book will deal was formerly part and parcel of Chute Forest, that must have covered a large portion of these Hampshire Highlands as well as the north-east corner of the adjoining county of Wiltshire. Even to-day, as I have said, Hampshire is well furnished with woods.

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There is Harewood Forest, not far short of two thousand acres in extent, lying within our district; and there are portions of the large wood of Bentley in the west, and Alice Holt—a Royal forest, with some fine timber and beautiful scenery, in the east; besides which there are many lesser woods with unnumbered oak and hazel copses all over the county. Woolmer I do not include in my list; its forest trees do not exist, whilst Waltham Chase is somewhat a forest of the past, and the best days, too, of Bere have long since passed. Speed, in the quaint and no doubt laborious map of Hampshire—or 'Hantshire,' as he calls the county—apparently does not mark any of the woods except the great historic ones, such as the New Forest, used for the shipbuilding needs of England. Nevertheless, Hampshire in his day—his map of Hampshire in my possession was printed about the beginning of the seventeenth century—must have been a finely wooded county. Chute was then one of the Royal Forests, extending from Savernake in Wiltshire far into North Hampshire. Only portions of it are now to be seen, such as the wood described in this book and one or two others in the east

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part of Wiltshire. Michael Drayton, in his *Poly-olbion*, speaks of 'the sprightly Test arising up in Chute,' thereby meaning, no doubt, what is now called the Bourne, a pretty and all too short tributary of the queen of Hampshire chalk streams, that now has its perennial source some miles from any trace of the once great forest where a Stuart king had one of his hunting boxes. It is at least conceivable, though I care to do no more than suggest it as a possibility, that the Bourne was in Drayton's time a more considerable stream than it is now, with a source higher up the valley. Anyhow, it is surely not unreasonable to suppose that there was a greater rainfall in Hampshire in those days of great woods than there is now. I read only recently in a State Report of New York that, by reason of the felling of woods and the growing of thirsty crops, a Wyoming stream, formerly quite sufficient for the miller's purposes, had become useless; and other cases can be quoted where deforestation has led to a lessening in the supply of water.

The woods climb up to some six hundred and forty feet above sea-level, and at about their highest point they command a view of the sur-

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rounding country in a northerly direction, which cannot but be a surprise and delight to the stranger who, coming from the south, has for many miles enjoyed nothing like scenery on a large scale. He has come probably by small and well-tilled valleys bounded by the most gently sloping hills, perhaps up the valley of the Anton, chief tributary of the Test, or down that of the idyllic trout-brook Anna or Pilhill; in any case, through villages and hamlets not built on steep hillsides or nestled far away in the depths of wild coombs, such as we expect to find in the bolder or more broken land of the west of England, but scattered here and there among the towering elms, the oak and hazel coppices, and the familiar fields of corn, root crops, and clover, which chiefly make up a North Hampshire farm. He has seen nothing but landscape of a quiet, peaceful character, the reverse of bold or grand. But at this point he stops to look down into a real valley, seeming deep indeed and well-defined compared with those he has lately passed through—namely, the valley of the river Bourne, which, when the springs are high, takes its rise by the secluded village of Upton and flows eastward through Hurstbourne

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Tarrant, Stoke, St. Mary Bourne, and beautifully undulating Hurstbourne Park to join the Test by the last-named spot. North of the valley, here, perhaps, seen at its best until Hurstbourne Park is reached, lie the rolling chalk-hills which crown themselves at Combe, Inkpen Beacon, and Sidown. Combe and Sidown are in Hampshire, but Inkpen, the giant of the chalk-hills of Great Britain, lies across the border in Berkshire, at a point where the three counties of Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Berkshire dovetail in with one another. Sidown, which is immediately to the south of Highclere Park, is well wooded; but the hills of Combe and Inkpen, bleak and treeless, give to the country a suggestion of wildness which must prevent even the most widely travelled man from describing the scenery here as tame. Standing one summer evening by Tangley Clump, another high point near by, I was struck by the fineness of these hills. The 'feel of June' was in the air beneath this lonely spot; but up here there was little sign of the abundant life and brimful overflowing joy one associates with the long day of that month of all months. A flame-bird or two—as I have heard the redstart called

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much farther west—and the yellowhammer's monotonous note, were the sole signs of all June's bird-life, and occasionally the note of the latter alone broke the deep silence which brooded over all things as I reached the point where, in a perfectly clear air, you can without field-glasses see the aërial pinnacle of Salisbury Cathedral. It was one of those alluring evenings when the winds, high during morning and afternoon, are 'upgathered now like sleeping flowers,' whilst the sun, hid through much of the day, reappears to sink in the west a globe of fire. To the south there lay stretched out a long line of purple hills, some of which would overlook the rich valley of the Wiltshire and Hampshire Avon—a river having, next to the Thames, the largest watershed of any of our south-country streams; and the valley, too, of Avon's tributary, the little Winterbourne or Porton Water, the 'pretty Bourne' of Michael Drayton. Other hills would overlook the charming Anton and her Anna, and some few the Test, a name to conjure with among anglers in all parts of the country. There are not many spots in the south of England where with a single glance of the eye one can even dimly take in a

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country which is enriched by so many pure and sweet trout-streams as these. Softness was the feature of this landscape to the south: a medley it looked of oak and hazel coppice, farms, and great thatched barns among dark elms, with here a few cottages clustered together, and there the ornamental timber of some considerable county seat, such as Amport, that recalls the fine old Hampshire name of Paulett. But to the north I enjoyed a much rarer, if less extensive, view of southern scenery. Bare and severe lay the hills above Combe, as desolate in aspect as those irreclaimable hills of Exmoor Forest, one of Nature's last remaining fastnesses in the tilled and tamed south. Green on the convex, and by reason of the light grey on the concave, how fine those hills looked that still, clear June evening! There is a glamour about such barren and severe spots in the midst of a country the features of which are softness and plenty. Green waving woods of oak and underwood, valleys watered by pellucid and never-failing chalk springs, trim cottages, their gardens ablaze through the summer with the flowers of our forefathers, lanes having great straggling hedges, laden in many parts with

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heavy masses of wild clematis, might save even a decidedly flat country from the charge of tameness; but a bit of wild, open moorland, a bleak hill without a green thing save its grass upon it, or with, at the most, a few stunted bushes and deformed trees, will always be a welcome change to the lover of landscape. Towards a bare wind-swept hill the eye will always be drawn. When I turned homewards that evening Combe was all grey; the yellowhammer, a bird that seems quite indifferent whether he lives and nests by bright homestead, in grass-grown woodland glade, or on a high and solitary spot like this, had ceased; and round the oaks beneath, the nightjar, the 'sombre gigantic swallow' of the twilight, was gliding and glancing like a bird-ghost.

This range of high chalk-hills viewed from a distance invites close inspection. It may be reached from the south by Netherton valley, and will well repay a visit. On each side of Netherton valley there is a broad and smooth expanse of turf with woods above on both hillsides, and the whole wears somewhat the look of a road through a park. Netherton rectory—its garden was once a rare place, I remember, for lilies of the valley—

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is passed, and soon one enters upon a wild and remote corner of the county. Here again the beautiful redstart is quite at home, flying in and out of the thin old hedge in front of the intruder, more inquisitive, it would seem, than alarmed. On the left-hand side of the road the land is more or less cultivated, but on the right the great rolling downs have their way, forming in at least one instance something like an immense natural amphitheatre within the valley. Alternately waves of sun and shadow swept over this land when I last saw it one day in late summer, and between Hurstbourne Tarrant, the Up-husband of the earlier part of the century, and the remote and well-named village of Combe, I met but one small party of labourers who were bringing home the last loads of the bountiful harvest of 1898: from Hurstbourne to the foot of the hill that leads up to Combe Church and the old dismantled manor-house—a distance of some four miles and a half—not another soul. Combe Church and churchyard, which lie a little apart from the village in the hollow, are worth visiting. The two aged yews in the churchyard, in their 'stubborn hardihood,' are fine specimens of a tree

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which evidently flourishes in the chalk, as does the graceful ash. Most old Hampshire churches have their fine yew or two. St. Mary Bourne has one with a girth of twenty-one feet, or some six feet less than the vast tree in the churchyard of Gilbert White's *Selborne*, which I measured some years ago and found to be nearly twenty-seven feet in girth. In some spots, notably about the Roman or British remains close to Bransbury and by Bullington in the same district, yews grow in some numbers in the hedgerows, and here and there at random like oak and ash. Nor are the quaintly-cut yews of the cottage garden wanting in various villages and hamlets hereabouts. Tennyson knew his Hampshire yews, and has described the tree in the second canto of *In Memoriam*—

> 'Old Yew which graspest at the stones
> That name the under-lying dead,
> Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
> Thy roots are wrapt about the bones.'

At Combe village one may well leave the road and follow a track leading to the top of the towering masses which divide the counties of Hampshire and Berkshire. From the breezy top at Combe Gibbet—the grim mark of a rough-

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and-ready age—or a little more to the south-east and nearer the hollow, within which is perhaps the most remote village in Hampshire, a noble expanse of country may be seen. Richard Cobbett, who knew many of the villages of this part of the county, has in that racy book of his, *Rural Rides*, an astonishing statement about the view from another hill of this same chalk range farther east at Burghclere. 'You look, at one view,' he writes, 'over the whole of Berkshire, into Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire, and you can see the Isle of Wight.' I cannot say that I have ever known any one who has seen the Isle of Wight or the sea from any point near here, but the spire of Salisbury Cathedral—the 'speer' a north Hampshire man would call it—can sometimes be seen from the hills above the village of Combe; and if people who think we have no view to speak of in homely Hampshire will note the distance between the two places on the map, they may see reason for modifying their opinion in this respect. I had not the good fortune to see the spire of Salisbury when last on Combe Hills, but from the summit of one of them I had a glimpse of heights in faintest of

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blue outlines far beyond Andover, with portions of green wooded hills nearer, and, finally, miles of rolling down spread around. Then, turning, I found to the north, north-west, and north-east an entirely different kind of country. A land comparatively flat lay stretched out as far as the eye could reach. Such a land Kingsley might well have had in his thoughts when he wrote his lines—

> 'Airly Beacon, Airly Beacon;
> Oh the pleasant sight to see
> Shires and towns from Airly Beacon,
> While my love climbed up to me!'

Compared with the unfruitful downs through which I had lately come, and upon which I could still look by turning round and moving a few steps, the country embraced in this view was as one great garden where all things had been carefully tended and watered. Not a bare piece of land stood out in all that wide expanse; and, where the trees and vegetation seemed most luxuriant in a country of luxuriance, it was my fancy that the great trout-stream of Berkshire, the Kennet, must be flowing. Certainly a goodly portion of the Kennet must have been included

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within that view, although the water itself could no more be seen, either with the unassisted eye or with the field-glasses, than could Newbury and pleasant, sleepy old Hungerford—'a toune famous,' as Evelyn observed, 'for its troutes.'

Wherever the eye turned it lighted upon the same luxuriant vegetation, whether towards Savernake Forest on the west, or northward to the valley of the Kennet, with beautiful Littlecote Park, Chilton-Foliatt, and Kintbury village—names to make the mouth of the trout angler water! North again of these tempting spots lay the country through the chalk and gravel of which flows the little Lambourne, with its source near the Lambourne Downs. The Lambourne is not a stream to be mentioned in the same breath with the Test, Itchen, or Kennet, but still it is very delightful owing to the purity of its water, the old farm homes and cottages (with windows like eyes in the thick thatch) scattered along its valley. It comes from a district which cannot but interest readers of Scott's *Kenilworth*, for within a drive or ride of the village of Lambourne is the cave of Wayland Smith; while at no great distance are the strange Blowing

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Stone, with origin as obscure as the huge Grey Wethers or Sarsen Stones of Salisbury Plain, and the White Horse which Judge Hughes brought into his *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. But, though the vale of the upper Lambourne stream is scarcely more than a dozen miles, as the crow flies, from the summit of the Hampshire chalk-hills, I am perhaps getting rather far from our Hampshire Highlands.

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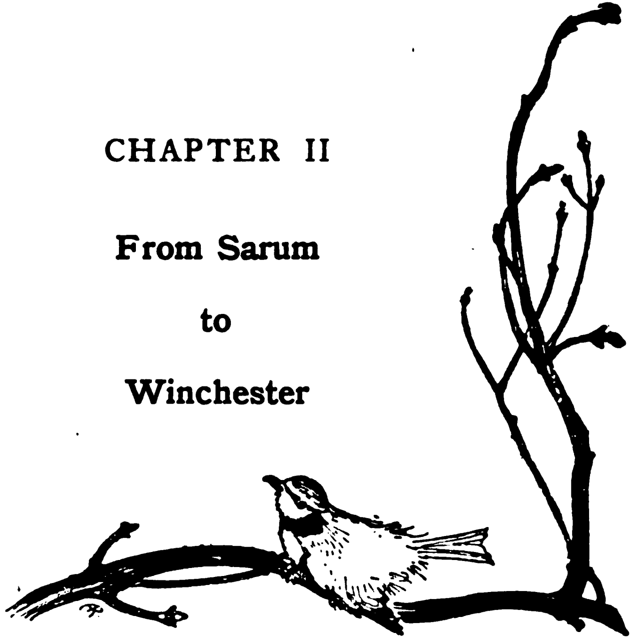
CHAPTER II

From Sarum to Winchester



FROM the home in the wood—'our wood that is dearer than all'—there is no view of the country to the north, but you can see southward across Andover and Clatford to the hills which overlook the Test near Stockbridge, such as steep Longstock, and across Weyhill, the scene of the famous yearly fair, to Quarley Clumps and the country about Tedworth, the headquarters for so long of the Tedworth Hounds and the home of dauntless Assheton Smith, greatest of all fox-hunters. Salisbury Cathedral spire, as I have already mentioned,

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can sometimes be seen from a high point near the woods, so that I may be excused for a passing reference to that bright and busy town, even though it scarcely comes within a twenty mile radius of the home in the wood, which is a somewhat larger one than I propose to deal with. Salisbury and its neighbourhood possess attractions apart from the Cathedral, which, however, is of course the centre of interest and one of the chief glories of the south of England. The two features of the Cathedral which most appeal to me are the wondrous Spire and the beautiful Close and Cloisters. To my mind the nearer one gets to the spire that so easily tops all others in the country, being some thirty feet higher than St. Paul's, and the more one looks straight up to it, the finer is the effect.

The spire has long been known as a favourite resort of that noble bird the peregrine falcon. A pair were seen, I am glad to say, quite recently about the buttresses, and pains are taken to save these welcome visitors from persecution. Writing to me from Salisbury, the Rev. A. P. Morres, who has made a loving study of the bird-life of this district for close on forty years, says: 'I do not

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know that I can tell you anything very new about the peregrines. You may say they are always more or less about the spire, as a rule roosting there as they are actually doing at the present time. They are always, I think, more numerous here in the autumn, when their numbers are increased no doubt by passage hawks from the Continent. Occasionally a pair have stayed with us till the spring and dropped their eggs in the gutters of the Cathedral Tower; but they have never nested here, and there is no spot adapted to their requirements. The Plain is their constant habitat, and shooting friends often tell me that they see the birds there. About three years ago a fine adult peregrine falcon was shot near here, and this specimen I have in my possession. It weighed a good two and a half pounds, and measured over nineteen inches from beak to tail. No year, indeed, passes without our local bird-stuffers having specimens brought to them for preservation.'

The peregrine is far from being the only interesting bird found in the district of Salisbury. The great grey shrike has been found at Homerton. Mr. Morres tells me that he has one obtained nearer Salisbury than Homerton, and that he

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observed another within a distance of twenty yards on a February day at Britford. The bird is, of course, only to be looked for in the winter months and the very beginning of spring: so far as is known, it never nests in this country. Britford, near Salisbury, is an excellent spot for an ornithologist, for he can there observe the down, the water (river Avon), and the forest birds. The sea-eagle and the wild swan have both visited the place, and among other species of water-fowl shot near the river have been the shoveller, garganey, goosander or dun diver, teal, smew, pochard, scaup duck, golden-eye, tufted duck, and brent goose. 'The rarest bird I have myself seen since I have been in these parts,' says Mr. Morres, 'has been *Hydrochelidon leucoptera*, the white-winged black tern—so rare that most people, I daresay, won't believe in the occurrence. I am certain, however, of my facts. The birds passed down the Avon at 5 P.M. on April 30, 1892, on migration to Christchurch, where H—— the naturalist had been looking out for them all that week. The hobby has spread with us this year, and a large female was shot near Salisbury by a friend of mine who mistook

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it for a pigeon. A large hen merlin was caught alive this last autumn by a bird-catcher, and this bird I also possess. The stone curlew is increasing in numbers about here, and an albino specimen was seen on our downs about two winters since.' Finally, Mr. Morres tells me—and this to my mind is the most interesting occurrence of all—that he has seen in his garden at Britford a male pied flycatcher.

In regard to the peregrines dropping their eggs in the gutters, I have it from another source that two eggs were discovered by a person at work on the outside of the Cathedral some years ago and sold to a Winchester College boy. The peregrine used once to breed on the Culver Cliffs between Sandown and Bembridge in the Isle of Wight, but it has deserted that spot for nesting purposes. It still frequents Freshwater Cliff, now one of its few remaining strongholds on the South Coast during the nesting season.

To the west of Andover lies a country interesting alike to sportsman, naturalist, and antiquarian. North Tedworth is just within Hampshire, and here again we find ourselves in an open country of down. The Tedworth hounds are still famous

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amongst foxhunters of the south, but Assheton Smith's old home after passing through various hands has been purchased by the Government. Military manœuvres and a large new military centre may somewhat change the aspect of this country, and I have fears lest the change may be the reverse of beneficial to one or two of the trout streams in the neighbourhood. The valley of the Avon, Porton Water, Wylye, and Ebble or Chalk Stream—described in Hoare as the most sequestered in the county of Wiltshire—were all more or less the scenes of mimic warfare during the summer of 1898. Amesbury, which lies between Tedworth and Salisbury, is of course world-famous through the mighty Sarsen Stones of Stonehenge, which are close by. On the chalk downs about here, as well as on the Wallop and on the Longstock downs—to get to which places we must turn back into Hampshire—the finest of extinct British birds, the great bustard, was once at home. Chafin, the author of a book of anecdotes, etc., relating to Cranbourne Chase, which in his time extended into Hampshire, records how in November 1751, whilst living at Wallop,

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he managed to kill five dotterels out of a flock of twelve one day when out shooting on the downs. The report of his gun scared a flock of no less than twenty-five bustards, which flew over Southern Hill. Having returned to his inn, loaded his gun with swanshot and put a new flint in it, he mounted his horse and went in pursuit of this noble quarry. 'But my mind misgave me at the time that it would turn out a mere wild-goose chase. When I had come to the brow of the hill over which I had seen them pass I rode very cautiously, looking carefully before me, when on a sudden I espied them nearly within shot, and they espied me also and rose for flight. The motion of their wings frightened my horse; he started back, threw me down, and ran away.' Chafin adds that when he got up he had a shot at the birds. It does not seem to have taken effect, and small wonder, considering the distance they must then have been from him.

Chafin's stories have been subjected to some rather severe criticisms, but there is nothing very improbable in this account of his about the dotterels and the bustards. Gilbert White

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ON BRANSBURY COMMON.

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in his diary relates how, in November 1782, he spent several hours at a lone farmhouse on the downs between Andover and Winchester. 'The carter told us that about twelve years ago he had seen a flock of eighteen bustards at one time on that farm.' Bustards, he added, when seen on the downs resembled fallow deer. There must have been something like rough shooting and chances of mixed bags in our country in those rare old days!

The Rev. Henry White, brother of Gilbert White, and once Rector of Fyfield in this district, in his unpublished diary says, under date 1780, October 10: 'Sir P. H. C., Mr. Barker, and Bob Cane, to Stonehenge, Wilton, etc., saw eighteen bustards.' Henry White was an observer of Nature, and his diaries contain many interesting allusions to the breeding and migration of birds, etc. I give a few of these.—'1781, April 19: Boys went to Abbots Anne Wood, brought home two young ravens nearly fledged.' '1784, 8th October: Ravens and rooks on ye trees warbling.' '1781, April 19: A bird with a soft, gentle, delicate laughing note appeared with ye blackcap, supposed to be of ye titmouse tribe.'

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The ravens of course have entirely disappeared from these parts, though, according to the late Rev. R. Clutterbuck, in his posthumous book, *Notes on the Parishes of Fyfield, Kimpton, Penton, Mewsey, Weyhill, and Wherwell*, there were ravens at Tangley within the memory of people alive at the time he wrote his book. Henry White, like Gilbert, paid attention to the subject of truffles, and there are sundry entries in his diary concerning the truffle-man's visits. He also speaks in one place of Lord Davies hunting for truffles in Gloucestershire with a pig.

As for the dotterel—two brace of which, by the way, were sent through Chafin to the father of the king, a keen sportsman who had never come across the bird before—I should say there was about as much chance of finding it near Wallop to-day as of finding the great bustard there once more. The dotterel is a summer visitor which has suffered much from the greed of collectors, unreasonable sportsmen, and, I am afraid, I should add fly-tiers. You must look for it now not on the Hampshire downs, but rather in the most remote hills of north Britain.

The whole of the country in east Wiltshire and

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north-west Hampshire has long been famous as a sporting centre, and as a popular resort of angler, hunter, and gunner. Cobbett, who was a sportsman as well as a vigorous politician—not a very acceptable one, perhaps, to the average sportsman of his day—has some capital pictures of the district. 'Before,' he writes in his *Rural Rides*, 'you get to Salisbury (from Andover) you cross the valley that brings down a little river—this is the Wiltshire and Hampshire Avon—from Amesbury. There is a chain of farmhouses and little churches all the way up it. Not so far above Amesbury is a little village called Netherhaven, where I once saw an *acre of hares*. We were coursing at Eversley, a few miles off, and one of the party happening to say that he had seen "an acre of hares" at Mr. Hicks-Beach's at Netherhaven, we, who wanted to see the same or to detect our informant, sent a messenger to beg a day's coursing, which being granted, we rode over the next day. Mr. Beach received us very politely. He took us into a wheat-stubble close by his paddock; his son took a gallop round, cracking his whip at the same time; the hares (which were very thickly in sight before) started

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all over the field, ran into a flock like sheep ; and we all agreed that the flock did cover an *acre of ground.*'

I must not omit from this brief survey of the country round our high Hampshire woods a passing reference to Winchester, that may be said to lie in the centre of the county of which it is the pride and glory. A few years ago it would have been regarded as quite a serious undertaking to set out to Winchester, a journey of some sixteen or seventeen miles by the shortest way. But in these days of pneumatic tyres the distance, when the flint roads are in good repair, seems trifling. If the old Roman road between Cirencester and Winchester had been preserved intact down to the present time, the distance would have been slightly less than it is to-day by the main road, for the Romans had a habit of going very straight to their destination. Close to East Anton, which, like Egbury, has been regarded by some as the site of ancient Vindomis, and at about three miles from the woods, two big Roman roads crossed one another. The Port Way was a road from Old Sarum, crossing the three small streams, Anna, Anton, and Bourne, and running straight

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as a die to Silchester; and almost as direct, apparently, must have been the road between Cirencester and Winchester, which met the Port Way near the spot which is now known as East Anton.

Winchester is certainly one of the most cheerful and interesting of county towns. Full of brightness and beauty, unrivalled in the age, associations, and massive grandeur of its Cathedral, possessing a stream that vies in purity and crystal clearness with the Test itself—some, indeed, venture to place Itchen not even second to Test—and surrounded with very pretty scenery—such is the Winchester of to-day. Many days may well be spent in examining the beauties of this town, which has a place of worship and a place of education both in some respects quite unrivalled.

Passing through Winchester and spending a few hours there one beautiful evening last summer, it seemed to me as though Winchester boys were, if possible, more fortunate in their school than Oxford men in their university. Unlike many places with a radiant past, Winchester wears still an air of cheerfulness and life, which by no means ill accords with her architectural

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beauties. It is at once clear to a stranger that the people take great pride in their town, and to my mind there is little to offend the eye about such changes and innovations as have been effected through necessity. As in the case of Oxford, the new mingles well with the old. Around the ancient city are high breezy downs, wood and park lands, luxuriant water meadows. Twyford, Hursley, Otterbourne, and Shawford form as pretty a group of Hampshire villages as one could well desire to see; whilst on the Itchen above the town and Alresford — which has, perhaps, seen its day—Kings Worthy, Itchen Abbas, and Avington are spots to linger in on long summer days. Such a fertile country is not always to be seen even in the vale of a chalk stream.

The neighbourhood of Winchester is noted for its variety of bird-life, a fact scarcely to be wondered at considering the character of the country around. Mr. Chalkley, the taxidermist and trout fly-tier, usually has in his pleasant quarters in The Square some interesting specimens to show you. The grey phalarope must be reckoned as one of the occasional visitors to the College meadows. The dipper, which I have never

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seen on any stream in the Home Counties, has been found at Worthy, the sand-grouse at Alresford, and the hoopoe at Keble's old home, Hursley, which Miss Charlotte Yonge has written about so delightfully. In the College Museum are specimens of the hooded crow (Oliver's Battery, 1890), the goosander (Stockbridge, 1887), the green sandpiper (Avington, 1894), red-breasted merganser, and a grey-hen taken at Crawley in 1884. It is much to be hoped, now these species have been identified as occasional visitors to the district round Winchester, that single birds or pairs, which may re-occur there in the future, will not be shot or molested. We must all thoroughly recognise the use of collections of well-preserved birds, insects, etc. Without them the study of natural history would be far more difficult than it is, and be confined to a much smaller circle of people than is the case at the present time. I do not profess to find cases of stuffed birds and of well-preserved butterflies and moths without beauty and interest. But when once a rare bird or insect has been identified with a district or even county—I incline strongly to the larger area—then let there be no more

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obtaining of the scarce species in question. There is such a thing, surely, as the legitimate collecting of specimens, and such a thing as waste of life: a wide difference exists between the two.

It is hard for a Hampshire-bred man to write without enthusiasm of this fair place and its fair neighbourhood. To one who has lately wandered through the precincts of the College, or in and about the Cathedral, it will scarcely seem far-fetched to apply to the city what Matthew Arnold wrote of Oxford: 'Who will deny that Winchester by her inevitable charm keeps ever calling us nearer to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal of perfection — to beauty, in a word, which is only truth seen from another side.'

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CHAPTER III

The Sweet of the Year

THE oak and the hazel woods are beautiful throughout the year, in the depth of winter when the frost and snow often combine to make an exquisite mimic foliage, as well as in spring and summer. But of all the months for the wood or for the river-side, or for the wild common, give me June, and of all times the first week or ten days of that month. Last season it fell my fortunate lot to have the last few days of May and the first few of June to spend at a small abode close to the edge of the wood. The cottage was not a thatch-roofed one, and it did not bear the signs of age which one certainly desires to see. Points, however, it had in its favour: such as a

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large garden in front, flower and vegetable mingled, planted seemingly at random, with apple and plum trees, which certainly did bear signs of age; a thick hedge on our side, and a tall straggling one, beloved of yellowhammer, titmouse, and greenfinch, on the other side of the road. Then, too, there was a short walk up from the road to the entrance with the thick and cropped garden hedge on one side, and a row of very tall and beautiful hazels, getting on, perhaps, for twenty years old, on the other. At the garden gate, leading up to a creeper-covered door, was a fine walnut-tree. Under the tree and through a gap in the hedge one had a view modest, but not to be despised, of the downs near Andover. The south wind comes through the gap, and it is pleasant to lean over the wicket-gate and look across the wheat and clover to the little blue hills, which may often have been covered centuries ago with soldiers of Rome or Britain. Strangely enough the camp of the dim past has suddenly become the occasional camp of to-day. Returning to the cottage home one evening later in the year, I looked through the gap and saw one of the hills thickly

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sprinkled over with white stationary specks and rows of black moving ones; whilst by and by, when these white and black specks faded from view in the fading light, red ones took their places. A regiment of cavalry had come hither that same evening from the Grand Review and March Past at Boscombe Down, near Salisbury, and the red specks were the glowing camp fires. A field or two from the cottage, which is an outlying one of the most quiet hamlet, is the Port Way, or rather the road which covers for two miles or so the ground where the Port Way once was. By following it up a mile you come to a small portion of the Devil's Ditch, or Wansdyke, as it has been sometimes called, and near at hand are two of the many *tumuli* which abound in parts of this county, and also a grave. Even for those who, like the writer, are very far from being deeply read in the stories of the relics of ancient Britain, there is something singularly interesting in these mounds, barrows, and camps. One is carried back in thought through centuries, as one can rarely if ever be by antiquities in a museum. Especially is this the case in regard to *tumuli* and graves or barrows that have never

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been opened—'grassy barrows of the happier dead.' Close to one of the fir-tree walks in the woods is a large mound which has never been touched, and which, there is some reason to believe, is one of these old-world *tumuli* or barrows. The knowledge that one would have such a resting-place as this might half rob the 'all-during night' of its terrors. The straight, dark fir-trees make rare music, low and soft on summer days, deep and resonant on loud autumn and winter nights; and, whether gently swaying to the breeze of June or rocking to the wild north-west, it is always true melody that they make. In the rich leafy mould which covers the clay and the chalk heaped up to form the mound, the primrose, wind-flower, and wood-sorrel grow in quantities in April and May, whilst all around in the brambles, intermingled with the hazel stems, the blackcaps and garden warblers build their slender but well-constructed nests. Could one choose a better resting-place through the centuries than this?

The prime object of our stay at the little hamlet was a week or ten days with the birds in the heart of the woods, in the thickest and

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quietest spots, in the haunts of the wood warblers. By wood warblers I do not mean the particular species known as the wood-warbler or wood-wren (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*), but these following birds: nightingale, garden warbler, blackcap, and lesser whitethroat. So far as our north Hampshire woods are concerned, these four charming birds most absolutely merit the name of wood-warblers. It is true you may often find the nightingale and lesser whitethroat, and rather less often, I think, the garden warbler and blackcap nesting in thick hedges close to the roadside, in small plantations, in the tiniest of spinny, and occasionally even in shrubberies and large quiet gardens. The big wood, however, is the spot where you will find these birds in their natural nesting quarters. They are lovers of seclusion during that season, and, unlike many other species, prefer the well-wooded wild. The common whitethroat, too, often enough builds among the low shoots, though this species does not frequent the depths of the wood like the others, but rather the fringe, and preferably a hedge close to the woods.

These four wood warblers have had a real

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fascination for me from my earliest birds'-nesting and boyhood days. There is a delicacy, a fragileness, a perfect symmetry and beauty of form, a shyness, and a choiceness of song about the first three which greatly attract one. Though I confess a special preference, the exact reason for which it would be difficult to give, for the garden warbler, among the four the nightingale is unquestionably the bird of the greatest distinction, whether we consider his song, his carriage, or his appearance.

Strange are the misconceptions which exist, and will continue to exist, about the nightingale. The female blackcap, which I have sometimes heard called the redcap, does sing, but no one ignorant of the habits of birds was ever heard to allude to a singing blackcap in the feminine gender. The female nightingale cannot sing, and yet people careless as to the habits of birds have from time long past alluded to the singing nightingale as 'she.' Poets, of course, have been the chief sinners; and only Tennyson among modern writers seems to have thought birds worthy of actual observation, and even study. Secondly, it is a common delusion that the bird sings only by night, whereas he is, during the breeding season,

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singing more or less all the day. Thirdly—and this, I think, is the most usual mistake of all—very many people who do know something about birds are convinced that the nightingale is a very plain, undistinguished-looking bird. In point of fact the nightingale is about the most distinguished-looking bird of all our smaller summer visitors, whether to wood, field, or mountain. He seems quite what he is—a king among small birds. Look at his large, bright—I was almost going to say gazelle-like—eye, at his nobility of mien and carriage, at the way in which he stands well up off his perch on those long brown legs of his; and you will never afterwards believe the stories about this marvellous singer being a little humble-looking brown bird. He has not brilliant or showy plumage, it is true; but do fine feathers really make such fine birds? I would rather have my four wood warblers than any number of the gaudy, flaunting, unmelodious creatures of the tropics; and many hold this view. In June 1898, whilst trout-fishing on the Lea close to Hatfield Park, I suddenly came full upon a nightingale singing hard in a thorn bush at about six yards' distance from me on other

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side of the stream, which at this point was extremely narrow with high banks. He was perched on a twig near the outside of the bush; his white throat[1] was greatly extended, and he was singing with all his might. We stared hard at one another, and for a few seconds I thought the bird would actually begin again, for at first he showed no sign of real alarm, and even finished off a few notes on hand, as it were, before stopping. However, he presently retired to a thicker bush, and held his peace till I had passed by. I never before had so excellent a view at such close quarters of a wild nightingale in the full glory of song. As a rule it is exceedingly difficult to get a good view of the nightingale singing. Again and again last spring I attempted to steal upon him when so engaged, but not once with any real success.

Though poets have helped to spread errors destined to take deep and obstinate root respecting this bird, they have also made it the subject of lines and whole poems of much beauty. Tennyson's 'low preamble of the nightingale' is fine, and so also Coleridge's 'one low piping sound

[1] Matthew Arnold was unfortunate in alluding to the 'tawny-throated nightingale.'

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more sweet than all,' though a friend points out to me that piping is scarcely the right word. The sound evidently here alluded to is that perfect note somewhat resembling an indrawn whistle, which is human in its pathos, but almost more than human in its beauty. Sometimes the song begins with this note repeated several times, and is then the 'low preamble'; whilst at other times it occurs in between a series of bursts of melody, and is then more hurried and less noticeable. But how rich and rare a vein of thought and language is displayed in Tennyson's

> 'As the music of the moon
> Sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale'!

The eggs of the nightingale are plain, as a rule, in the sense of being destitute of markings, but there is a distinction about them as about almost everything relating to the bird. Some in my collection are of a fine olive green, and others more brown than olive. Beautiful eggs I call the nightingale's when fresh, but they soon lose a certain bronze-like sheen which they possess in the nest. There is no British nesting bird that lays eggs like the nightingale's, though those of

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our occasional autumn visitor the bluethroat—a near relative of the nightingale, as probably is also the robin—resemble them rather closely. The date of the arrival of the nightingale in our woods varies but little from year to year. Of recent years I have not kept notes on the subject, but, glancing through an old natural history calendar kept for a dozen years or so, I find various entries that throw light on the subject. In four successive years in the eighties, I find the nightingale was first heard in the woods on, respectively, April 15, April 12, April 20, and April 13. These rough natural history notes and calendars—I caught the infection when a child after reading Markwick's and Gilbert White's—may seem trifling enough to many people, and yet such a note as 'April 25.—Found golden-crested wren's nest with five eggs, fresh'; or 'July 28.—Took a purple emperor butterfly,' will often awake after many years the most delightful memories that have long slept within the mind. The immense enthusiasm we had for these things when the whole world was lit by the light of which Wordsworth tells in his great ode! The immense enthusiasm we still

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have for the same things later in life when the light has been blurred over! If only we can keep this enthusiasm, as Charles Kingsley did, we shall keep one of our most precious possessions.

Is love of birds sometimes hereditary? I put the question because I am reminded that one of my companions during a portion of my ten days with the birds in May and June was a direct descendant of Bewick. He was and is one of the keenest men on birds I ever met. We plunged straight into the woods at the nearest point to the hamlet, and made our way to a portion which is known as the 'Rag.' This 'Rag' was planted with young oak saplings, or with acorns, and with hazel—which is here as elsewhere the staple form of the underwood—early in the present century, and is therefore the newest wing of the woods. Oak-timber and underwood have flourished here as in few other parts of the wood. The warblers are to be seen and heard in every section of the wood, as well as in the thickets and 'rows' of the breezy gorse-sprinkled common that lies high in their midst, and has peeps of the surrounding country. But above all they prefer the wood of from two to five years' growth. When the underwood grows tall and

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thick and begins to get ripe for the woodman's axe, the undergrowth, deprived more and more every year of air and light, dwindles and dies down. In the high wood of from ten to fourteen years' growth—it is cut when it reaches the latter age—there is scarcely any undergrowth to speak of. The copse grasses, the brambles, the wood-rushes die away, not to reappear till the wood has been laid bare and the young shoots have begun to spring up once more. 'Long sleeps the summer' —of these sun and light lovers—'in the seed.'

In order to get at once to the nesting-ground of the wood warblers, we made a bee-line for the three- or four-year-old underwood of this bird-beloved coppice. It so happened that the last few days had been rather cold and rainy. To walk along the narrower woodland paths was to get wet; to plunge right into the thickets was to get soaked. We chose the thickets, of course, because in no other way could we hope to see much of the birds and their nests. Nightingales, garden warblers, blackcaps, whitethroats, willow wrens, and chiff-chaffs were in a perfect tumult of song after the rain. They must be nesting all round us, was the thought that at once occurred;

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how could we avoid finding nest upon nest of these species? Nevertheless, the first hour's search for nests was fruitless. Some people who live in the country, keep their eyes open and take delight in Nature, have assured me that they never can find nests, and the statement is not hard to believe. In early years I never had the least difficulty in discovering the nests of the true woodland warblers: I have literally found them by the dozen, and many more than a dozen in a single favourable day. Now the search is much less often rewarded, though scarcely less keenly undertaken.

After a while, however, I came upon a mass of brambles, growing high and thick, and straggling over the top stems of oak or hazel stubbs, in which I felt convinced some wood warbler must be nesting, if any were nesting at all; and sure enough a small bird slipped out of the brambles in the quiet way most birds do when disturbed from their eggs. It was a garden warbler's nest with a clutch of four eggs quite fresh, and a typical example of this bird's skill in building. The nest, composed of the dry stems and lined with the dry heads of copse

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grasses, was slight but neat, and perfectly secure against wind and rain.

It was woven round the stems of bramble in workmanlike style, and well hidden by the leaves of the trailing plant. The bramble is to the wood-warblers what the reed and the sedge are to the water-warblers. In our wood and in other south of England woods which I have visited, the garden warbler almost invariably builds in brambles; and so do the blackcap and the lesser whitethroat. The nightingale often, though by no means always, builds under and amid rather than on brambles, and the common whitethroat is far from averse to the same plant for nesting purposes, though this bird prefers, according to my observation, a thick tuft of coarse grass, or a miscellaneous tangle. Every garden warbler's nest I found last year—I found about a dozen in all—was built in brambles, and so also was every blackcap's. I found only one lesser whitethroat's, and that, too, was in the same position.

Nor are these by any means the only birds that choose the brambles. The bulky little home of the wren, made of moss and dead bracken, is more often than not found in thick brambles;

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blackbirds and thrushes build in brambles, and last season I was surprised to find the chaffinch following the prevailing fashion.

It is a fact that even the shy woodland birds often build their nests within a yard or so of overgrown or blind paths or tracks made by woodmen who like a short-cut home to the village after their day's work cutting, barking, fagoting, or hurdling. These paths or tracks are only used regularly during a portion of one year, as the woodman's working ground is necessarily shifted every season, and directly their outlines begin to grow faint and the brambles show signs of a desire to creep across them, and the hazel, oak, and ash shoots join here and there overhead, the birds frequent them for nesting purposes. By a winding track of this kind well within the woods I discovered nest after nest one morning. A song-thrush had young newly fledged in a bramble-bush within a few feet of the path; two blackbirds sat hard on their faint blue brown-speckled eggs in bramble-bushes higher from the ground, within half a dozen yards of the thrush and three yards of one another; a garden warbler sat hard on a clutch of eggs in a low bramble-

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bush in a glade off the path; a blackcap's nest in brambles clinging to some hazel stems fully six feet from the ground contained two fresh eggs; whilst, finally, there was a chaffinch's nest, also in the brambles and some four feet from the ground, with two fresh eggs. All these nests were found within a strip of land fifteen yards long at the most by perhaps five yards broad. The most interesting to me was that of the chaffinch, for it was partly lined with the slender red-brown fruit stems of one of the wood mosses. I never before saw a chaffinch's nest so lined, and in all probability shall never do so again: as a rule, chaffinches which build in the beds of brambles line with ordinary green moss, and dispense with wools and usually also with feathers.

A favourite haunt of the garden warblers, as also of the nightingales and blackcaps, is illustrated in the frontispiece of this volume. On one side of a little-used walk under Scotch firs is a bit of rising ground where the underwood, probably through the depredations of rabbits at some time in the past, is thin. Here the ground is covered with a jungle of brambles where the warblers

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build. On the other side of the pine grove the hazels are tall and the ground shady and cool on hot summer days. The grove leads right into the heart of the woods to other lovely walks from a green lane called Port Lane End, which makes us think that it was once connected with the great Port Way. Possibly, though this is a mere surmise, it connected the Port Way with the very important road between Cirencester, once a famous Roman town, and Winchester. It is now but little used, so that one might almost compare it to the roads in the sleepy land of *Aylmer's Field*—

'. . . where under the same wheel
The same old rut would deepen year by year.'

Just inside the wood, at the point where the pine grove touches Port Lane End, I have stood often in the sweet of the season and listened to garden warbler and blackcap. Among our singing birds the nightingale comes very easily first. He is in a class by himself, and there is no other song of British bird in the faintest degree comparable to his. I would put the nightingale alone in the first class, and I would not suffer any bird to come in the second class. The blackcap and

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garden warbler should come in the third class, of which they should be the sole occupants. Blackbird, thrush, and lark should be placed in class four. The garden warbler is not a very distinguished-looking bird like the nightingale, but he is a splendid singer. Rather more hurried than the blackcap's, his song is scarcely less pure than that bird's. I repeatedly heard and saw the garden warbler singing from oak-tree and hazel stem last May and June, and I cannot quite understand why Bewick should have deemed this attractive bird so very difficult to catch sight of when singing. The nightingale, as we have seen, is undoubtedly very hard to get a good view of when singing in the thick woods, but patience and a little concentration will enable one to see my two third-class warblers. I have seen both male and female blackcap—the country people often call the male bird the black-a-topper—in full song in the underwood, and once had the good fortune to come upon a male singing with rapture while sitting on his wife's eggs in a bramble-bush off the Fir Tree Walk. I heard the song, softly entered the wood, and there saw the sitting and singing bird—a very charming sight. The

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garden warbler does not seem to have engaged the close attention of the ornithologists as much as it deserves, considering its power of song. Seebohm, usually so accurate, always so conscientious, says that where the garden warbler is abundant the blackcap is inclined to be scarce, and *vice versâ*. If the great naturalist had seen and heard the warblers in our wood last summer, he would have written differently or have made an exception to his rule. The garden warbler was very abundant, the blackcap abundant, but the lesser whitethroat, so far as I could make out, rather scarce. Which is the better singer of the two—the blackcap or the garden warbler? Writers on birds set the blackcap first, and some, not very happily, have called that bird the mock nightingale. I am inclined to agree that the blackcap is the better of the two, though this might well be described as a matter of taste. There is a certain rarity about the blackcap's notes which goes well with his wild woodland retreats. But the male blackcap has also, what I have never noted in the garden warbler, a delightful kind of undersong into which he occasionally changes after a burst or two of his

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ordinary song. It is good to hear that undersong, full of delicate, subtle beauty. The admirable blackbird, too, has an undersong of his own, and so has the redstart in confinement, and no doubt also in a free state.

As for the lesser whitethroat, it is one of the most active and one of the neatest of all small birds of passage. I have seen the bird, which is as alert and restless as a tit or gold-crest, singing its small and agreeable but not particularly striking song, whilst hunting for food among the boughs of a low oak. As for the alleged harsh notes of the lesser whitethroat, all I can say is I have not so far heard them ; nor have I ever heard the alleged 'hoarse croak,' after the young are hatched, of the nightingale, but instead a powerful striking note commonly repeated after a whistling call-note and not unlike sometimes the letters *Kur-r-r-r* and at others *Kar-r-r-r*.

In spite of statements to the contrary, I believe I am right in saying that the nests of the golden warbler, blackcap, and lesser whitethroat often exactly resemble one another. Bents, gorse grass, and copse grass, with occasionally

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a few horse-hairs for lining, are the ordinary materials. Sometimes a little green moss and a portion of a cobweb or of a cocoon are used for weaving the materials together: as a rule, however, these accessories are wanting. I find a note in my diary which states that 'out of half a dozen nests of blackcap, garden warbler, and lesser whitethroat, found in May 1898, not one so far (May 29) has contained any cobwebs or cocoons.'

The nests are commonly placed about eighteen inches from the ground, but I have known the blackcap build at a much greater height. The common whitethroat's nest is considerably stouter and much more warmly lined than those of the three wood warblers referred to. I have found it at various heights from the ground up to seven or eight feet, and now and then on the ground. Sometimes the nest is lined with the white fluffy down of the seed-vessels of the sallow, just as the sedge-warbler lines with that of the willow, so that the young may have a home as soft as eider-down. A remarkable fact about the building operations of these wood warblers is the number of nests begun, but never completed.

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I should say that they will desert, provided the eggs have not been laid, from seemingly very slight causes. Many uncompleted nests of wrens are also found early in the season.

Get two people to describe the eggs of these wood warblers, and you will find that they generally differ considerably in regard to certain colours. I imagine it is as hard for a practised eye to confuse the eggs of blackcap, garden warbler, and lesser whitethroat, when fresh and in the nest, as it is for a good aurelian to confuse the pearl-bordered and small pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies. But I own I should not care to be set the task of sorting a large number of these eggs after they had been blown, mixed up together, and perhaps kept for some time. Here are my descriptions of eggs of these birds found last season, and I may add perhaps that they were amended and finally passed by a lady with a good eye for colour, who, in one or two cases, turned my blues into greens and greens into blues :—

Blackcap.—Ground colour—a bluish white, spotted with sepia brown, most thickly round the large end which is encircled by a zone of spots

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and small blotches; and interspersed among the sepia marks are ash-colour spots.

Garden Warbler.—Ground colour—a greenish or green-tinged white, well stained all over with a light brown; spotted rather sparsely with a darker shade of brown; and having a zone at the larger end of brown spots and blotches and of ash-coloured spots. Another type of egg, from a batch of five found on June 5 in a nest containing cobwebs, was white in ground colour, stained with light brown; it had a few specks and small crookedly etched lines (somewhat like those on a yellowhammer's egg) of a darker brown; it had no zone, and the usual ash-coloured markings were scarcely visible.

Lesser Whitethroat.—Ground colour—faintest blue, blotched with light brown, much more thickly at the large end, where there is a zone of markings as on the blackcap's and garden warbler's eggs; whilst a few ash-coloured spots are just discernible here and there about the zone, but not nearly so distinct as on the eggs of the two species mentioned above.

It is very well known that birds' eggs when taken and blown very soon lose their delicate

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beauty. I took one egg of a red-backed shrike last July out of a clutch of four from a nest in a lane close to Harrow. It was a thing of beauty indeed before the yolk was removed, as also for a short while afterwards; but now its once rich and perfectly blended colours have faded away. On the other hand, a nightjar's fine oval egg, taken a month earlier, is as beautiful as ever with its bold violet markings. Neither egg has been much exposed to the light, which plays havoc with birds' eggs as with the wings of butterflies and moths.

After returning home at about sunset in those glorious times of May and June, after a long ramble through wood and breezy common, it is a never diminishing pleasure to sit in the garden after the evening meal and watch the passing of the day. I take from my notebook the following paragraph :—

'June 4th, a grey but soft evening. 8.20 P.M.: skylarks still singing all round over corn and clover, and a yellowhammer calling from the high hedge at the side of the garden. 8.55: a cuckoo is shouting from a coppice close by; many thrushes are now singing, the nightjar is

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just beginning, the partridge is very persistent, and a landrail's "crek" comes faintly from a distant hay-field; the nightingale is quite silent. 9: partridge and landrail alone are now to be heard, and both are gradually ceasing; the thrush, wren, robin, and skylark have gone straight from song to sleep.'

The little garden where I have often watched the day thus passing is scarcely less admirably placed for hearing the nightingale than is the garden of the house in the very centre of the woods, for it has round it two small coppices of an acre or so apiece, and at a distance of about two hundred yards and close to Port Way, a strip of broad thick hedge which shelters one or two pairs. There are always four or five birds in these three spots, and by night they challenge and sing against one another for hours at a stretch.

But perhaps to most enjoy the passing of the day at this season of the year one should go back again to the woods for an hour. There is a mystery and a glamour about the darkening woods which one does not expect to find in garden or field. The fragrance of the woods,

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too, on a late May or an early June evening after sundown is a good thing to know of. This fragrance is not to be attributed to any particular flower or herb; nor is it merely the odour of fresh green leaves of hazel, oak, and ash after cooling showers. Pick some leaves of hazel, crush them slightly, and hold them to the nose, and you will certainly find they are sweet; but this is not the sweetness with which the air is now lightly laden. It is rather, I think, the result of the combined odours of all the green things and flowers which are springing up, flourishing everywhere. I have seen a Middlesex lane within a dozen miles of the heart of town covered from end to end in July with many, many thousands of wild roses, and meadow-sweet in the same month growing in Southern Norway literally by the acre, but the odour which these flowers gives forth, though strong, is not so refreshing as that indescribable one of the May and June woods.

Few but choice are the sounds of the woods when dusk is deepening into dark. There is the churn of the nightjar, which very likely will be heard by-and-by by the woodman who is up and doing by the time dark softens into dusk;

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and there is the occasional drone overhead of a chaffer or dorr, which sleeps away the day, and will then suffer itself to be handled with no protest but a slight drowsy movement of its legs; whilst now and then the cry of the brown wood-owl startles the silent time. These, with bursts and flashes of the nightingale's melody, are almost the solitary sounds of the young June night in the depths of one of these Hampshire woods. I have once or twice at this season heard with amazement the cuckoo suddenly break out into full cry, and more often myself awakened some small warbler into a short, irregular snatch of song; but such sounds are rare and accidental, and no more to be reckoned part of the programme of the summer night than is the spectacle of an eccentric nightjar hawking for food about a shady coppice on a June or July afternoon to be reckoned part of the programme of the summer day. And the sights of the young June night are as few and choice as are the sounds. In the overgrown tangled paths you must feel rather than see your way when the moon is not up in a bright heaven. But in the open glades and clearings you can still trace the forms of your

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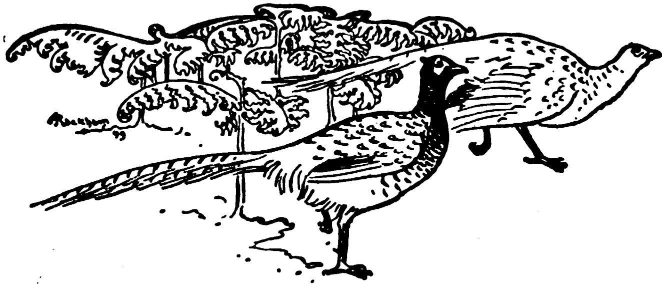
favourite oaks, and near the outside of the wood you will stand still for a few minutes before taking the dim footpath through the dewy fields, to note the black, black outlines of the trees so clear cut against the sky. The young June night is good to see and feel in most quiet spots outside the city. It is good on the rolling down, on the dusty highway, on the seashore, in the fragrant garden, by the flashing trout-stream; but best of all, I sometimes think, among the dark, mysterious woods.



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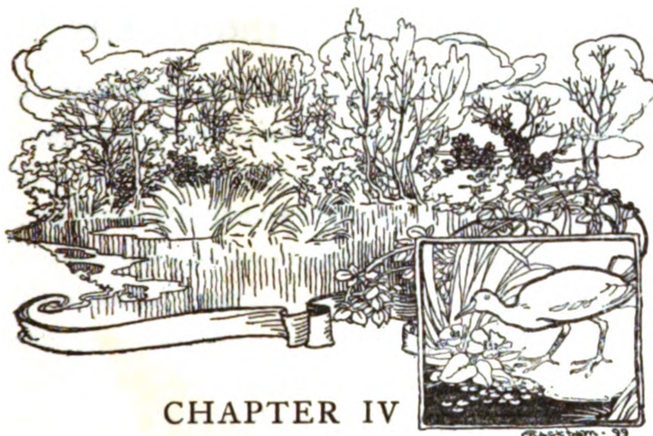

CHAPTER IV

The Woodlands' Medley

MAY and the first part of June are Nature's busiest time in the woodlands, teeming as they do with bird, insect, and flower life, and colour and scent and movement, brimming over with restless energy, bursting with productiveness. This is undoubtedly the season when the medley of the woodlands is seen at its prime. April, compared to this wonderful time, is but a barren month, July and August but dumb ones. Often a long hunt for the nests of scarce or interesting birds, if unrewarded by success, will be remarkable for the discovery in unsuspected spots of choice, though perhaps not actually rare, woodland flowers. The tway-blade is pretty well known

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as a lover of shady spots on a chalk soil or subsoil, and I have been familiar with this quaint flower, which is fertilised by the ichneumon flies only, for many years as a widely distributed one in our woods. Last year, however, whilst searching for nightingales' nests, I was astonished at finding it growing in one or two shady and comparatively moist places in the clay in great abundance. Much less abundant, but still to be found here and there in the higher wood and also in shady spots, is the more showy butterfly orchis. In the evening its pale green-white blossoms are redolent like those of the fragrant orchis, though the odour, I think, is rather more faint. The leaves of the butterfly orchis resemble those of the lily of the valley, and the pretty plant is not one likely to be passed over by those who are bent on putting together a mixed woodland bouquet. The bee orchis, which is frequently to be found on the Wiltshire downs and in the Isle of Wight—in both cases over the chalk—does not seem to grow near the woods or on the common in their midst, nor have I ever seen specimens of that fine flower the spider orchis or fly orchis, a plant which assuredly well deserves

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its name, in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, the green man orchis occurs, I believe, though I have not seen it of late years, whilst the ever-familiar purple wood orchis is everywhere to be seen in high wood and in low—the flower so well described in the 'purple orchises with spotted leaves' of Matthew Arnold's *Gypsy Scholar*. When this flower is picked and taken indoors, it will in a short time make a room smell as strongly and as unpleasantly as will the wet leaves of box. In the open air few, if any, wild-flowers smell decidedly unpleasant; and in the same way it may safely be said that few, if any, wild birds' sounds are really wearisome or unlovely. The flower may be as much out of place in the vase as the bird in the cage.

It is curious to observe the way in which some plants once scarce gradually spread their area, whilst others once stunted in growth and feeble seem to get a fresh lease of life. Formerly we had very little heather, and that little was of the smallest and feeblest growth; now there is in several spots something like an abundance, strong and wiry. I recollect that fine plant the rosebay willow-herb, often called Persian or French willow-

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herb in the east of England, growing in a large patch in only one place on the common. Within the last twenty years it has spread to various parts of the wood, so that half a dozen large patches may be seen, some of them distant a mile or more from each other. Single plants or only two or three plants growing together are not to be seen ; where the stately rosebay grows in the woods, it grows in quantities. The rosebay, whether wild, or, as it doubtless often is, an escape from cultivation, is a fine addition to the flora of a big wood. Its crimson-petaled blossoms grow in leafless clusters at the top of a stem which will reach a height of five or six feet.

But now, in late May and in June, when the day of the primrose, anemone, and 'gilt-bowl daffodilly' has long passed by, the woodland flowers which grow in real profusion are such very familiar ones as the sweet woodruffe, the blue pimpernel, the cow-wheat, the greater stitchwort, and the wild parsley. These, with immense masses of the scented wild clematis or traveller's joy on the hedges just outside the woods, are the flowers that one associates with the season of birds' eggs, and of the orange-tip and pearl and

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small pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies. The time of these two pretty fritillaries varies to a certain extent in the woods according to whether the season is forward or the reverse. Last season they did not hatch out till the 2nd of June—a glorious fresh day bathed in sun after the rain. On a slope covered with underwood of two or three years' growth I found both species in large quantities sunning themselves in every glade and open space between the hazel stems. They had evidently just hatched out, and were all in perfect condition. The pearl and small pearl-bordered fritillaries are not among the handsomest members of the family, but, being on the wing, as they are some little time before the more highly coloured and boldly marked insects have appeared, they are always welcome harbingers to the keen entomologist of the butterfly summer to come. With me these insects have ever been favourites. The small pearl-bordered is rather the darker coloured—a rich brown—of the two, and the edges of its wings are more distinctly marked with black spots than are those of the slightly larger species. The hatching out of the woodland fritillaries synchronises with the hatching out of

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the orange-tip, and sometimes with that of one or two other species. Looking back through my notes I find that these two fritillaries were in 1879—that wet season which turned out so disastrously for the farmers—out in quantities in the woods by the beginning of the third week in May; whilst at about the same time the Duke of Burgundy fritillary, a very small creature indeed for such a very big name, the lovely azure blue or holly, and the scarlet and black moth called the cinnabar, were all to be found in woods and in the park round the house—which later is a favourite spot of the brilliant six-spot burnet-moth—as well as on the common. There are said to be two distinct broods of the pearl-bordered fritillaries during the season, but one always associates these insects with the early summer, when the sap is still rising and the freshness and fragrance of the woods tell only of vigour and youth. The pearl-bordered fritillaries, and the olive-green eggs of the nightingale, and the purple wood orchises are some of the loveliest treasures of the young June day in a south of England coppice. I confess they appeal to me more than the most splendid insects, birds,

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and flowers which a Central African or a South American forest can show.

The purple orchises grow everywhere, and the fritillaries may be taken, if one has a mind to take them, by the score in the young shoots; but to discover the last-mentioned of these treasures of the woodland you will have to search for many hours and perhaps days, and even then, unless you have had a birds'-nesting youth, you will probably fail. The nests of the three wood warblers mentioned in the last chapter are far more easy to discover, because they are built at some little height, as a rule, from the ground, and are almost invariably placed, as we have seen, in the same position, namely, a thick bramble-bush.[1] But the nightingale builds on or very near the ground, and the nest, being largely composed of dead oak leaves, such as are scattered about everywhere, is particularly difficult to detect. I have found as many as three nests in a day, but each of these was built on the ground in a patch of stinging nettles in rather high wood. I discovered them by disturbing the bird off her eggs.

[1] Once last year I found a blackcap's nest built in the small dead boughs of a birch stem in high wood—a most unusual site.

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Where the wood is lower and the undergrowth consequently much thicker, one cannot often hope to find a nightingale's nest in this manner, and I have searched whole hours at a stretch, with nightingales singing all round, and yet searched in vain. However, last year we found one just ready for eggs built quite on the ground in the midst of some trailing woodbine. It was one of the neatest nightingale's nests I had ever seen. As a rule oak leaves are used, and a somewhat untidy fabric is the consequence, but this nest was compactly put together with the pliable and skeletonised leaves and portions of leaves of hazel, deftly mingled with some coarse grasses and scraps of thistle stem. A few fine grasses and roots formed the lining. The nightingale always uses much coarser grasses than do the blackcap, garden warbler, and whitethroats, and its nest is commonly a far more loosely woven one than the nests of these birds, but the nest described above was as neat and well shaped as one could wish to see.

Strange that the nightingale, so shy in its wild state, should be so tame in confinement! Just before writing these words I was dining in a room within two miles of Charing Cross, in which there

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are at the present time, amongst other birds, a young and an adult nightingale, a pair of lesser whitethroats, a blackcap, and two redstarts. The blackcap and redstarts sing beautifully, though they have not yet completed their moult, and though it is raw winter weather; the lesser whitethroats are in perfect health and may commence singing any morning; and the redstarts, one of which, like the blackcap, sings really finely, are most beautiful to look at. The nightingales, however, are the two birds in this truly remarkable collection of warblers in London which fix the attention. They are not yet singing, but their owner is convinced they will begin soon, provided they are male birds, and they are so tame that they not only freely take a mealworm out of the hand of a stranger, but demand it with clamour when one takes up the bowl in which the food is kept. Personally, I do not keep birds, and scarcely care to think of the prolonged miseries of many of the poor larks and other small birds one sees in the windows of London bird-shops. But it is only fair to say that there are birds in confinement *and* birds in confinement.

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Morris, in his ever-delightful work on British birds, alludes more than once with severity to the practice of keeping birds in cages. He makes apparently no exceptions, and yet, I think, could he have seen the bird-room of my friend, he would have admitted that the blackcap sang therein as sweetly as in its wildest woodland haunt, that the lesser whitethroat could not have been more alert in its beloved thickets than in its large cage, and that the nightingale appeared to be quite happy with its lot. I fully agree, at any rate, that no one should keep these wild birds unless they have ample time to devote to their wants, and ample space. Sometimes my friend releases a bird if he thinks it is not happy or would do better in its wild state. Amongst other birds, he has released a red-backed shrike and a willow wren. A day or two after the release of these two birds we went into Battersea Park, and found the willow wren, full of life and activity, hunting up and down a quiet plantation in search of food. Willow wrens are not to be seen every July day in Battersea, and it was very pleasant watching this little fellow, no doubt the single bird of the species at large in the midst of the

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vast city that day. Whilst we were watching the willow wren, a pair of spotted flycatchers suddenly showed themselves, and a little later we got a fine view of a piebald cock blackbird in a low tree just off the road. Even in the heart of London one may see and hear a few wild birds now and then, if one knows where to look and listen for them. About dawn sometimes a carrion crow perches on the roof of my dwelling-place in Chelsea, and calls with his 'voice of care.' It may not be a lovely sound in itself, but it takes me instantly back to the green woods of youth, in which I can lose myself in thought, as Hazlitt could lose himself in the tangled solitudes of the woods of Tuderley.

A nightingale in full song in this country in winter seems a strange inversion of the natural order of things, and yet it is far from being unknown. Bishop Stanley had one which sang all through the winter, and the bird was so tame that when let out of his cage he would invariably return at night or next day. Cowper has left lines 'To the Nightingale which the Author heard singing on New Year's Day, 1792,' and I am informed of a nightingale kept by a gentleman

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in his stable at Ealing, which sings the winter through, and has done so for years past. I have never heard the nightingale sing in confinement, and whilst quite believing that the bird may be perfectly happy in that state when in good hands, I must say I would rather hear one in the woods than any number in cages. Their song is immensely powerful. Morris says it can fill 'a space of a mile in diameter'—a statement which I should be sorry to cast doubt upon.

The nightingale, as I have shown, first begins to sing in the second or third week of April in our woods. The majority of the birds have ceased by the end of the first week, though a few continue till about the end of the second week, in June. Thus these 'rivers of melody' flow unceasingly for eight weeks every year. I feel certain, after many observations extending over a good many years, that the nightingale ceases to sing the very day, if not the very hour, the young break through the shell. It has been stated by more than one writer that the nightingale loses his voice about this period, and is reduced to 'a hoarse croak.' The 'hoarse croak' is a ridiculous misnomer, as already pointed out,

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though it is perfectly true that the sound alluded to is heard after the young are hatched, and not, I believe, previous to that.[1] But surely it is not reasonable to suppose that suddenly the nightingale is reduced from a singing to a silent bird because it has completely lost its power of melody. I prefer to think that the power is still there, but the will or desire is wanting directly the female bird hatches her young; for remember this, that the singing of the nightingale shows no deterioration or going off;—say a couple of nightingales in your coppice cease to sing on June 6; on June 5 they have been singing as splendidly as through April and May. The nightingale, as we know, having ceased, sings no more during the season so far as this country is concerned, and I take it the same may be said in regard to blackcap and garden warbler, although Jenyns in his observations on natural history records having heard the last-named singing so late as July 17. It is an interesting fact that the willow warbler does sing again sometimes after its period of silence, though I cannot say that I have ever

[1] I cannot recollect ever having heard it and having found out afterwards that the female bird has been sitting on her eggs.

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heard it in song in our wood after about the middle, or at latest the third week, of June. I have heard the male lesser whitethroat singing as late as July 3, accompanied at the time by his mate. Whether these birds had hatched their young I could not say; but if not, they were uncommonly late. In my notebooks I find such entries as: 'May 24—Lesser whitethroat's nest with five eggs sat hard upon'; and 'May 26—Lesser whitethroat's nest with three fresh eggs.' By July these warblers have, in the vast majority of cases, ceased sitting; indeed, I have never found the eggs of any of them at so late a date in the woods, and it may be confidently stated that none of them ever rear two broods during the season.

There are very few birds' songs which can be written in English letters, and though the nightingale's is not so impossible to put in writing or print as, say, the garden warbler's or blackcap's, one can only at best go fairly near to expressing it. The well-known run, resembling in some degree the words, '*zwartz, zwartz, zwartz, zwarty,*' is perhaps easier to write down than are most. Nor are the call and other notes of

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birds easy to write down correctly. The nuthatch's sharp, loud, '*whit, whit*,' and the chiff-chaff's cry, '*hoo-id*,'[1] are perhaps among those that can be reduced to writing.

I now turn from what I have ventured to call the true wood warblers to the delicate little creatures which have been neatly described as the leaf warblers. The willow wren, occasionally, like the common whitethroat, called by the country folk the nettle-creeper, is, of course, the most familiar, but the chiff-chaff is also abundant throughout the wood and in the country around. Last season I seemed to see as much of the chiff-chaff as of the willow wren, and the only two nests of the leaf warblers I found were chiff-chaffs'. One was built two feet from the ground in a small fir, and was ready for eggs. It could be seen distinctly from the old turnpike road between Andover and Newbury, and was conse-

[1] This '*hoo-id*' of the chiff-chaff cannot be called the note of alarm, since it is used by the bird when no danger threatens—unless the mere fact of the chiff-chaffs calling together the young implies a fear of danger or a sense of alarm on the part of the parent. As already shown, the nightingale's '*ku-r-r-r*' or '*ka-r-r-r*' is also uttered when no danger threatens or is apprehended. I fancy the expression 'note of alarm' is used too often in regard to various species.

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quently robbed by some passer-by. The second nest, made of moss and leaves, and lined with a good number of feathers, was on the ground in a small open place in the wood. I only found it by watching the old birds for some time, one of which in bringing food alighted every time on precisely the same oak-twig preparatory to dropping straight down to her five almost fully fledged young (June 2nd). The chiff-chaff's '*hoo-id*,' most dwellers in the county who observe birds at all must know, as also the—for the size of the diminutive creature—loud note from which the name of the species is derived. The chiff-chaff's song, however, is much less familiar than are the songs of either willow warbler or wood warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*). I have seen few references to it in ornithologies. On June 2, 1898, on the evening of the day on which I found the chiff-chaff's nest with young, I saw a chiff-chaff feeding in a low oak, and pouring forth several times a little song, without the distinctive character of the willow wren's, but still rather pleasant.

The wood-warbler or wood-wren is much scarcer than its two little relatives—a pretty,

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shapely bird with a nice song, which is most often uttered from the boughs of a tall oak. Last year I could not find this favourite bird of mine anywhere in the woods, though no doubt it was there, but in previous years I have commonly found a few pairs scattered about. The wood-warbler's nest, as is well known, never contains feathers as lining; yet the bird builds in much the same spots as the other two leaf warblers, and like them constructs its domed nest of leaves and moss. Shall we ever know why the wood-warbler dispenses with the feathers, which its near relatives, the willow warbler and the chiff-chaff, invariably use? and shall we ever know why these three little warblers make domed nests? I note Wallace's statement, that dull-coloured females sit on open nests, whilst bright-coloured ones sit in domed ones; but you can scarcely call the female birds of these three species bright-coloured, any more than you can the common wren.

A fourth British species of this delightful little family, the melodious willow wren, has not yet been claimed as a Hampshire bird. It is great news that this bird seems likely to establish

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itself in Devonshire; and at the time of writing I am looking forward greatly to a proposed expedition in the spring with the Rev. Murray A. Mathew to one of the spots which it is now believed to frequent upon its arrival in England. 'In a beautiful glen,' he writes in the *Zoologist*, 'carpeted with bluebells and ground-ivy, five melodious warblers and a nightingale were singing close round me; and as I stood listening to them, another melodious warbler flew into a bush at my elbow, and commenced its song.' The list of our vanished and vanishing birds is a sad enough one, including such charming small species as the Savi's warbler (quite gone) and the bearded tit-mouse, once a Hampshire nesting-bird, but now rare even in its last stronghold, Norfolk. It will be a real consolation to the lover of a choice and varied fauna if we can class a few newly discovered species, like the marsh warbler and the melodious willow warbler, among our undoubted regular nesting-birds.

I conclude these remarks on the little leaf warblers with a query: does the wood-warbler or wood-wren sometimes recommence singing in July or August as the willow wren is now

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known to do? I ask because in an old note-book I find this entry: 'Heard wood-wren in the woods August 22, 1880.' I had quite forgotten the incident till I noticed it recently, and so cannot say for certain whether this entry referred to the song or the call-note of the bird, though I incline to think it would be the latter. The song of this warbler is scarcely less distinctive than that of the willow wren. White of Selborne, Lilford, Seebohm, and Blyth, among other ornithologists, have endeavoured to describe the wood-warbler's remarkable sibilous or shivering song; and their descriptions vary a good deal. Here is a pleasant and a true-to-nature glimpse of the bird by Mr. Howard Saunders:—'The hen at times sits very close: when fairly beaten out she will feed in an unconcerned manner, uttering a low *pi-ó* for a quarter of an hour or more; after which she works round to a branch above her nest, drops down abruptly and enters it in an instant.'

It is a change indeed to turn from the dainty leaf and wood warblers to two of our summer visitors of which I shall now write, the nightjar and the cuckoo; but certainly these curious

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birds are important to our woodland medley of May and June. Much has been written of the strange nightjar, in regard to whose note many a dweller in the south country who even scarcely care for, much less study, birds, might well say, as Keats of the nightingale, 'Darkling I listen.' Except the bleating of the snipe over a wild marsh scene, I know of no bird sound more fascinating than the whirring note of this odd creature of the summer dusk. It has been likened by Mivart to the sound produced by a small rattle, and by Lilford to that produced by a spinning-wheel. It reminds me rather of the whirring caused by some piece of machinery, and, if it were not for the associations and for the knowledge that it came from a quaint and interesting bird, I do not think it could by any stretch of imagination be described as agreeable; and the same may be said of the bleating of the snipe. A regular rise and fall imparts a certain variety to the note, which can be heard on a still night at a distance of several hundred yards. Amongst Gilbert White's perfect studies of birds there is a delightful one of the nightjar. In one of my

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editions, that of Captain Brown, published in 1856, there is a note by Wilson in which it is said that the nightjar or 'whip-poor-will' is common in the United States, where on moonlight nights it may be heard with little intervention till morning. Somehow I cannot recollect hearing the note after about ten o'clock at night in our woods, which the birds visit every summer in considerable numbers, though it is certainly to be heard again before daybreak. Often, when returning with my gun from shooting rabbits on the common on a summer's evening, I have had the good fortune to see the 'night-swallow' perched lengthways on a dead oak or ash bough *in full song*. On such occasions I have known the bird to come and flutter round, almost touching the barrels of the gun, possibly to draw me off from the young or eggs hard by. The nightjar, which is always called by the country people the night-hawk, never the goat-sucker, arrives in the woods in the third week in May. The hen lays her two eggs on the bare ground, sometimes in June, sometimes in July, and the spot selected is a small, fairly open space in the shoots of from two to three or four years' growth.

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Early in June last year I flushed a nightjar off her two lovely eggs. They were almost perfectly oval-shaped, glossy, and had grey and violet markings. The eggs were placed side by side on the short grass and moss, and not even so much as a depression in the ground had been prepared for them. The bird, which had only just begun to sit, rose noiselessly, and floating away over the hazels settled on a bare oak-bough. The buoyancy of her flight surpassed that of any bird I had ever seen : it was full of grace. Next day I took my wife to see, and if possible photograph, the bird on her eggs. We were able to get near enough to distinguish the bird, in spite of the fact that her orange, brown, and grey plumage —a most choice and softly blended combination —harmonised by no means ill with the brilliant greens amid which she was sitting. She was wide awake with one eye steadily fixed upon us, and her appearance verged on the uncanny. That the nightjar is in possession of all its faculties in the daylight is proved by the fact that it migrates then. The young, I take it, are not fed except after dusk, when, like their parents, they probably get very big meals to satisfy their cravings, for

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scarabæi and fat-bodied moths, such as are found in infinite numbers round the oaks in summer, should be most satisfying. Several lime-trees have greatly flourished round the home in the woods, and are of such noble proportions that they can be seen for many miles from high spots in the surrounding country. In summer these trees are packed with the honey that the bees of various kinds, 'yellow-banded' and others, love dearly, and are 'a home of murmurous wings.' At dusk they are much affected, as are the two or three large horse-chestnuts which grow with them, by the *noctuæ*, and then the nightjars will often come and take their fill. I do not think they are exceptionally shy or wary birds unless a gun has been discharged near them, in which case they at once become very difficult to approach.

The cuckoo never ceases to interest and to occupy the close attention of ornithologists, and a certain amount of light has been thrown on the life-history of the bird since the time of Jenner. It is now more than a century since that great doctor saw, so he related, a young cuckoo just hatched and quite blind thrust out both a young bird and an egg which were the

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rightful occupants of the usurped nest. He also stated that he had witnessed a lengthy and exciting struggle, extending over an entire day, between two young cuckoos for a hedge-sparrow's nest, which ultimately ended in the triumph of the slightly larger bird. The account of these struggles appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions*, and is of such great interest that I venture to make some extracts therefrom.

'June 18, 1797, I examined the nest of a hedge-sparrow which then contained a cuckoo's and three hedge-sparrow's eggs. On inspecting it the day following, I found the bird had hatched, but that the nest now contained only a young cuckoo and one young hedge-sparrow. The nest was placed so near the extremity of a hedge, that I could distinctly see what was going forward in it; and, to my astonishment, saw the young cuckoo, though so newly hatched, in the act of turning out the young hedge-sparrow.

'The mode of accomplishing this was very curious. The little animal, with the assistance of its rump and wings, contrived to get the bird upon its back, and making a lodgment

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for the burden by elevating its elbows, clambered backward with it up the side of the nest till it reached the top, where, resting for a moment, it threw off its load with a jerk, and quite disengaged it from the nest. It remained in this situation a short time, feeling about with the extremities of its wings as if to be convinced whether the business was properly executed, and then dropped into the nest again. With these (the extremities of its wings) I have often seen it examine, as it were, an egg or nestling before it began its operations; and the nice sensibility which these parts appeared to possess seemed sufficiently to compensate the want of sight, which, as yet, it was destitute of.' As to the number of eggs laid by the cuckoo, Jenner in his observations remarked: 'That the cuckoo actually lays a great number of eggs dissection seems to prove very decisively. Upon a comparison I had the opportunity of making between the ovarium or *racemus vitellorum* of a female cuckoo, killed just as she had begun to lay, and of a pullet killed in the same state, no essential difference appeared. The uterus of each contained an egg perfectly formed, and ready for exclusion; and

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the ovarium contained a large cluster of eggs gradually advanced from a very diminutive size to the greatest the yoke acquires before it is received into the oviduct. The appearance of one killed on the 3rd of July was very different. In this I could distinctly trace a great number of the membranes which had discharged yokes into the oviduct, and one of them appeared as if it had parted with a yoke the preceding day. The ovarium still exhibited a cluster of enlarged eggs; but the most forward of them was scarcely larger than a mustard-seed.'

Jenner's story of his precocious young cuckoo has not been accepted by all naturalists. Charles Waterton, whose blunt criticisms of his two contemporaries, Audubon the American and Swainson[1] the English naturalist, show that he was not averse to a little combat at times, waxed indignant over the account. 'We learn from the story in question,' he declared, 'that a young cuckoo, the day after it was hatched, contrived to get a young hedge-sparrow (which was in the same nest with itself) on its back,

[1] 'Your nomenclature has caused me the jaw-ache.'—Waterton in an open letter to Swainson.

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and proceeded with it, stern foremost, up the side of the nest; and on arriving at the summit jerked its load into the hedge below. The performance of such a feat is impossible. At that period of existence the legs of a young cuckoo could not support the weight of its own body, to say nothing of the additional load of another upon that body. Again, the supposed act was contrary to any instinct with which the young cuckoo might have been endowed; for had not the old bird been frightened away she would have been sitting on the two young ones at the time at which the feat was said to have taken place, and her covering them would have totally prevented such a movement on the part of either of them.' Thus Waterton, and upon looking into the *Dictionary of National Biography* I find Jenner accused of having commissioned a nephew of his to watch the young cuckoo instead of doing so himself. The nephew, it is suggested, gave a fictitious account of what had taken place; but perhaps the writer of the article on Jenner in the *Dictionary* was not aware, when he wrote thus, that Jenner professed to have watched not this one young cuckoo but many others. If Jenner

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was a romancist, he was a romancist on a very extensive scale. It would be safer to believe that Jenner had watched young cuckoos, but that he was mistaken or misinformed as to the age of the particular one, on the story of whose extraordinary activity Waterton poured such contemptuous ridicule. Gould must be reckoned among those who have been fortunate enough to see a very young cuckoo turn out some young meadow pipits; and his pipits had, moreover, well-developed quills on their wings and back.

Though I have found a good many cuckoos' eggs in the nests of reed-warblers and wagtails, and have in one or two instances found the young cuckoo in possession, I have not so far had the good luck to witness the ejectment process. A friend tells me that he saw a young cuckoo, after much exertion, turn out some young hedge-sparrows. When he replaced one of the birds it was again ejected by the cuckoo.

May 29, 1898, I shall always regard as a red-letter day in my life as a field naturalist. Wandering with a friend about a thick spot in the 'Rag,' and finding now a white-

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throat's, now a chaffinch's, and now a garden warbler's nest—all of them built in the bramble beds—we disturbed a wren from her moss and fern nest suspended in the brambles. Within lay a hideous young bird, naked, blind, and glistening as though it had been polished. My companion instantly drew attention to the enormous size of this creature compared with the wren. It was a young cuckoo, which we concluded could not have been hatched more than twenty-four hours or so since. Lying as it was on its belly, black and oily-looking, and feebly and silently opening its mouth, we agreed that it was the one lamentable and unlovely sight we had seen in the woods that May day. It was alone in the nest, and the question at once arose what had become of the eggs or young of the imposed-upon owners thereof? The nest, a couple of feet from the ground, was suspended in a very thick place, but upon looking carefully beneath, I discovered three wren's eggs. One had been slightly pecked either by accident or design, whilst the other two were quite uninjured. They contained tiny young which had evidently perished just about the time when they ought to have been hatched. There

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were no other eggs or portions of eggs to be seen about, though within the nest itself and under the young bird I searched for and found some fragments of the shell of the cuckoo's egg. Three of the wren's eggs found on the ground were under that side of the nest which contained the entrance; the fourth egg was well on the other side of the nest. Even assuming that the helpless-looking little log within the domed nest was capable of turning the eggs out—and we agreed that such an effort on its part was utterly out of the question—the position of the fourth egg away from the entrance made it clear enough that the ejectment in this instance had been effected by either the wren or wrens themselves, or else the old cuckoo. I think there can be little doubt that the wren sacrificed her own young just as they were about to burst through their shells. It has been said that meadow pipits will sometimes throw out their young to make room for the parasite, and Jenner stated that upon the young cuckoo being hatched any unhatched eggs would be thrust out by the foster-parent. My experience has perhaps been scarcely large enough to entitle me to speak with certainty, but I do strongly incline

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to the view that the cuckoo herself leaves alone the eggs of the birds in whose nests she is laying. I have found the cuckoo's egg among clutches of four or five reed-warbler's eggs, and on one occasion two cuckoos' eggs slightly differing from one another in a pied wagtail's nest containing five eggs of its own. I cannot recall ever having found signs of *broken* eggs round a nest in which a cuckoo has laid, nor have I ever found a bird sitting on a cuckoo's egg alone—though in regard to this I should mention that a friend told me he knew of a sedge-warbler sitting on one egg, that of a cuckoo, by the Itchen only last summer.

To return to our cuckoo in the wren's nest. We replaced the ejected eggs on the ground, rearranged the brambles and underwood, etc., which we had slightly disturbed, and retired after taking a note as to the position of the nest, which was at some distance from the nearest path. Two days later we returned to the nest, looked in, and found to our surprise and disappointment that the young monster had disappeared. The nest had not been disturbed, the wren's eggs lay beneath it, and there was, so far as we could see,

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no sign that any birds'-nesting lad had been on the spot. What had become of the bird? Had a hawk swooped down and removed the ugly, but perhaps toothsome, little lump; or—more probable on the face of it—had one of the sharp, thin weazels with which the wood abounded climbed up and done the deed? There was no reply to these queries, and a cuckoo hard by, as though to mock at our fruitless doubts and questionings, shouted loud and long. It was a woodland tragedy not to be cleared up.

The number of nests in which the egg of the cuckoo has been found has gone up greatly within the last thirty years or so. The *Ibis* list of 1865, compiled by Mr. Rowley, gave the nests of only thirty-seven European birds, whereas Mr. Bidwell has mentioned the nests of no less than one hundred and twenty-three species. I fancy the wren is but rarely selected by the cuckoo, but to my mind the choice of the nest of the jay or blackbird or song-thrush is far more remarkable. I have frequently in birds'-nesting days placed the eggs of small birds in the nests of these three species, and the result

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has always been the same—the eggs have been broken up. If I wished to preserve a cuckoo's egg, the last place I should think of placing it in would be the nest of the jay, blackbird, or thrush.

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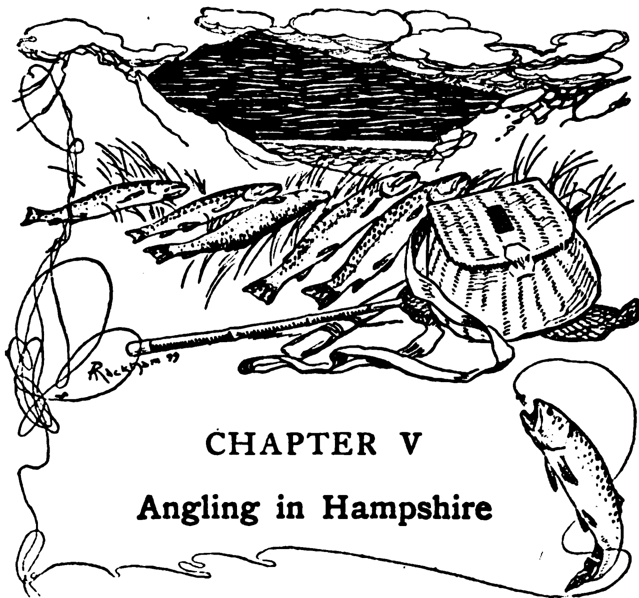

CHAPTER V

Angling in Hampshire

In his book on angling in the 'Haddon Hall Library,' Sir Edward Grey speaks of 'the most wonderful of all the notes of birds, the prolonged spring notes of curlews, the most healing sound that ever was, full of rest and joy.' I have never heard the curlew's whistle in spring, but feel that it must indeed be a sound worth listening to, if it is better than 'the purr of the nightjar' in our Hampshire woods, or the bleating on April days of the snipe by our Hampshire streams. On the whole, I know of no bird-sound of more singular

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fascination for one who has 'been long in city pent,' than this bleating of the snipe high over the commons and marshes of the first of the English chalk streams: I incline to put the snipe before the nightjar in this respect. I think I shall never hear the snipe bleating, or, as some prefer to call it, drumming, in any part of the country without being carried in thought to a wild common on the upper Test, where in the spring one may hear that sound from morning till night to one's heart's content.

One of the tributaries of the upper Test, when the great sponges of chalk are full of water and the springs consequently high, rises in the very heart of the country of which I have been writing, and flows below the woods, past the hanging of hazels crowned with beech-trees, and past a quiet village or two, till it enters beautiful Hurstbourne Park, to shortly after join, near Hurstbourne Priors, what is now undoubtedly the main branch of the stream. This tributary would seem to have gone of old by the name of the Test, Michael Drayton, as I have shown, speaking of it so; but now it is always known locally as the Bourne. Only very occasionally do the Bourne trout get

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above the village of St. Mary Bourne, and the trout fishing indeed can scarcely be said to begin till that village is well passed. The Test proper is the branch which rises at Ashe Park and flows south-west past Overton, Laverstoke, Freefolk, Whitchurch, Longparish, Wherwell, Chilbolton, Fullerton—where the Anton (the old name of the Test) joins—Leckford, Stockbridge, Houghton, Horsebridge, Mottisfont, Romsey, Nursling, and Redbridge, below which place it empties itself into Southampton Water. I have followed this beautiful trout stream, once at least, almost from source to sea, and have been struck by the beauty and variety of its scenery. In some of its upper parts it has the beauty of wooded marsh and common and quiet and sleepy villages and hamlets; by Leckford and Stockbridge it flows for a little while through water meadows bounded by fine chalk-hills; and finally it empties itself into one of the fairest arms of the sea which indent our southern coast. One can ride or walk or cycle from Overton to the clean, bright market-town of Romsey, and scarcely ever be for any length of time out of sight or sound of the river Test or of one of its various branches. There are many spots on

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"*THE QUEEN OF CHALK STREAMS.*"

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the journey at which the traveller may well rest and enjoy his surroundings. At Freefolk he will perhaps desire to see something of the famous mills where is made the Bank of England note-paper; at Hurstbourne Priors he will desire to see the beautifully wooded deer park; at Wherwell, the church; at Stockbridge, the old town with its broad street, which looks like sleeping a Rip Van Winkle sleep, now its race-course is a thing of the past; and at Romsey the noble abbey church. But if the traveller is an angler, there is one spot above all perhaps at which he should tarry. Let him stop at the bridge which spans the river by Houghton Mill, lean over and search the water for some of the great grayling that I saw rolling about there last September. If he sees two or three fish equal in girth to those which I saw when last looking over the bridge, he will understand why anglers praise so much the grayling of the Test. Grayling equal in size to large sea-trout are not to be despised by the keenest trout fisherman. What were approximately the weights of these grayling which I saw from the bridge by Houghton Mill? Fish seen from a bridge

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are likely to deceive one a good deal in regard to weight. Yet it is certain that grayling have been captured very near indeed to this same spot of over three and a half pounds, whilst there are perfectly reliable records of Test and Itchen[1] grayling up to and even exceeding four pounds in weight. I do not think that two or three of the grayling I saw on that September afternoon could have been less than three pounds apiece.

In 1884 and 1885 Froude, the historian, fished in the Bossington water below Houghton, and enjoyed excellent sport with big grayling. One day he got a brace of fish weighing 2 lbs. apiece, and another four fish weighing respectively 2 lbs. 1 oz., 1 lb. 14 oz., 1 lb. 12 oz., and 1 lb. 11 oz. On this fine water, too, there are good trout, which rise at the alder, sedge, May-fly, and small duns. Two pounds is the ordinary size of a Bossington trout, and the average weight of grayling is not much under this.

Major Carlisle, so well known to trout anglers in all parts of the country by the notes and

[1] Last season (1898) a grayling of four and a quarter pounds was killed in the Itchen.

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articles on dry fly fishing, which he has long contributed to the *Field* under the writing name of 'South West,' mentioned not long ago how he had once described the Test to a friend as the best trout-stream in the United Kingdom: 'in the world,' said his friend, correcting him. I would not myself venture to describe the Test other than as the queen of the chalk streams, although I believe that many anglers of much greater and more varied experience than mine would not hesitate to indorse 'South West's' statement. The Itchen is a great stream for both trout and grayling fishing, and it has, like the Test, its fine salmon; but it is a smaller water, and its special admirers will probably be content to place it second.[1]

I find it hard to select what shall be said and what left unsaid about this stainless stream with its perfect water meadows, its scenery, its abundance of sport and wild life. Properly speaking, it is only the upper Test from source to junction with the Anton, or, say, from source to Stock-

[1] Drayton represents the Test and Itchen as jealous of each other. The Itchen, despite the gentle reproaches of the Test—

'. . . thinks in all the isle not any such as she,
And for a Demigod she would related be.'

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bridge, which comes within the district of which this book treats; but I desire to say a little of the lower branches of the river where, despite the pessimists, a good number of *fresh-run* salmon are still to be taken with rod and line, and trout run up to a startling size. I shall begin at the end of the water instead of the beginning, and deal with the Testwood salmon and the Broadlands trout.

Thirty years or so since a bag of five salmon taken by one angler in a day on the Test was placed on record as a remarkable piece of sport, but, whether fish were or were not more numerous in those times, it is certain that larger bags than five salmon have been made within recent years. Captain Beaumont on Testwood has, I know, landed as many as ten salmon in a day, of which eight[1] have been clean. This, of course, is an exceptional bag, and three or four fish would be a good one at the present time. It would be absurd to claim for the Test the reputation of a great salmon water, but it is not fair to say, as some are inclined

[1] Three of these salmon weighed 90 lbs., made up as follows:—32 lbs., 30 lbs., and 28 lbs.

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to, that salmon fishing on this stream is kelt and kipper fishing. Red fish are landed more often perhaps than silver ones; but in March, April, and May—the best part of the season—when the water is in proper condition, real sport is often to be had on the best lengths of this salmon-holding portion of the Test. In August, September, and October there are sea-trout and grilse, too, for the angler when fresh salmon have got to be rather scarce.

At Broadlands, once Lord Palmerston's house and now Mr. Evelyn Ashley's, we are not yet by any means out of the salmon water—fish indeed have been taken miles above Romsey—but we are in the regions of monster trout. It would be by no means right to call the trout angling here the best in the Test, but in regard to sheer weight the Broadlands trout seem only equalled by the New Zealanders. I have before me a list of weights of many of the more important trout taken in the Broadlands water during the last ten years, and they are very startling even to a chalk stream fisherman. We have had a surfeit of records during recent years in regard to bags of fish as well

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as furred and feathered game, and I do not desire to add more than I can possibly help to these lists. But in order to illustrate the different character of the trout fishing at, say, Broadlands on the lower, and Whitchurch on the upper waters of the Test, a few weights may be given.

The heaviest fish in the lower part of the Test do not often take a fly, but the Broadlands fish records tell of a trout of 7 lbs. captured within recent years with a May-fly. In May 1896 a trout of 6¼ lbs. was taken shortly before dusk with an alder; whilst there is also the record of one of 5¼ lbs. taken on a small red spinner. On May 27, 1897, an angler landed seven trout weighing 29 lbs. Long lines of pounds avoirdupois, which, before the page on which they are written is turned over total up to hundredweights, face me as I write; but it seems unnecessary to say more when all I wish to show is that the trout of the lower Test run to a very large size. I will now return to that part of the Test which was in my mind when I wrote at the beginning of this chapter of the bleating of the snipe in spring-time.

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An occasional struggle with one of the huge trout of the lower Test, which may run to any weight between four and ten pounds, is doubtless an exhilarating experience, but for my part I confess a preference for water where a good trout is a two pounder and the lure a small dun or spinner on finest drawn gut. The Test in the neighbourhood of Longparish or Wherwell is a water of this description—a perfect fly-fishing stream. The Test between Overton and Longparish is as pretty a piece of trout water as can well be imagined, and the scenery through which it flows is of a singularly pleasant character, but the trout do run rather small. Fish are extraordinarily numerous in some parts of this length of the Test. Between Overton and Laverstoke they simply swarm in certain stretches. In Laverstoke Park I have stood still and counted dozens in a single shallow, and genuine *wild* trout, too, for this part of the stream has not been stocked, I believe, for at any rate many years. In no stream in the south of England have I ever seen such an astonishing abundance of trout, varying from a few ounces to about 1 lb., as I saw on this water in May 1898. I

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found myself returning an undersized fish every few minutes at one period during the day, and every trout hooked and played scared several others. As may be imagined, bags on this part of the Test are often heavy by reason of the number of fish of about $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. which take the floating fly really well. A 2 lbs. fish about Overton or Laverstoke is very exceptional.[1]

Below Longparish the Test becomes a considerable stream, and when it is anything like bank-full there are plenty of places into which an angler even in his wading-trousers must not venture. Then we feel that we are in the regions of the 2 lbs. fish, and that we have always a chance of a fight with a fish of 3 lbs., or, during the May-fly season and in the summer evenings, even with one of as much as 4 lbs. I have not myself taken any trout in these parts of much over 2 lbs., but have seen far bigger ones moving at various times of the year.

Towards the head-waters of the Test, as I have shown in my remarks on the fishing at Laverstoke, trout take very well indeed, probably as

[1] Two thousand eight hundred and forty-nine fish taken on one stretch in the years 1894-97 weighed 2503 lbs.

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well as they have ever done, and anglers have no cause for complaint on that score. There is plenty of natural fly, too, on the water, on which the fish feed freely. Below, however, the constant complaint of anglers is that fly is far scarcer than it used to be, and that fishing has gone off. Major Turle, a Test angler whose evidence is always worth having, has recently declared frankly to me that things are not as they were. 'Trout nowadays are decidedly more difficult to catch than they were twenty years ago, principally owing, I think, to the incessant clearing away of mud and to the cutting of the weeds. They have' (Major Turle is speaking especially of the water between Longparish and Wherwell) 'become more numerous and have decreased in size. Some twelve years ago, in May-fly season, I killed four fish in an hour all over 4 lbs. in weight: now it is quite the exception about these parts to hear of a four-pounder, and last season (1898) I doubt if any were killed of over 3 lbs.'

I would not, of course, venture to question Major Turle's views on this subject. If he does not speak with great authority on these matters, then surely nobody can. But when all has been

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said concerning the deterioration in regard to the size of bags and the size of individual fish, the fact remains that a week or fortnight's fishing in this part of the world is a treat of treats to a keen angler. Whitchurch, Longparish, Bransbury, Wherwell, Chilbolton—what enticing sounds these names have for the trout fisherman about the time when the yellow of palm and primrose begins to appear in the hazel coppices, and the note of the chiff-chaff is heard from oak and elm!

The methods of angling for trout on the Test are identical with those practised by Itchen fishermen, which Sir Edward Grey has described in the opening volume of the 'Haddon Hall Library.' I shall not, therefore, describe them at any length, or in detail. Although the natural flies have, according to the observation of Major Turle and other anglers, considerably diminished in numbers within recent years, there is certainly in the stream between Longparish and Wherwell, as well as on the head-waters of the Test, what anglers in other parts of the country would regard as a very fair stock indeed. Olive and watery duns and May-flies are, so far as the *Ephemeridæ*

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are concerned, the most abundant, but there are also little May duns, iron blue duns, and Turkey browns sometimes in fair numbers, and I have seen the first and last mentioned taken now and then pretty well by the trout. The little May dun, which in size is intermediate between a large olive and a May-fly, is a very noticeable insect with wings of a lovely sulphur colour. I have seen it on various streams in both the south and the north of England, but only in any quantity on the Test on dull, cold days such as seem favourable for the hatching out of the iron blue. On the Itchen also these duns come out now and then, I believe, in some numbers during the summer months. Imitations of this insect, which are tied by the fly-makers, do not appear to be very successful in dry fly fishing, nor are the artificial Turkey browns very serviceable. On the other hand, the iron blue in its *sub-imago* state is copied very successfully by the fly-makers.

The most serviceable flies in my experience for dry fly waters—chalk, like the Test, or limestone, like the Derbyshire (Wye)—are the imitations of the olive dun. I like to have several

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shades, including, by all means, a decidedly light one, dressed on eyed-hooks Nos. 0 and 00; when the water is fine, the latter size is the better. Sedges dressed on hooks varying from Nos. 00 to No. 1 must be in the angler's box for evening fishing on the upper Test, and of course, during the season, the May-fly. Wickhams, alders, and red-quills are good flies too, but for my part, in regard to the upper Test and its tributaries, branches, and feeders, I shall be well content if, when on the water, I find my box contains only olive duns, quills, and sedges, and, should it be the May-fly season, May-flies. Sometimes it happens that the fish, though rising well at duns, will take no notice whatever of the angler's imitations. I find the following in a diary under the date September 13, 1898:—

'Much cooler and cloudier day than yesterday, with a little rain. Some duns out in considerable quantities for several hours about the middle of the day. Water very low, as it is everywhere this season in the south, but not more than ordinarily bright. Fish rising first at smuts or midges, but later coming on very well indeed at the duns, and settling down to a fair "head and

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tail rise" for a couple of hours or so. Not a fish could I take, though I cast up-stream and across-stream and drifted down-stream. Only once or twice did a trout appear to glance at my fly, or follow it a little way down-stream. It was the same in the still as in the broken water. The gut was fine: the flies were Holland's, and paraffined so as to float admirably: the "drag" was carefully avoided: the fish were not scared or "set down." Yet at another time, with conditions apparently not nearly so favourable, with water not one whit less clear, one might have had a pretty dish of 1 lb. and 2 lbs. trout to show at the end of the day. What is the explanation of this entire and ignominious failure at times of the man *v.* the trout?'

I do not believe that on this particular day I could have killed trout with any artificial flies, even had they been considerably better than those I was actually using. I know perfectly well that the line could have been sent out over these rising trout by hands much more skilful than mine, and much more accustomed to and successful with the Test trout; but it is my belief that in this particular case they would not have fared

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much better than I did. It was, I believe, a hopeless day, though most things, excepting, perhaps, the light and the lowness of the water, appeared favourable. The dun on which the trout were feeding was a pale watery one, and I recollect being struck by the fact that I had what really seemed like a capital imitation. I tried various changes of fly, and the result was always the same, namely, nothing. No wonder Jesse, ardent angler and delightful naturalist, found the Test trout so difficult to capture with his cast of wet flies. How *did* they manage, out of May-fly[1] season, to get trout with the flies of forty or fifty years since?

On the shallows the trout will 'tail' for hours, many of them even when the dun is hatching out. On most waters I like to use an alder or a coachman, or some fancy fly of the kind, against a 'tailing' trout, working it with sharp movements on a long line down-stream. Last year, however, I had several very cheering successes when I tried a floating dun over 'tailing' trout. One day I hooked and landed two good fish and lost a third within half an hour by this method,

[1] They used the natural fly during that season.

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though I must admit that next day I repeatedly tried the same thing without getting the faintest encouragement. A floating dun over a 'tailing' trout in nice, shallow, rippling water is, on the whole, worth a trial. These shallows where I hooked the 'tailing' trout are a very favourite place of mine. They have two islets from which one can fish, comfortably sitting on one of the great 'mats' of grass when not casting, and look upon a very fair scene. Close by is a house in which Tennyson stayed for a month in 1885, which the present Lord Tennyson describes as 'a farm on an island in the Test, here a babbling stream, running by banks of loosestrife, meadow-sweet, and willow-herb.' Sitting on the islet in midstream, waiting for a rise somewhere under or near the stump on the right bank, listening to the 'river keen that hath a voice and sings,' and occasionally taking my eyes off the water to admire the luxuriant mass of foliage which shuts from view the charming house where the poet stayed, I could spend many restful hours, and feel afterwards that I had spent them very well. 'No life,' surely rightly says Walton, 'so happy and so pleasant as the life of a well-

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governed angler; for when the lawyer is swallowed up with business, and the statesman is preventing or contriving plots, then we sit on cowslip banks, hear the birds sing, and possess ourselves in as much quietness as these silver streams, which we now see glide so quietly by us.'

The Test trout are undoubtedly very difficult to deceive, but on the whole, taking one day with another, I think that they are not more difficult than those of one or two other streams, or portions of streams, with which I am well acquainted. The last five miles or so of the Derbyshire Wye, from Holm Bridge, Bakewell, to Rowsley Bridge, are about the most difficult dry fly waters that I know of. The stream is rapid and extraordinarily winding, and the trout, which have never, since I have known the Wye, been very numerous, prefer to wait for their natural fly-food in the little eddies and backwaters and bays under the banks and at the corners where the current is gentle. To get the floating fly to fish in these positions is often extremely difficult owing to the 'drag,' which tears the lure roughly away down-stream before

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the trout has time to take it. The angler has consequently to resort to all manner of stratagems in order to get fish with the dry fly—and the good ones will nowadays rarely take any other, except in the early spring or when the water is discoloured. He has to cast from very awkward positions sometimes to 'drift' the fly downstream, at others to let the wind—if the wind chance to be favourable—carry it on to the right spot, and at others again to dib with his artificial dun or May-fly.

So much for the dry fly on these difficult lengths of the Derbyshire Wye. On the upper Test, on the other hand, though of course the least suspicion of a 'drag' has to be avoided, the fishing is in a way more simple. The Test is not so strong in current as the Wye, and it does not bend and twist nearly so much. The Test trout lie in plenty of other spots besides the backwaters and bays, and plenty of good ones may be taken in or near the middle of the stream as well as under the banks. The angler on the Test must often crawl to his trout, but scarcely so often as he must when fishing the northern stream. I am inclined on the whole to conclude that the trout of the

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Wye are decidedly harder than those of the Test to get the fly to neatly; whereas the trout of the Test are harder to deceive *when the fly has been got to them neatly* than those of the Wye. The upper Test trout are shorter, finer fish, in my view, than those of the Wye, but the latter, having a stronger stream in their favour, perhaps afford slightly better sport. The rise of trout on the upper Test seems to be a remarkably clearly defined one, and when it is over there is often not the least chance of picking up an odd brace or two of fish. This is not so on the Derbyshire Wye, nor is it so, I believe, on one or two of the tributaries of the Test, such as the Anton, that charming stream which takes its rise in the elm meadows near the cluster of houses and the small, very ancient church at Enham. The Anton, so far as angling goes, is not very familiar to me, though I have once or twice thrown a fly upon it about Andover, but from all I hear it is still a fine stream. By the ford and close to the railway station at Clatford I marked many trout rising well at duns one delightful morning last September (1898). A pleasant spot that!

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What unquestionably is necessary for success on the upper Test is that the angler should send out a straight line, and manage so that his fly will float well 'cocked,' *i.e.* upright and not lying limply and unnaturally on its side, over the feeding trout. I have never professed to believe in, or be very careful in my selection of, fine tackle. I have often fished with tackle anything but beautiful or costly, and at the end of a bad day have felt that the bag or creel has been wofully light through my own clumsiness, or else refusal of the trout to stir at surface-food. And yet, if people like to spend time and money on the purchase of fine tackle, there is no reason why they should not do so, for it is certainly a very innocent occupation. Moreover, a very nice rod with a line and gut, cast tapering perfectly and exactly suited to its throwing capacities, is doubtless a pleasant thing to handle. Get the best of these by all means, and be sure that you get it. Personally, I admit myself unequal to the task of giving advice as to whether Hardy's rods or Farlow's, Holland's flies or Ogden Smith's are the better for the upper Test.

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A ten-feet or ten-feet-six rod, in action the *reverse of flabby*, is ordinarily quite sufficient for the upper Test, and certainly for any of the Test's tributaries, but there have been occasions when the angler has longed that his weapon was just a trifle longer. In June 1897 I was fishing the Test at a very marshy spot, and was frequently compelled to wade into soft boggy places a yard or two off from the actual banks of the river. The stream was very full of water, and, having only wading-stockings on, I could not enter it, but had to keep a respectful distance from its brink. Wading in these treacherous bogs I constantly found myself all but waistcoat deep, casting, or trying to cast, to fish rising under the opposite banks. As a matter of fact I did contrive to get a few very good trout, but these were as nothing compared to the trout which I did not get. My rod, a three-jointed greenheart (which I believe to be decidedly inferior to a two-jointed split cane), was scarcely ten feet in length, and I soon found that it was quite impossible to get a fly with it well under the opposite bank at various points in the stream. It declined to do the work I hoped and expected of it, and the line caught again

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and again in the reeds, rushes, and sedge-grasses behind me. Sunk thigh-deep as I was in these boggy places, and thus of considerably less stature than the exasperating vegetation around and behind me, I found my ten-feet, or perhaps nine feet ten, greenheart miserably inadequate to the work I desired it to perform. My feelings were painful indeed when, in these conditions, I saw good trout after good trout rising at May-fly or dun in delightful places with the most gentle, seductive flow of water under the hazels on the opposite bank. If I had been a few years younger, and had not been kept in check by the knowledge that there was some one very near and dear to me at the inn who would severely condemn any proceeding of the kind, I should probably have slipped into the river itself, and even up to the fourth or fifth button of my waistcoat, waded out to those great risers. Ah, how they rose under the hazels that day! Would my old angling companion, P——, I wonder, have got to them with my weak rod? He stands well over six feet, and somehow I think he would have got two or three more brace of the two-pounders than I did.

Sometimes one finds a trout rising well at

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almost every fly that sails over his haunt, which is in an impossible or next to impossible spot. I have such a spot on the Test in my mind as I write. The trout rises, or rather he did rise last season, close under the right bank of the stream, which is fringed with thorn-bushes and various other vegetation. I soon found that I could not cast from below or opposite him because of the vegetation immediately behind, which much interfered with me when I tried these positions. Nor could I wade into the river, because at this point on my side—the left bank—it was too deep. The only way was to go above the fish and 'drift' the fly down to him. The cast was a long one for my rod and skill, and not one effort in a dozen looked in the least likely to be successful. I caught my hook in the vegetation on my side of the river, and once I caught it in the thorn-bush above the trout, but at length the fly floated well over the spot. With the utmost distinctness I saw the trout rise, open its mouth, and, as I believed, accept the offer. I struck, and to my chagrin I found I was as far as ever from being fast in that difficult trout. When one sees a trout distinctly and is 'drifting'

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the fly down-stream, there is certainly a tendency to strike too soon. A friend recommends me under those conditions not to strike till I have actually felt my fish : in other words, to let the fish hook itself. This is hard advice to take.

In his work on angling Sir Edward Grey says he prefers to strike directly he sees the rise—he is not referring in this to 'drifting' the fly down-stream—and many anglers are at one with him. When you see the rise, but not the fish, you cannot, I believe, be too quick in striking. The case is different where you see the trout. It is my idea that trout in quiet water do not necessarily by any means discover instantly that the fly they have taken into their mouths is unfit for food, and so reject it. Several times I have seen a good trout in a quiet backwater rise at my fly, take it, and sink slightly. I have given the trout after this several moments of grace, and have then struck and been fast in him. On the other hand, where there has been anything like a free current of water, I have never ventured on anything of the kind. It has been my idea that under such conditions the movement of the gut caused by the current is very likely, if not

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absolutely, sure to assure the trout that something is wrong, and cause him to lose not a fraction of a second in trying to get rid of the fly he has just taken. This idea may be derided by many anglers: I here only suggest it as a possibility. I do feel pretty certain, however, that large trout in quiet pools and backwaters will not always 'spit out' the artificial fly, after they have once taken it into their mouths, so speedily as some people may believe.

I agree with Lord Granby when he says that the expression 'a turn of the wrist' does not give a good idea of the action known as striking a trout. An expression which I have ventured to use myself is 'a twitch of the wrist,' which should convey an idea very different from that conveyed by 'a turn of the wrist.' Another writer speaks of the strike as an action of the forearm, and in any case I believe that the operation is commonly by no means without an appearance of vigour. You can strike much too hard, but you can also strike too gingerly. There can be no question as to whether or no striking is essential in dry fly fishing. Now and then, perhaps, a fish will hook itself, but such instances

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must be treated as exceptions to the rule that, when fished for in this style, a trout will *not* hook itself.

One of the chief dangers which the Test angler has to guard himself against, and often extricate himself from, is that of being 'weeded' by heavy trout. The trout which goes into a patch of weeds is not quite so bad as a trout that goes among snags and roots of trees, nor as one which rushes down-stream under a wire or beam or bridge across the river. Disaster nearly always attends the angler under such circumstances, though the agony is soon over. The best trout I hooked one day on the Lathkill above Allport took the line out with such suddenness in his furious rush under a beam stretched across the stream, that I was broken before I had time to in the least degree grasp the situation. It struck me afterwards that the trout must have known of that beam and tested its gut-breaking powers on some previous occasion! Chalk-stream weeds, as I say, are not quite so fatal as these snags, roots, and beams, but they are extremely numerous, and often help to keep the creel light. Many anglers during the present season (1899)

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will no doubt be interesting themselves in the very important suggestion which Sir Edward Grey makes that trout when hooked will seize the weeds with their mouths. One day during the May-fly season in 1897 I hooked a fat trout of rather over 2 lbs., which almost instantly 'weeded' me in midstream. Curiously enough I could see the fish distinctly in the patch of weeds, which was not a very large one. I kept an even strain on the fish from below him, and could see as well as feel him struggling in resistance. Suddenly the entire patch of weeds became uprooted, and fish and all flowed away downstream. The weight on the line seemed overpoweringly heavy, but I managed somehow to tow it near the bank, when the weeds fortunately became detached, and I was able to net out the trout dead-beat and on his side. Upon reading Sir Edward Grey's suggestion I at once recalled this curious incident, and wondered whether or no the trout had anchored himself by his mouth to the patch of weeds.

It has been repeatedly pointed out that one of the great attractions of fishing these clear streams with the floating fly is the distinctness with which

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the angler so often sees the sport. In observing the habits of trout in clear chalk and other streams, I have often been struck by what I call the wanton spirit displayed by fish. During a hatch of fly one day I found a trout rising pretty steadily at flies in a little backwater under an overhanging bit of hollow bank. It was quite impossible, from the side of the river on which I happened to be fishing, to get below and cast up to him, as the overhanging bank completely shut out all view both of the trout and the rise. The only plan was to try and 'drift' the fly to the fish. Owing to the wind and the 'drag' the plan failed. Lying flat on the ground and taking off my hat, I pulled myself along to the edge of the stream, and to within about a yard and a half of the trout, with the idea of watching him at close quarters. To my surprise I found that he went on taking olives under my very nose! I then stretched out my right arm and managed to draw the rod to me. Next I pulled back the knot attaching the line to the cast through several of the rings, and, with some four or five inches of the gut, with the fly dangling at the end, gently lowered the same on to the water. The trout came

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to have a look at the fly. He followed it down an inch or two, seemed on the point of taking it, and so of getting me into sad trouble—I believe I *must* have been broken had he taken it—when he apparently thought better of it, and came back into position again. Several other attempts were made with just the same result, and then a quaint change took place in the conduct of the trout. He came repeatedly at both my artificial as well as at the natural flies, merely to splash at and buffet them. Being at such extraordinarily close quarters to the fish, I could of course see the whole thing with absolute distinctness. On various occasions I have noticed these spluttering or splashy rises after a prolonged and steady head and tail rise of trout at fly, and I have known a trout feeding on 'smuts' or 'fisherman curses' dash impetuously at an artificial May-fly and strike at it. I can hardly suppose that it is a motive similar to this that induces the salmon to rise to the fly, because trout when coming at the fly in this wanton spirit do not seize it, whereas the salmon takes the artificial fly into his mouth. And here let me say a word or two respecting the possible motives of salmon in rising at *natural*

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fly. Although the study of the blue-book, *Investigations of the Life History of Salmon in Fresh Water* (1898), has convinced me that Professor Miescher Ruesch was absolutely correct when he stated, in 1880, that salmon were not really feeders in fresh water, I cannot resist the idea that they do sometimes take worms beneath and natural flies upon the surface of the water from motives of hunger or rapacity, rather than from curiosity or playfulness or anger. Salmon have on various occasions been known to rise at both natural and artificial May-flies on the lower part of the Test, and one at least, in 1898, was taken on a dry and floating May-fly.[1] They also, I believe, rise at natural March-browns on some rivers. Seriously, how can we be expected to believe that salmon rise at and attempt to swallow May-flies and March-browns from motives other than those of hunger or rapacity?

The authors of the blue-book say that salmon will sometimes take 'wriggling' things: yes, but they will also rise deliberately and take flies which

[1] A friend of mine a good many years ago killed with a large yellow May-fly a grilse on the Inver, which he had seen rise at a brimstone butterfly (*Gonepteryx rhamni*).

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do not wriggle in the least, but sail sedately down-stream. We know that salmon do not feed regularly in fresh water, and, thanks to the researches first of Professor Miescher Ruesch and then of the Scotch Commissioners, that their digestive powers are degenerate when the time comes for them to leave the sea and go up the rivers to spawn; but there seems very good reason to believe that notwithstanding this they *often try to feed* like trout and other fish.

Before discontinuing these speculations in regard to the motives and emotions of fish, I should like to tell in his own words an interesting story given to me by Mr. Moss, who at one time used to fish the Test a good deal in this district:—

'I was fishing one day some twelve seasons ago at Testcombe, where the Anton joins the Test, when I saw swimming slowly along the side of the stream just below me a large black trout of about 2 lbs. It was a year when there were many fish suffering from fungoid disease, and this trout had the fungus all over its head, and was evidently quite blind. Behind this sick trout was a fine healthy trout of about 1½ lb. Both swam slowly along close to the side, so that I was able to watch them for about ten minutes. The healthy trout was watching over the sick one. Whenever the sick fish got too near the edge of the stream, the healthy one would swim inside and gently push the former in the side with its nose, and so get it out into deeper water. This was done repeatedly

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until I put my landing-net under the diseased fish and took it out of the water, when the healthy one left the spot. I have not the slightest doubt that the healthy fish had taken charge of the sick one. Up to that time I had always been accustomed to look on fish as very cold-blooded creatures. The incident presented matters in a somewhat new light, and for a while it rather took the edge off my pleasure in fishing.'

A stiffish ten feet, or, at the most, ten feet six inches rod, fine gut, a tapering cast, and eyed flies dressed on small hooks and being as good imitations of the natural insects in regard to (1) form, (2) colour, (3) shade, as can be procured; equipped with these the patient, painstaking angler on the upper Test will eventually succeed in getting sport. I have known of men who have fished on and off the entire season without landing a sizable trout: probably they have become demoralised and practically ceased to persevere after the first few weeks. It took me about a week to actually land my first good trout from the Derbyshire Wye with a dry dun some nine years since, though I had not been always unsuccessful previously in various difficult waters. The ice of failure is sometimes hard to break in dry fly fishing, and every now and then—as in May 1899—it will freeze very severely.

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The finest bits of Test valley scenery are perhaps by Leckford and Stockbridge, the headquarters of two of the most famous of all angling clubs, where there are hills of a bolder aspect than can be seen on the upper or lower portions of the stream. The upper Test, however, has many scenes of wood, and wild marsh, and common land, which in May and June, indeed all through the summer, never fail to delight those who love the tranquil element in south-country landscape. And then, what a sense of richness and fragrancy does the country watered by this chalk stream always give one! I have ventured elsewhere to describe the valley of the Test as a land flowing with milk and honey, and am not so sure that many who know and enjoy it will quarrel with the description as being an exaggerated one.

The splendid water-meadows that mark the course of this life-giving stream are full of wild creatures, which make the district almost as attractive to the naturalist as to the angler. Now that the Broads are so much frequented, and the Fens for the most part reclaimed, we may look to such luxuriantly vegetated and care-

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fully preserved streams as the Hampshire Test to save us various interesting water-birds, some of which have been getting too rare of late years in England. At Bransbury and Wherwell and at other points of the stream the snipe is numerous throughout a great part of the season, though, I believe, not so numerous as it used to be. The bird is more plentiful in the winter than at any other season. The wild-fowl shooter lying in ambush in the early hours of the long winter night will often hear numbers of snipe coming in to feed in the soft spots by the riverside, but, curiously enough, it is by no means very easy to discover them during the daylight. Where the snipes all get to during the daylight is something of a mystery. About eight or nine years ago Seebohm stayed at Newton Stacey on the upper Test, and saw something of the breeding snipe there. Both snipe and woodcock will, like the partridge, occasionally perch in trees and bushes, and Seebohm had the good fortune to see the first-mentioned bird on the top of a tree—a sight which greatly pleased him. He also saw by the Test—strange as the statement may seem—his first snipe's nest. The wing music of

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the snipe during the breeding season is described by some as 'drumming,' by others as 'bleating': I prefer the latter name. The French call the full snipe 'the flying nanny-goat,' but to me the sound resembles the faint bleating of lambs in the distance. It is full of fascination. On moonlight nights in April I like to put on a thick pair of boots and go on the common to hear the concert of the birds of the marish. The silver plovers or lapwings, in ceaseless evolutions, now high in the air, and now almost sweeping the ground with their wings, are to be seen and heard in every direction; whilst the '*tchak, tchak*' of the snipe is constantly to be heard overhead, though not, so far as I have noticed, the bleating sound.

The jack snipe or half snipe, the midget among game birds, is to be found during the winter months in the valley of the Test, though it is far scarcer, of course, than the common or full snipe. Near Marsh Court, at Stockbridge, upwards of a dozen jack snipe have been seen within a small space, but this must be regarded as very exceptional. This tiny snipe is only about two ounces in weight, but he has the secret of how to keep fat during weather when many other birds

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are all but starved. Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey says the jack snipe has never been known to breed in this country; Daniel remarks in his *Rural Sports* that the bird breeds in our marshes; whilst Blaine in his *Encyclopædia of Sport* says that the bird breeds here sometimes, but not often. In his posthumous work on the eggs of British birds, Seebohm says nothing on the subject. Here are two notes from Major Turle, which may be of interest:—'I once found and have in my possession the only jack snipe's eggs ever found in England. . . . I found the jack snipe's eggs (four in number) myself at the top of Bransbury Common some twelve years ago.'

The constant associates of the snipe on the commons and marshes are the lapwing and the wild duck. These three species may be found nesting in the same spots and very close to one another, but the snipe commonly begins a little later than either of the others. The lapwing builds, if it can be said to build at all, on the ground where the grass is short; whilst the snipe and duck select spots where there is some rough, wiry grass to conceal their eggs. The lapwing remains abundant throughout this

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part of the country in spite of the heavy toll which the egg-gatherers levy upon it. The egg-gatherer will work a good deal more than his eight or nine hours a day during the lapwing's laying-time, and, considering the price the eggs fetch in London, where he sends them, he should do very well whilst that season lasts. Any time almost from daybreak till dusk he may be seen walking up and down the favourite laying-places in April, with his eyes fastened to the ground. When he finds a nest with incomplete clutch of eggs, *i.e.* less than four, he marks the spot by some method known only to himself, to return in due time and empty the nest. On the commons and dry places the eggs of the lapwing are by no means so easy to find as might be supposed from their bold markings and the fact that the bird makes no effort at concealment, but in the water-meadows the task of the egg-gatherer is much more simple. The lapwings which frequent for breeding purposes the latter spots, only lay their eggs on the dry spots at the edges of the little feeders and drains where the ground is higher than elsewhere. I have found as many as twenty nests emptied by the egg-gatherer in

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a single field of two or three acres. The lapwing's intelligence is perhaps not of a very high order, otherwise the bird would after a while forsake the ground covered so assiduously and successfully by the egg-gatherer day after day, season after season. The wild duck is scarcely a better architect than the lapwing, but, though she will sometimes build in a small patch of grass in the open, she commonly affects more sheltered spots, and lines her nest with plenty of soft down from her own body. When the young are hatched the birds will, to protect them from human and other intruders, resort to devices not less ingenious than those of the cock and hen partridge. Coots, moorhens, little grebes or dabchicks, and water rails, are all familiar birds on the upper Test. The first-mentioned was no doubt well known to the Romans. On one of the beautiful Roman tesselated pavements in the villa near Brading there is an admirable representation of the coot listening to Orpheus playing his wonderful lyre. The water rail nests on the commons among the great grassy 'mats,' as they are called, which grow in the boggy places.

Much scarcer than any of these species of river

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birds is the pretty spotted crake, which has been found, however, on both the upper Test[1] and on the Itchen. I have little doubt the spotted crake nests from time to time by both these rivers, though owing to its extremely skulking habits it is rarely observed. A few pairs of widgeon and teal stay and breed in the meadows, and among the scarcer members of the family *Anatidæ*, the tufted duck is by no means unknown. It is seen now and then in winter,—one was shot in the neighbourhood of the upper Test last December (1898), and it is supposed to sometimes breed on a sheet of water at Laverstoke. In winter the bean goose has now and then been seen and shot about Newton Stacey.

The river affords sanctuary for many smaller birds. There is the bold, dashing-looking grey wagtail, the scarcely less handsome yellow wagtail, the sedge-warbler, which sings for hours every night, the reed bunting, the reed and grasshopper warblers, the marsh-tit—as much at home here as in the woods—with, of course, chiff-chaffs, willow wrens, and nightingales in every thick hedge and coppice by the stream. The reed-

[1] At Chilbolton, where in winter the great grey shrike has also occurred, and where I have noticed the wheatear in May.

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warbler suspends its beautiful nest in many of the great reed-beds. Years ago an angler fishing near Newton Stacey lost in the reeds his cast with a May-fly. Later on in the season he discovered it woven ingeniously into a reed-warbler's nest. The reed-warbler ranks with the long-tailed titmouse, the chaffinch, the golden-crested wren, and the goldfinch, as the most skilful of our bird builders. The last-named bird, by the way, may sometimes be seen in flocks of twenty or thereabouts busy among the thistle-down on the Test commons and wild places during the autumn. It is a pretty sight to see the goldfinches clinging to the heads of the thistles, for they are as agile as the titmice.

As for the kingfisher, he is found not only by the main stream, but by many of the little tributaries of tributaries, and by the ditches, which add their little quota to this bird-beloved river. The kingfisher is far from rare on our Hampshire waters.

The river, like the wood, has its medley of exquisite things, when the summer comes in and the marshes and commons and meadows are all oozing with water. The glossy eggs of the kingfisher; the deep, wonderfully made cup in which

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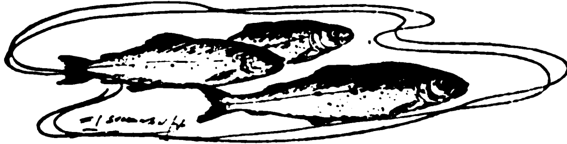
the reed-warbler sits secure in the highest wind; the small but richly coloured wings of the greasy fritillary; the silky cotton-grass, the star-like bog bean, the little needle furze, the fragrant river-side orchises, the velvety, chocolate-brown heads of the reed mace with their yellow spires, the loosestrifes, yellow and purple,—these are a few of the treasures of the Test, when the trout are at their best. Set me down by the stream, with my rod and box of flies, on a fair day in May or June, and, even if a trout be not landed, I shall find that day all too short. I think, too, that on such a day I shall always be able to see the world somewhat as it appeared during the rambles of childhood, when

> 'The earth and every common sight
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream.'



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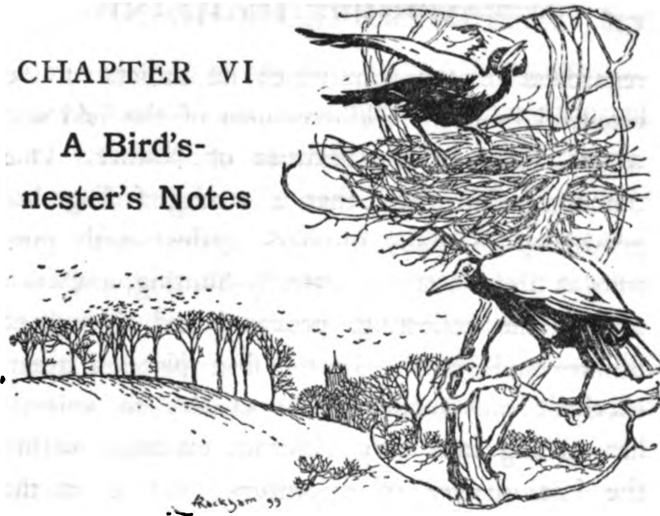

CHAPTER VI

A Bird's-nester's Notes

There is a tendency to-day to say rather severe things about the collector of birds' eggs, butterflies, and other natural history objects. They who are really fond of wild nature, we are often told, will prefer to see the bird alive and at liberty, the egg unblown and in its nest, the butterfly sunning itself on the flower: the stuffed bird in the glass case, the egg blown and placed in a cabinet, the butterfly stuck on to a bit of cork with a pin through its body, are things from which beauty and life have gone together. There is a disposition to look on the collector as a mere destroyer of wild life, as one who rides his hobby

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regardless of the pain which he inflicts on the beautiful innocent wild creatures of the field and woods, blind to the beauties of Nature. One cannot be surprised that a strong feeling has grown up in many quarters against such pursuits as birds'-nesting, butterfly-hunting, and even against the collecting, pressing, and drying of flowers and ferns. In the first place, a great, excellent movement against cruelty to animals has sprung into very vigorous existence within the last quarter of a century, and is at the present time, I believe, gaining fresh support in every direction and among all classes. Secondly, there has been a distinct and also, I am glad to say, a strong protest against the destruction of scarce birds, insects, and flowers, which is now voiced by societies as well as by many active and earnest individuals, who are alarmed at the way in which our beautiful wild things, animate and inanimate, are being in many places threatened with absolute extinction. Savi's warbler has gone; the swallow-tail butterfly has only been saved from extinction within the British Isles by the generosity and patriotism of those who have placed a part of almost its last, if indeed not actually its

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last, stronghold, Wicken Fen, out of danger; and the noble *osmunda* or royal fern, once common in various parts of the country, is in danger, so far as England is concerned, of being a wild fern of the past. The collector, it is true, is not by any means always to blame for the increasing rarity or actual extinction of certain of our birds, insects, and plants: civilisation and improvements in our system of agriculture have in many instances proved far more fatal to wild life than he. Savi's warbler, the bittern with its eerie cry in waste places by night, the marten or marten-cat of some old sporting waters, the glorious large copper butterfly, the great bustard—they and other beautiful and interesting creatures have gone, or are going fast, because of the inroads of civilisation on their once wild retreats. The destruction of these rarities cannot justly be laid at the door of the collector or at that of the sportsman. At the same time, it is not to be denied that there is a certain class of collectors which richly merits all the censure bestowed upon it. These are collectors who, provided they can fill their cases and cabinets—and thereby often enough their pockets—care not in the least whether they root

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up and utterly obliterate some bird, butterfly, or plant which is reputed scarce or local, and will therefore fetch money in the natural history market. Most grievous things have been done by these selfish people in the south of England within my own memory, if not actual experience. 'Local' butterflies and plants, much sought after, have been completely removed from favoured spots where for long they have had a firm foothold, and which they have much helped to make interesting and beautiful. No wonder, when these misdeeds have been brought to public notice and talked indignantly about, that the innocent amateur collector and naturalist, who would rather forego his pursuits altogether than place any species within danger of extinction, has to suffer for the sins of the black sheep of the flock. People are incensed and disgusted by such greed and selfishness, and they do not stop to discriminate between the innocent and the guilty collector, but prefer to brand the whole class as objectionable. As a matter of fact, it often happens that the very person who brings to light these misdeeds, and does his best to prevent their repetition, is a collector himself.

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My own days as a collector have passed, and it is only very occasionally that the fancy takes me to add an interesting butterfly, or a scarce or unusually-marked egg to my own modest collections; but I cannot truthfully say that the recollection of the birds'-nesting or butterfly-hunting expeditions of boyhood make my conscience uneasy to-day; nor am I in the least afraid of being branded cruel because I find delight in the use of fishing-rod and gun.

In the ranks of English sportsmen and collectors there are by no means wanting men who are as averse to the aimless and selfish destruction of life as one can desire to find; men, moreover, who have done and are doing not a little to preserve the fauna of other countries as well as our own, and to protect animals in both a wild and a domesticated state against wanton, thoughtless cruelty. The custom of torturing animals to fit them for the show-bench, and the appalling and wholesale slaughter of birds to gratify a fleeting and uncertain fashion—against both of which there are many protests to-day—afford instances of good movements largely sustained and inspired by those who

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love wild sport. As for the boy collector, surely he should not be discouraged from healthy and innocent pursuits. A lad who devotes his whole or half holiday to a birds'-nesting or butterfly-hunting expedition in the woods, fields, or downs, is not in the way of turning out a very bad man, and he is often learning a love of Nature which will prove a constant joy and a never-failing interest through life. I would not lift up my hands and eyes in too pious horror, if he did now and then rifle a coveted nest, instead of only taking one or two eggs; though it is well to point out to him that the better plan is, save in very exceptional cases, to leave a sufficient number of eggs to prevent the birds forsaking. When this latter course is taken, the birds will often return to the same, or nearly the same, place to breed next year, which is always a most pleasant experience for the lover of Nature. In a quiet lane in Middlesex early in July 1898, we found the lesser redpole, the tree-sparrow, the chiff-chaff, and the red-backed shrike nesting. The three first all got off their young safely, though I fear the shrikes, which had built in an extremely exposed position, may have been less successful

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in incubation. Had we completely rifled the nests of these birds, it is more than doubtful whether they would have returned thither to try and breed again: as it is, I shall not be surprised to find the birds back near their last year's nesting-quarters this coming spring or summer of 1899. Nests of the lesser redpole and tree-sparrow within a dozen miles of the midmost roar of London are things worth looking forward to with keenness!

Notes taken and set down in writing in birds'-nesting days are often of much service later on in life. We are much more likely to set down our own observations unalloyed, as it were, by anything we have read in books. Unfortunately, my own notebooks containing the experiences of those happy days are not always very full of information in regard to some of what now seem to have been my most interesting discoveries. I have at the present time an extraordinary set of dwarf specimens of the eggs of the common linnet taken from several different nests in 1877 in gorse bushes on the common. There are nine of these curious freaks in all, and I fancy oologists would not think me very rash if

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I described them as probably quite unique among existing collections of British birds' eggs. With one exception—that of the largest of the set—the eggs have never been blown, for to have attempted to treat them as ordinary eggs would probably have been to destroy them all. As it is, two or three have suffered somewhat through removals, and the greatest care is necessary in touching such fragile treasures. I turn to my notebook, and find this rather meagre entry: 'May 1877—Have taken upwards of a dozen linnets' eggs from different nests on the common, the largest of which is scarcely larger than the egg of the golden wren. I have seen white-throats' eggs of this minute size, and have heard of a chaffinch's; have seen a song-thrush's egg hardly as large as a hedge-sparrow's egg. Some assert that these tiny eggs are the first ever laid by the bird.' These eggs, with the exception of the largest, which is all but spotless, are excellent specimens in miniature of the ordinary egg of the linnet, though the shells of one or two are somewhat rough, as in many instances are dwarf eggs of the common fowl. The following are the measurements of respectively the largest and

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the smallest :—Thirteen twenty-fourths of an inch in length, and twenty-five forty-eighths in breadth: three-eighths of an inch in length, and seven twenty-fourths in breadth. The first egg of this series, which I find the largest, was included in a clutch of eggs of the ordinary size. The others were taken from three or four, possibly five, nests, some of which nests contained linnets' eggs of the ordinary dimensions, and others only one or two dwarf specimens. The common is divided up into several partitions by dense rows, a hundred yards or so broad, of blackthorn, hazel, and scrub of various kinds, intermingled with a little oak and ash timber. The linnets' nests containing these dwarf eggs were all built in gorse bushes scattered about one of the divisions of the open common. I found other linnets' nests on other parts of the common, but not one of them contained any but the ordinary type of eggs. Never since have I found a linnet's dwarf egg, or, indeed, the dwarf egg of any bird, save once of a starling's. The clutch of dwarf eggs of whitethroat, which, if I recollect aright, were considerably larger than my linnet specimens, were shown to me many years ago

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by either Mr. Swaysland or Mr. Pratt of Brighton. The eggs may be more common than I am aware of, but they are rarely seen, at any rate in either public or private collections; nor can I recollect ever having seen any convincing explanation of why they now and then occur. Variations and irregularities in respect to colour and marking are, of course, much more frequent. I have taken spotless eggs of the robin, the song-thrush and the chaffinch, and I have in my own small collection one or two coal titmouse's eggs oddly shaped. How slight is our knowledge of oology! and can we expect to learn much about these occasional irregularities when we know nothing of the causes and meaning of the ordinary colour and markings of birds' eggs? Those strange scratches and scrawls on the egg of the yellow-hammer are hieroglyphics which no naturalist has learned to decipher: he has yet no clue to their mystery.

Every season we have accounts in the newspapers, often illustrated ones, of odd spots chosen by robins, titmice, and other familiar birds for their nests. A robin's nest in an old hat, a blue tit's in a pump or a letter-box is voted a curiosity, but as a matter of fact these birds are so capricious

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in their choice of a nesting-place that there is nothing really very surprising in these cases. It is much stranger when a bird belonging to a species very conservative in its nesting habits goes out of its way apparently to build in the most unlikely spot imaginable. The strangest departure from habit I ever knew in birds in the breeding season was that of a pair of grey wagtails which built their nest under a loose slate in the roof of my old home in the woods. In this strange place the eggs were laid, and the young were duly hatched and got off. The cock bird, a splendid fellow with rich yellow breast and grey back, fed the hen when on her eggs, and later did his share in the work of supporting the young. There was no water within miles of the spot, and the birds found their food mostly on a smooth plot of turf just below the site of their nest and about the terraces. They disappeared soon after the young had flown and were not seen again. This is the only instance of the occurrence of the grey wagtail in the woods that I know of, though about the springs of the upper Anton, some five miles off in the more open country, I have occasionally seen the bird in summer-time. I

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have never seen either the yellow or the much scarcer blue-headed wagtail in the woods or on the common. The wagtails, with the exception of our common pied wagtail, are essentially water birds. The conduct of my pair of grey wagtails was quite unintelligible.

The long-tailed titmouse, unlike the blue titmouse and the coal titmouse, which will build almost anywhere, is very conservative in its choice of a nesting-place. It selects either a blackthorn or brier-bush on the common or in one of the thick lanes contiguous to the wood, or else the big fork of an ash or oak tree in the woods. A third but less likely spot is a thick evergreen, such as fir or yew tree or bush in shrubbery or garden. When the nest is built in the big fork of an ash in the woods it usually harmonises perfectly with the limbs of the tree, being beautifully covered outside with the light-coloured lichens which grow on the ash. If this assimilation is by design—which I should doubt—then the tree-building long-tailed tits must be much wiser than the bush-building ones, the nests of which are very easy indeed to discover, and stand little chance of being passed by. All the com-

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pleted nests of this species of titmouse which I have ever found in Hampshire have been in one of these three spots, but I must mention two extraordinary exceptions to the conservatism of the bird. On one occasion I came across a pair of long-tailed titmice busy trying to build their nest in the roof inside a thatched barn in the woods, which was used as a cowhouse. Both birds were busy for a day or so bringing in material through a hole in the roof, but they then ceased operations, whether owing to interference by house sparrows, or whether because they found the place dark and unsuited to their habits I cannot say. This thatched building used to be frequented by various species of birds. Robins, house sparrows, coal titmice, and blue titmice all built within the building, and a tree-creeper nested one spring in a small hole it made for itself in an upright piece of timber in the middle of the roof reduced by long exposure to the weather to the condition of touchwood. I can recollect another very strange spot in which a pair of long-tailed titmice once built in the woods, namely, an old 'drey,' as the country folk about here as well as in the New Forest and

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other parts of England call the squirrel's nest. These birds completed their nest, and the hen actually laid a few eggs in it. In neither of these cases was the season very much advanced, so that there was no pressing need on this ground to put together in hasty, slovenly fashion a few materials instead of building a proper nest. These must be regarded as extraordinary exceptions to the long-tailed titmouse's rule. I can only suppose that the birds had already built nests in the wood, which had been destroyed, and that they did not feel equal to the labour of making fresh ones of the ordinary character—though this is a mere surmise. When the long-tailed titmouse commences building betimes, a very beautiful work is usually the crown of its labours. The bird is one of the first to start building in the woods and on the common. Last season I found a nest apparently completed, inside and out, on April 10, but this was a little early. I should say that as a rule the long-tailed titmouse is making good progress with its nest at about the time the storm-cock's clutch of pretty eggs is completed. The latter bird is rather earlier than either blackbird or song-thrush, commonly

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THE REDSTART AND LESSER WHITE THROAT

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Red Start

Lesser Whitethroat

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hatching before even the carrion crow. Mr. Stewart in his agreeable volume, *The Birds of our Country*, says that the nest of the long-tailed tit-mouse takes fully a fortnight to complete, both male and female working together at it. One season I watched a nest being built in a small fir in a clearing near the house. It took three weeks to complete, and male and female worked equally hard. Towards the end there was an interesting division of labour, the female lining the inside with feathers, whilst the male ornamented the outside with grey lichens. I brought a mass of feathers of all sorts and scattered them about close to the nest, but the female bird would have none of these, preferring to find material for herself in the woods. The nest, in the end, was one of the most exquisite I ever saw, finished in its every detail, and felted and compressed together with perfect skill by the aid of cobwebs and portions of cocoons: not a feather out of the many hundreds used for the lining was awry. Should such a nest as this be removed or robbed of its contents, it seems by no means improbable that the birds would exert less pains and spend less time

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on a second effort, and indeed I have often seen very inferior nests of this species a little later on in the season—nests thinly lined and scarcely ornamented at all.

The long-tailed titmouse is as common in the woods in winter, at any rate, as either the blue, the coal, or the great titmouse, and, considering the number of eggs the bird lays, this is not to be wondered at. I have found as many as eighteen in one nest on the common, and more than once between twelve and sixteen. Some twenty years ago there was brought to me a nest containing twenty-one eggs all alike in size and in markings, and I see no reason to suppose that they were the production of more than one hen. 'It has often been a wonder to me,' writes Mr. Sterland in his *Birds of Sherwood Forest*, 'how the parent bird manages among such a mass of down to find all her numerous tiny young ones. The aperture of the nest is so small that, when the bird enters, the interior must be almost in complete darkness, and the marvel is that some of the gaping mouths below are not left unsupplied with food. But in this, as in all of our Maker's works, the means are perfectly adapted to the end, and if in any

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case we are unable to comprehend how this end is attained, we cannot withhold our faith in that Divine wisdom which both plans, and carries the plan into effect.' From the spirit in which this true lover of birds wrote one would be sorry to dissent; and yet I cannot help saying that what applies to the long-tailed titmouse does not apply to a woodland bird with which it is often seen in company during the winter months—the nuthatch. I am convinced that some of the nuthatch's eggs must often be laid in vain, owing to the utter carelessness of the bird in the construction of its nest. Under the loose mass of dead oak leaves, of which the nuthatch's nest is chiefly composed, I have more than once found an egg or two either addled or evidently detached from the clutch: I have never found anything of the kind in a long-tailed tit's well-ordered household.

The fourth instance coming under my own observation of a bird strangely departing from its usual nesting habits, was that of a jay, which built its nest and laid its eggs near the top of one of the great lime-trees round the house. The jay is a bird that shuns man and all his

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works. Only twice have I known a jay so far forget its distrust of human beings as to take its food and make its nest at their very doors. During the terrible winter of 1880-81 a jay in a very emaciated condition used to come down into the kitchen yard, and, joining the titmice and other small birds, pick up scraps of broken bread and meat. This continued for a week or so, when, the severity of the frost relaxing, the bird went off and did not appear again. The other instance, already referred to, was when a pair of these birds reared their young in one of the lime-trees. I have found scores and scores of jays' nests in the high underwood. They are built very commonly in the birch thickets, sometimes in the oak stems, and occasionally in the ivy covering the trunk of an oak-tree.[1] The jay's nest, built of dead twigs and lined with plenty of fine roots, is placed from, say, six to ten feet from the ground. The nest in the lime-tree must have been fully forty feet from the ground, close to the gravel drive up to the front door, and quite outside the thick, high

[1] 'The nest of the jay,' says Charles Waterton, 'is never seen near the tops of the trees.'

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underwood which the bird affects so much. I have given these few instances not as illustrations of what are often called curious nesting-places, but as illustrations of absolute departure from habit, and to my mind that of the jay is the most striking of all. The solitary pair of grey wagtails *may* have been stranded in the woods and have selected the roof of the house because no other spot was in the least convenient; the long-tailed titmice may have resorted to the thatched roof and the squirrel's 'drey' owing to the destruction of their first nest, and to the desire to get through the duties of nidification with the utmost despatch; but for the jay's departure from its habit of building well inside the high, thick wood and at no great distance from the ground, no explanation suggests itself to me. I should no more expect to find a jay's nest at the top of a high tree, than a carrion crow's nest on the ground, or a golden-crested wren's in an oak.

The scarcest of the titmice, which frequent the woods and the common the year through, is the marsh titmouse. This nice little bird is not quite so uncommon as people are often wont to suppose. The marsh is not so common as the

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coal titmouse, which I have found laying as many as eleven eggs, but I believe it is to be seen, if carefully searched for, in many spots far removed from the water. The bird has not been well named.

To see the blue titmouse or bluecap in its element, is to see it ripping holes in the tough pod of a poppy head: it loves poppy seeds as the marsh tit loves sunflower seeds. Day after day in August and September you may see this gay fellow paying a visit, always at about the same hour, to the beds of old-fashioned flowers, and, anchoring his small self on one of the poppy stems, rain against the side of the head above a succession of sharp blows which soon place the seeds at his mercy. Heavy toll this bird will levy on every ripe poppy head in the garden, unless precautions are taken by the owner thereof. The blue titmouse knows exactly when the seeds are ripe, and does not strike till the right time arrives. These titmice are a family of seed searchers. The marsh titmouse revels in the large black seeds of the sunflower—a weakness of which the watchful bird-snarer takes advantage—as well as in those of various woodland plants.

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It has often been a source of wonder to me why, considering the size, the thickness, and the quietude of the woods and the common in their midst, we do not get scarce birds breeding with us more often than is actually the case. All the years I have known the place and kept a look-out for scarce species, I have never yet come across the grasshopper warbler or the Dartford warbler, though I have felt pretty certain that the former bird must sometimes nest on the common. I have notes of the appearance of the cirl bunting at a pond much frequented by birds in summer-time, but have never found the nest of this fine and local bird in the woods or the district. The common or corn bunting—bunt lark, the rustic egg-hunters call the bird—nests in the fields around the wood, and eggs have been brought to me as late as September; whilst in winter the reed bunting occasionally visits not only the high-lying farms around, keeping company with sparrows, larks, and finches, but also the shoots of two or three years' growth. It goes away, however, to the water meadows before spring comes round, as do the bramblings, which also visit us in very hard weather. The

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lesser redpole never breeds in the woods, and the bird seems to be unknown to the country folk; the hawfinch, which I have found nesting in the adjoining county of Berkshire, is not seen, and I have never observed a crossbill in the district.

The return of the same pair of migratory birds, or at any rate of a pair of the same species of birds, to the same spot year after year is ever a source of pleasure to us. Twenty years ago I used to search in vain for the nest of a pair of handsome stonechats which frequented, during the spring and part of the summer, a few furze bushes on the common and close to the high-road which passes through the wood. Whether the birds drew me off the real site of their nest by simulating extreme anxiety when I approached and searched in these few bushes, I cannot say; but it is certain that I never could find the nest, though I used to look for it for hours. There used to be only one pair of stonechats on this common, and last season I once more looked out for and discovered a pair of stonechats there. Of course they were not the same pair, but it is curious

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that there always should be generally one, and only one, pair of these birds coming year after year to the same place: Gilbert White, perhaps, would have ascribed this to the ἀντιστόργη of birds, which he touches on in his *Natural History of Selborne*. The stonechat does not spend the winter with us, nor the whinchat. The latter bird is said by some writers never to spend the winter in this country, but I am not at all sure that I did not see two of these birds on the bleak Goonhilly Downs in Cornwall one day in January 1895, whilst walking from Helston to the Lizard. The stonechat is sometimes called the blackcap by the country people. To see this fine bird really at home and in abundance one should visit the Fille Fjeld in Southern Norway in the breeding season. The stonechat is a bird with very distinctive habits. It likes to perch on the most slender and prominent twig in a low bush, and from that position briskly move its tail up and down and utter its familiar note resembling the word 'chack.'

As I have said, I remain in doubt as to whether my pair of stonechats lured me away from the real site of their nest. All field naturalists will

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agree that the nest of the stonechat is singularly difficult to discover, but perhaps all will not be inclined to agree to the statement sometimes made that the birds by their behaviour artfully contrive to draw the intruder away from its site. Mr. Arthur G. Butler, in his account of the stonechat in the second volume of *British Birds, with their Nests and Eggs*, gives in a few words an admirable description of the conduct of the birds which so puzzles the nest-hunter. 'All attempts of the stranger,' he remarks, 'to investigate its family concerns are met by the stonechat with alarm and resentment; to any one seeking the nest it is most confusing to hear the two parent birds *chacking* in different places, rarely in the same bush; the male also from time to time uttering a queer double note, in which he seems to proclaim himself a wheatear.' The conduct of various birds during the breeding season is so different from what it is at other times, that to my mind it is often very hard to say for certain where distress ends and strategy begins, or to which of the two the behaviour of the bird should be attributed. Birds disturbed off their eggs or their newly hatched young often flutter about as

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though they were half paralysed. I cannot believe that this is always for the purpose of drawing the unwelcome intruder away from the precious nest. Birds which have been sitting for a long time are invariably inactive when disturbed, and this should be taken into account in considering the question of whether there is strategy or no. On the other hand, one finds at times both male and female behaving in a way that suggests something like a regular scheme on the part of the parent birds for rescuing their young from real or imaginary danger. I came upon a covey of very young partridges accompanied by their parents on the dusty high-road one July evening when going with my rod to the river-side. The cock bird, I had just time to observe, hurried the young through a gateway into a field, whilst the hen instantly started running along the road a dozen yards or so ahead of me. Once or twice she stopped, apparently to allow me to come up fairly close to her, and then ran on again. This continued till we were about a hundred yards from the spot where the covey ran into the field, when the hen bird also ran through a gap in the hedge. I got up just in time to see her rise from the

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ground and fly straight back to the spot where her family were no doubt lurking. If that was not strategy, it was curiously like it. On the Test one day I disturbed a family party of wild ducks in a little reed-sheltered creek. The female bird, within reach of my ten-feet fly rod, flapped helplessly about the water as though grievously wounded. The male flew across the stream, where he was joined by the young; not until all the latter were safely across the water did the mother rise on strong wing to follow the rest of the family. In both those cases the conduct of the parent birds surely implied strategy of a high order. The female bird in both cases played the chief part, but the male took his share in the work of keeping together and leading the young. The ringed dotterel, I believe, will also resort to similar devices when her young are threatened, but I have no personal experience in this matter, having only made the acquaintance of that natty little bird within the last year and after the conclusion of the nesting season.

Do insects ever resort to device in order to save themselves from what they take to be deadly peril? It has been asserted, probably with truth,

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that the common magpie or currant moth when alarmed will sometimes feign death, whilst several caterpillars, notably that of the tiger moth, if touched, instantly roll themselves up into as small a compass as possible and remain perfectly still for a while. The young lapwing—to return to birds—when pursued before it can fly, runs to the nearest tuft of thick grass or the like and hides its head, a comical device, reminding one of that of the ostrich.

Just as there is always a pair of stonechats on the common, so there is always a pair of spotted flycatchers, and one pair only, so far as I have observed, coming year after year to the terrace by the house, and frequently building in a small coat of arms near the roof. There is room and to spare for many pairs, but only one comes each year in May. The male flycatcher feeds the hen most assiduously as she sits on her eggs, and I think it likely, too, that he, after the fashion of the male linnet, blackcap, and greenfinch, takes his turn at incubation. The spotted flycatcher arrives even later than the nightjar and the butcher-bird, but finds time to construct a particularly neat nest. I cannot say whether this species ever brings

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up two lots of young in the course of the season, but I have found on the same day in July some nests with two or three fresh eggs, whilst others have had young all but fledged. The turtle dove, like the spotted flycatcher, is also among those summer visitors of ours which are often found nesting at a late date; but the three resident birds, the yellowhammer, ring dove, and common bunting, are our latest breeders, and each of them, I should say, bring up two broods of young in the course of the season.

The woodlark is a scarce bird, and it is possible that this species may prefer small coppices to great woodlands. I have never yet been lucky enough to find its nest. The woodlark is not very often seen in a cage; its eggs are hard to find, and it is not slaughtered for pie purposes and strung up in the London shops: yet it remains a comparatively scarce bird; whilst the skylark, on the other hand, really seems to be as plentiful as ever, both in summer and winter. The tree pipit is much more numerous than the woodlark. It loves the grassy and mossy glades among the hazel and oak trees in the low underwood, and there

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are few more pleasing woodland sights than the tree pipit rising in the air a height of some ten yards or so from the low oak-tree that he loves, and then, with wings and tail stretched out, slowly descend, singing the while his gentle song. Sometimes he will return to the very twig from which he sprang upwards, and at others will drop to the ground. On a soft warm day in the deep recesses of the woods, the tree pipit's aërial song is a decided feature of the bird-life in the latter half of April before 'the rivers of melody' of all the summer warblers are yet in full flow: later on, one may lose sight of the bird. My experience is that the tree pipit's nest is as hard to discover as that of any small bird. I have searched for a long time round the tree affected by the male bird, and without success. The nests, which are always placed on the ground, are well worth finding, owing to the great variation in the colour and marking of the eggs belonging to different clutches. The eggs of the tree pipit vary as much as, if not more than, those of any other British small bird. A few types, widely differing from one another, are illustrated in the matchless

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plates of Seebohm's *Eggs of British Birds*, and the author makes the very interesting suggestion that each bird lays 'a peculiar type which it has inherited from its parents and transmits to its offspring.' It would be interesting to examine clutches of eggs laid by certain birds which nest in the same spot season after season, and notice whether they differ much in appearance. This, unfortunately, might be very difficult in the case of the tree pipit, which is not known to return and nest in its last year's site, but it would be occasionally quite practicable in regard to certain other familiar species. If it were shown that a spotted flycatcher, a robin, or a hawfinch laid eggs of the same type several seasons running, some useful information would be at the disposal of naturalists interested in these curious questions of oology. I mention these three birds because they certainly do return in many cases to the same nesting-spots, and because their eggs are subject to variation.

To turn to those true sylvan birds the woodpeckers: I regret to say both the greater spotted and lesser spotted are far from common with us. I am inclined to think that the woodpeckers do

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not want very big and thick woods so much as woods with plenty of very old and decayed timber. In our wood, timber which has long since passed its prime and reached the purely ornamental state is rare, and this perhaps is the explanation of the scarcity of these two beautiful birds. The green woodpecker is not uncommon, though it is difficult to find this bird's nesting-places; whilst in regard to other families of climbers, the tree-creeper is fairly and the nut-hatch very abundant. I have never seen a wryneck in the wood, nor heard its cry there.

My experience of gamekeepers and woodmen is that their natural history must often be accepted with much caution. At the same time, a long talk with the woodman as he works at his hurdles in spring, or with a keeper out shooting, is what few of us who care for the wild life of the woodlands like to miss. The opportunities which these leaders of open-air lives have of seeing the furred and feathered creatures of the woodlands are unrivalled and almost unlimited, and the keeper has ears and eyes for the dark as well as the day. Frequently from one or the other one gets a hint which proves well worthy

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of being followed up. Many a hawk's nest in days past have keepers directed me to, and helped me to reach. Small birds the gamekeeper takes as a rule little note of, though he has a son very likely ready to climb anywhere and take anything.

Among my non-proven records of rare birds in the woods is one relating to no less a bird than the great black woodpecker. A keeper, whom I questioned some twenty years since respecting uncommon birds he had come across during my absence from home for some months, gave me an account of a large bird with habits resembling those of the yappingale (as he called the green woodpecker), but with coal black plumage relieved by a little red. He had shot the bird in the winter, and kept it for a few days intending to send it to a bird-stuffer's, but had allowed the opportunity to go by. Considering that not a feather of this *rarissima avis* was forthcoming, I am afraid such a record would not pass muster with the most obliging ornithologist, so that my possible great black woodpecker must go the way of those which Mr. Gurney disposed of one and all. That fine naturalist Colonel Montagu gave the bird a place in his ornitho-

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logical dictionary 'with considerable doubt,' declaring that he could not speak of it from his own knowledge; and Colonel Montagu's doubts are those of the leading ornithologists of to-day. I am afraid the account of a pair of these birds not only frequenting the New Forest, but on one occasion actually breeding there, is not accepted.

Beyond doubt a scarce bird of the hawk family visits our wood now and then, and possibly may nest there, though I have never found the eggs or had them brought to me. From time to time I have received from keepers and others accounts of 'grit hawks' being seen about the wood or the neighbourhood. One, it appears, was shot a winter or two ago on a game farm bordering on the woods, but the accounts I received were rather meagre and vague, and I am left in doubt as to whether it was a falcon or buzzard. The peregrine falcon, as we have seen, has long been partial to Salisbury Cathedral, and I was not much surprised to find out that a bird of this species, a young female, had been shot at Combe in the winter of 1897. The peregrine has been seen on those wild downs pretty frequently during the autumn, and I heard

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on good authority of one there quite recently. In September 1898 I saw a bird hovering about over the ancient camp known as Walbury Hill on the downs, which looked much like a buzzard, but I was not near enough to try to determine the species. In 1894 a rough-legged buzzard was shot at Combe, and is now in the possession of Mr. Cole of West Woodhay. The rough-legged buzzard is said to be only an occasional visitor to the British Isles on autumn migration. Some years ago a friend bought for a few shillings in London in August a young rough-legged buzzard and kept it for some little time. The species is easily distinguished from the common buzzard and the honey buzzard by the legs, which are feathered right down to the feet. I have never heard of the so-called common buzzard in the district, but Montagu says that a honey buzzard was shot at Highclere. The latter species used to breed regularly in the New Forest, and the famous Hanger at Selborne in Gilbert White's day was frequented one season by a pair. No letter in the *Natural History of Selborne* appeals more to the ardent and bold young birds'-nester than that in which the

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naturalist tells Thomas Pennant how a pair of honey buzzards 'built them a large shallow nest composed of twigs and lined with dead beechen leaves upon a tall slender beech near the middle of Selborne Hanger in the summer of 1780'; and how a daring lad climbed the tree on this dizzy spot and fetched down the only egg in the nest, an egg 'dotted at each end with small red spots and surrounded in the middle with a broad bloody zone.' The buzzard has little of the dash and boldness of the peregrine, but the description of it in Johnson's *Dictionary*, as 'a degenerate or mean species of hawk,' errs perhaps on the side of severity. A wounded rough-legged buzzard, at any rate, attacked by a large dog, has been known to fight with spirit and success. A slow, gliding flight at a short distance from the ground is characteristic of the buzzard and the rough-legged buzzard, as the hovering in mid-air is of the kestrel or wind-hover, as the bird is called here and in many places in the country. The hovering of the kestrel, the lightning-like rush of the humming-bird hawk-moth, the proud, triumphant flight of the purple emperor butterfly, and the perfect

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buoyancy on the wing of the nightjar are among the marvels of volitation, which may sometimes be all seen in a single summer day in a south-country wood. Shelley had the humming-bird hawk-moth, or else one of the rapid clearwings, in his mind when he wrote of 'the bee-like ephemeris whose path is the lightnings,' and there is a windhover in the New World, as Bret Harte's fine lines show:

> 'Above the tumult of the cañon lifted
> The grey hawk breathless hung,
> Or on the hill a wingèd shadow drifted
> Where furze and thorn-bush clung.'

The kestrel and the sparrow-hawk remain, I am glad to say, common birds in this as in many other districts, but I have never seen the hobby or any of the harriers in north-west Hampshire, though the first-named has nested quite recently in the Basingstoke district. The tawny or wood-owl, like the woodpeckers, prefers old and decaying timber. Still it is a common enough bird with us, though far more often heard than seen. In the daytime the tawny owls roost in the high wood in the lower branches of such oak-trees as are covered thickly with ivy, and they are not

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so alert when disturbed as is the nightjar. I venture to think that the old ignorant belief that the owls are enemies of the game preserver is now passing away, but the owls are still regarded with something of aversion by many country folk. There is a superstition that if an owl flaps against the window of a house uttering its wild screech or hoot,[1] one of the persons sitting in the room will shortly lose a very near and dear relation. This belief is deep-rooted and common. Other bird superstitions in Hampshire relate to the turtle dove and the cuckoo: it is said to be unlucky to shoot either of these birds, whilst according to some the flesh of the former is poisonous.

The carrion crow and the jay love big woods, and the latter is well content to lurk in the high underwood of hazel, birch, oak, and ash the whole day, indeed the whole year. With us the jay is and always has been a very common bird,

[1] The question whether it is the tawny owl or the barn owl which hoots has been discussed by several ornithologists—Gilbert White, Sir William Jardine, and Sterland among others. Sterland says: 'The result of my own careful and repeated observations may be thus summed up,—that the white owl hoots chiefly, but sometimes, though very seldom, screams; while the tawny owl screeches, and rarely, if ever, hoots.'

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despite the fact that it is in the nature of a keeper to pick him off when opportunity occurs, and that he is not rarely included in the mixed bag of a rabbit-shooting party. I question very much whether the jay does any serious harm to feathered game in a large wood where, in the nesting season, there is a vast abundance of food other than pheasants' eggs, and I doubt whether the bird is really such a thief in regard to the eggs of smaller species as some would have us believe. It is not, after all, very often that one finds the eggs of the blackbirds, thrushes, finches, and warblers of the woodlands broken and sucked, and though I have watched jays for many years I have never caught one *in flagrante delicto* or even in a suspicious position. The jay gives one the idea of being one of the most excitable and demonstrative of birds. The clamour which the bird makes when its haunts in the high wood are invaded is familiar to most ears, but to find the jay at his noisiest you should steal upon his retreats among the birches just breaking into tender green towards the end of April. On such occasions I have counted as many as a dozen and even sixteen birds in furious uproar over two or

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three hens. Matrimony with the jay means immense clamour rather, I fancy, than actual combat. The nest is built and the eggs laid commonly during the first fortnight in May, but in backward seasons I have found the jay only just beginning to sit on her speckled eggs at the end of May or even beginning of June. I think it is not generally known that the jay suffers much in very severe weather. I have picked up dead jays which have simply been starved to death during prolonged frosts. The wing of the jay, with its blue, white, and black so finely blended, is surpassed in beauty of design by the plumage of very few birds, though in minute detail of pattern it can scarcely compare with what teal, garganey, and widgeon can show in the breeding season.

The jay is found not only in the heart of the woods, where he always seems essentially at home, but also in most of the small coppices of North Hants, as well as in some of the thick hedgerows and plantations. The magpie, on the contrary, prefers the two last-mentioned spots, and if nesting sometimes within the wood selects a tree close to the fields. It is a curious thing that

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many country people persist in believing that there are two different species of magpies, the 'bush mag' and the 'tree mag,' and that the latter is the larger of the two. So careful and experienced a naturalist as Jesse held the same opinion, and in his *Country Life*, published rather more than fifty years since, he went so far as to give the respective sizes of the two pies. The smaller pie, he wrote, invariably built in bushes and weighed only six ounces, as against the nine ounces of the larger pie which built in trees. Jesse is quite correct in his statement that the magpie in Norway is a much tamer bird than in this country. The magpie and the hooded crow are as tame and approachable in Southern Norway as the magpie and the carrion crow are wild and fearful of man in England.

The carrion crow is one of the most interesting and picturesque birds of a great wood. With us it remains, and I hope always will, quite common, and, unlike the hooded or Royston crow, is no roamer. As the short winter afternoon draws in, it is interesting to see and hear the carrion crows getting together as they prepare to settle down for the night. The rook in his 'black republic'

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seems as civilised as the crow is wild and uncouth. In spite of the custom of rook-shooting, the rook affects man and builds and roosts close to his abode by immemorial preference. The crow, on the other hand, usually—I admit there are a few notable exceptions—shuns man, and nests and roosts as far as possible from his home. During the winter day the crows go about in pairs, and when feeding in open fields near the woods are very impatient of the presence of any rooks. Towards evening they gather together and seek about for some warm spot protected from the wind in which to spend the night. I have disturbed seven or eight off one oak-tree in the woods on a winter's evening, and have occasionally seen a far greater number flying about and searching for a favourable roosting-place: once on a chill November afternoon I counted *dozens* of carrion crows so engaged. It is possible that crows, when the frost is very sharp, sometimes roost in a cluster as magpies are known to do. I like to see the glossy carrion crow seated on the very top of one of his favourite 'grey grown oaks,' and calling at sundown on a gloomy winter's day to his companions to come to rest

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in the depths of the darkening woods: there is glamour in the scene. Can these be the same woods, one may ask oneself wonderingly, in which the blackcap poured out his pure notes in the first luscious days of June, or over which splendid Iris floated with strong wing in sun-steeped July?

In March the carrion crows, which are almost, if not quite, our earliest breeders, commence to build. So far as I have observed, the crows do not patch up their old nests, though they *may* use some of the outer materials of old nests for building new ones. The position chosen is as a rule one of the top boughs of a large oak in the high wood, and the nest being a large one, like that of the missel-thrush, is easily found. It is composed of dead sticks and twigs, and lined very snugly with a mass of wool and fur overlying a quantity of roots and small twigs. Crows' eggs vary a good deal, some specimens resembling the eggs of the rook. I recollect when a boy offering a dozen or so of crows' eggs, all of which I had taken myself from a number of different nests in the woods, to a London dealer with whom I occasionally effected exchanges. He

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looked at them very knowingly, and condemned one and all as 'only rooks' eggs.' It was useless arguing the point, but the incident showed me that to be a successful dealer was by no means necessarily to be an unerring ornithologist. The number of the eggs rather than their appearance roused my friend's suspicions; and yet it would not be hard to get in the woods during March and April three times as many carrion crows' eggs as I actually offered him, provided one took the full clutch from each nest discovered or pointed out by keeper and woodmen.

The crow is in several ways a favourite of mine. To watch the bird in many a bleak wintry scene has often given me pleasure, and my many hunts in times gone by for crows' nests in the early spring, when even the missel-thrush has yet scarcely begun to lay in that great lichen-covered nest of hers, afford rare memories of my prime woodland adventures. The crow, moreover, is a bird which builds an honest nest, and builds it well too,—not one of those slovens that appropriate the old nests of other species, or that lay their eggs on the bare ground. At the same time, I cannot wonder that the keeper and the

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game-preserver wage war against the bird.[1] A few pairs of crows in a small preserve must do a great deal of damage in the nesting season. Cycling from London to Buckinghamshire not long since, I stopped near Elstree for a few minutes to watch a small party of gunners at a warm corner, and I could not feel surprised or indignant upon seeing several crows brought down among the high-flying pheasants. To pheasants' eggs and young the carrion crow is undoubtedly partial, as also to young ducklings and chickens when the latter can be obtained from quiet farmyards close to the woods. I would never allow any keeper of mine, however, to shoot the carrion crow on her eggs or young, nor would I for a moment assent to any attempt to quite exterminate the birds in *large* woodlands. I am convinced that in our large and thick Hampshire woods, where game is not too thick, the crow can seldom taste the egg or the tender young of the pheasant. As for our young rabbits, which the crow occasionally picks up in summer-time, why, they are plentiful enough in all conscience; and it ought not to be

[1] See the remarks on this subject of the Marquess of Granby in the general preface to the Haddon Hall Library, contained in Sir Edward Grey's *Fly Fishing*.

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forgotten that the bird has, like the rook, a taste for insects and grubs of various kinds. I admit that the crow is a villain in a preserve sacred to the pheasant, and I do not plead for him when found at home in such spots; but I do think that in a large wood where the game is chiefly or entirely wild game the crow is not so black as painted.

I have tried to mention one or two things which should really tell in favour of my old friend with the black and the steel-blue plumage. One virtue in particular the crow is believed by many observers of birds to possess, which should soften the hearts of some of his enemies: he pairs, it is thought, for life.

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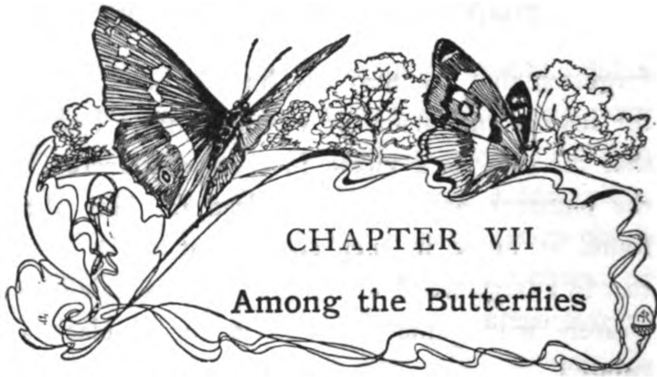

CHAPTER VII

Among the Butterflies

HAMPSHIRE has long been recognised as one of the best counties in the south of England for the pursuit of entomology, and it is certainly rich in its butterfly life. The New Forest is a very favourite hunting-ground of the collector, and in the Isle of Wight there is at least one species of butterfly, the very interesting Glanville fritillary, which is almost, if not quite, peculiar to that place alone within the British Isles.[1] On the chalk downs of Hampshire the 'blues' of various

[1] Morris in his *History of British Butterflies* says the Glanville fritillary (*Cinxia*) seems to be most plentiful near Ryde and in other places in the Isle of Wight, where it may be looked for 'on the grassy sides of little glens which run down to the seashore.' He also mentions the neighbourhood of Great Bedwin and Salisbury, where, it is said, the greasy fritillary (*Artemis*) and the pearl-bordered likeness fritillary (*Athalia*) have also been taken. In two places on the south side of the Isle of Wight *Cinxia* was, I know, taken in 1898: it would be unwise to mention the exact spots.

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kinds abound; in many of the woods with which the county is so well clothed we find the splendid purple emperor and elegant white admiral; and in the marsh meadows along at least one of the chalk streams, the very local greasy fritillary may be looked for not in vain. The north-west corner of the county is a decidedly good one for the collector of butterflies, and also—if to a less extent—of scarce moths. The district of Andover was long ago mentioned as a good one for the scarce brown hairstreak, the largest member of the *Thecla* family; whilst, in regard to places not far outside the county, the districts of Salisbury and of Marlborough in Wiltshire have been mentioned in connection with various scarce or local insects, and the valley of the Enborne stream, which divides north-west Hampshire and Berkshire, has been recommended to those seeking specimens of the greasy fritillary and the black-veined white. Stype wood, too, in Berkshire and close to Hungerford, was stated by Morris in his beautifully illustrated work on British butterflies to be an excellent place for several good insects. Whether any specimens of the rare black-veined white are still to be taken near the Hampshire

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border, or whether any have been seen there within recent years, I cannot say; but of the brown hairstreak I can speak from personal experience, having taken it myself some five miles from Andover. The professional or semi-professional collector of butterflies and moths is often, I am afraid, selfish and greedy in the pursuit of his hobby, or rather business, and it is to be hoped he will continue to regard our district as unworthy of his serious notice. Nothing seems to content him, when a scarce or much desired species is concerned, but a perfect butterfly battue!

The first butterflies to appear in the early spring are, of course, the various hybernating species. The sulphur or brimstone, which by the way was extremely abundant, as was the large white during the burning weather in September 1898, appears frequently on warm sunshiny days in the very early spring, whilst the small garden white (seen sometimes as late as November) reappears in March and April. The small tortoise-shell is the commonest of the hybernating species, and the large tortoise-shell one of the rarest. The red admiral, the peacock (rather rarely), the large skipper, and the clouded yellow

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are also on my list. I have no doubt whatever about the clouded yellow occasionally hybernating, as I saw a good many specimens in the early spring of that great butterfly year, 1877. About the painted lady I am more doubtful, though in May I have frequently seen and taken specimens of this insect which have had decidedly the appearance of hybernated butterflies. The small tortoise-shell seems to be the lightest sleeper of the hybernating butterflies, as it may be seen out on almost any warm sunlit winter day.

The real butterfly season, or at any rate the height of the butterfly season, is not till July is well in, but there is a considerable advance-guard of bright and lively insects to be seen in the woods some time between the middle of May and the middle of June, according to whether the season is a forward or backward one. Last season, as I have mentioned in a previous chapter, the orange-tip, pearl-bordered, and small pearl-bordered fritillaries did not appear till June 2nd, a delicious day in the woodlands after rain and a series of rather chilly evenings. Glancing back to a natural history calendar kept in 1878 I find: May 4, orange-tip; May 5, azure (or

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holly) blue; May 9, large white; May 11, cinnabar moth; May 16, painted lady (hybernated?), pearl-bordered fritillary, Duke of Burgundy fritillary, grizzled skipper; May 21, small pearl-bordered fritillary; May 25, dingy skipper. In 1878 the season in regard to birds as well as butterflies was clearly a full fortnight in advance of that of twenty years later, for I find that blackcaps, nightingales, jays, willow warblers, yellowhammers, coal and great titmice, were then all sitting on their eggs by the middle of May. The following season was probably one of the worst ones on record for butterflies. Through June 1879 there was scarcely an insect to be seen in the woods beyond a few large and small whites. Curiously enough in that year I took two pearl-bordered fritillaries as late as July 20, which is the only instance I have ever known of this insect appearing in any other months save May and June. There are said to be two broods, the second appearing as late as July, but save for these two specimens I could never see the insect or the small pearl-bordered after about the middle of June. No other fritillaries of any sort were to be seen in the woods in 1879, which was un-

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questionably as bad a year for insects as 1877 was good. One might suppose that a great scarcity of butterflies one year would lead to a scarcity in the next one, but is this so? If, it might be argued, very few insects hatch out, very few eggs can be laid, and consequently there will be a marked scarcity next year. And yet I do not know that 1880 was such a particularly bad year from the butterfly lover's point of view: it was certainly infinitely better than 1879. The pearl and small pearl bordered fritillaries affect the grassy glades of the two or three years' old underwood, but the Duke of Burgundy—a very small creature with a big, pompous name—and the green hairstreak like nothing better than the thymy fragrance of the hillside at the edge of the wood. There on many a June day I have found both these butterflies disporting their small selves in the short grass, and among the flowers that love to grow in such spots, such as the pimpernel and gentian. A while later this hill-side will have many common blues, and a few specimens of that pretty little butterfly, the small copper. At Oxford I used to find the small copper keeping the pearl-bordered fritillaries and

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the Duke of Burgundy company in early June in Bagley woods, but in Hampshire I have more commonly seen the small copper later on in the height of the butterfly season. The dingy and grizzled skippers are distinctly butterflies of the woodlands, and both species occur most seasons in abundance in June. They love the copse grasses and flowers, and are often to be seen and taken in the spots frequented by the pearl-bordered fritillaries. A much rarer insect than any of these is the wood-white, a few specimens of which may be seen by the careful observer in the early part of June. The flight of this butterfly is very feeble, and as uncertain as that of a weak-winged moth disturbed during the daylight. The wood-white is much the smallest of the six species of the white butterflies, including the orange-tip, that are to be found in the wood, and it is also of course much the scarcest. It is perhaps the weakest flying of all the British *Lepidoptera*.

June is not the real month of the butterflies, but when fine and warm it brings out in small numbers several other species besides those which I have referred to, usually including meadow

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browns, red admirals, large skippers, and common blues. The blues form a charming family of small butterflies. The Clifden blue, which I esteem by far the loveliest of all, is not to be found in the wood or in the immediate neighbourhood, but the azure or holly blue is not uncommon in the spring and early summer, whilst later on the silver-spotted blue and the brown argus are to be seen in many spots. The chalk-hill blue, though possibly fairly common on some of the downs in the district, is not often to be seen on the common or in the wood: its time, like that of the silver-spotted blue, is July. As for the common blues, they appear in their thousands, first in June and then — a much larger brood — in August or September. There seem to be also two hatchings of the brown argus, one in June and the other in late August or September. But July is the height, the cream of the butterfly season. It is the time of the noble purple emperor, the elegant white admiral, and those boldly marked and richly coloured fritillaries, the high brown, the silver-washed, and the dark green. All these are more or less abundant throughout the woods in a good year, and then, besides, we have in

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plenty during the same month the rather local marble white—'the marmoress' of Mrs. Loudon —the purple hairstreak, which has always appealed to me somehow as a kind of purple emperor in miniature, the various *Vanessæ* including the large and the small tortoise-shell butterflies, the brimstone or sulphur, the ringlet in great abundance, and the two heath butterflies and the meadow brown in even greater quantities. In all, the wood and its neighbourhood have a list of over forty species of butterflies seen or taken by myself within the last two-and-twenty years, including the rare Camberwell beauty and brown hairstreak, the very local comma and greasy fritillary. I have never seen either the black or the white letter hairstreak, which Morris mentions in connection with Stype wood, but it was only quite recently that I discovered the greasy fritillary in the district. The Camberwell beauty was taken on a lavender-bush in a garden about two miles from the woods. It was in perfect condition when captured, but some years ago it contracted the cruel butterfly and moth complaint known as 'the grease,' and now no longer merits its second name. I have never doubted for an instant that

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this insect was a genuine *wild* one, and not, as some might suggest perhaps, an escaped specimen. There was nobody except myself at the time in the neighbourhood collecting or rearing butterflies, and this specimen had clearly but just emerged from the pupa. It was taken in September 1877 —that *annus mirabilis* of the butterfly collector.

The purple emperor has no rival among British butterflies. There is something decidedly noble about this insect. Its strong, confident flight, its firm, muscular wing, the spots which it affects, and its bold and beautiful colouring combine to place it at the head of all our butterflies. I perfectly recollect seeing for the first time a silver-washed fritillary, a clouded yellow, and a purple emperor. The first two surprised and delighted, but the third astounded me. I had just commenced to collect butterflies at the time, and, when one July afternoon I saw a splendid emperor come floating down from an ash-tree on the lawn, settle on the gravel path, and open and shut its wings with their glorious flashing purple, I could scarcely believe my eyes. The emperor came down to the gravel path several times during the next two days, and eventually I managed to get it

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under my net. After that I began to look about the woods for emperors, and saw a good many. I generally managed to secure two or three specimens every year, several of which are still in a case just above me as I write. After more than twenty years their wonderful hues flash as brilliantly as ever, and in no respect, save in the loss of *antennæ*, have any of them materially suffered. A purple emperor or two commonly frequented the lawns, but the favourite haunts were oak-trees close to the broader woodland rides. In Port Lane End I have seen an emperor floating majestically over the higher oaks, and sometimes coming down to settle for a few moments on the grass-grown, deep-rutted road, and there are other little-used roads in the neighbourhood where an emperor may be looked for in July or the first week or so of August. Only once in my life have I seen an empress: she was flying along Port Lane End: I gave chase and actually got her under my net. Alas! there was a hole in the net, and, escaping through it, in an instant she was soaring over the tree-tops. It is remarkable how rarely empresses are seen even when emperors are almost abundant: I

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really believe a collector might spend a lifetime in the woods and not take half a dozen specimens.

Owing to the thickness of his wings the purple emperor is a splendid flier, and he has a habit of towering above the oak-trees to considerable heights. You do not know the wild life of the summer oak woods until you have watched the emperor with wings shot over with 'a changing gloss of intense purple' soaring and towering in the sunshine of a perfect July day. The emperor occupies among the butterflies a place apart, as does the nightingale among the singing birds: he has no equal.

Some entomologists assert that the purple emperor rarely settles on the ground, but when he does is inclined to be fearless. My experience is exactly contrary to this. I have found emperors constantly come down from the oaks to settle on the path or road, but I have never found them by any means easy to capture. It is astonishing how few country people know of this glorious creature. The larger fritillaries are called the copse butterflies by the country folk, and the peacock the harvest butterfly, but the emperor seems to be unknown and unnoticed. Emperors, it is well

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known, can be taken sometimes by means of a piece of 'high' meat set as a trap in spots they are known to frequent, and empresses are also, I believe, sometimes secured by the same device. Red admirals and small tortoise-shells are both often found on 'sugar' (a mixture of rum, beer, and sugar) put overnight on the trees to entice moths, but I have never secured an emperor in this way. The caterpillar of the emperor feeds on the sallow, which is common throughout the woods.

I have said the emperor has no equal or rival: the white admiral, however, which abounds in the woods and loves the hazel as the emperor the oak, is regarded by some people as more graceful in its flight than any other British butterfly. *Camilla* is certainly a very pretty and graceful insect, and wonderfully buoyant on the wing. It is a much more fragile insect than the emperor, which in the white markings on both back and front wings it somewhat resembles, and the least touch spoils its beauty. In some seasons the white admiral is very abundant in the woods, appearing rather earlier than the emperor, but during a wet July you will scarcely see a single specimen.

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The little purple hairstreak frequents, like the emperor, in whose company it may sometimes be seen, the tops of the oaks, and is abundant throughout the woods. I have seen many dozens of this insect fluttering about the top of a single oak, and with a net fixed to a long pole have taken several at a single sweep. The female has a little of the emperor's purple about her wings, but it is of a less intense hue.

The marble-white butterfly abounds in open spaces in common and wood in July, which is also the month of the three large fritillaries. The silver-washed fritillary is the handsomest of this handsome trio, and also by far the most abundant. There is also a fine dark variety of the silver-washed fritillary, which was abundant in 1877, and which I have often seen since. These fritillaries are fairly strong fliers, but they are easy to take on their favourite perching places in the wood, the bramble bushes.

The grayling, the peacock, and the large tortoise-shell are also to be looked for in July, whilst in August the speckled wall, wood argus, and painted lady put in an appearance. The wood moths of July and August are of course

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exceedingly numerous, among the more striking being the very pretty small elephant hawk-moth, the oak eggar, the grass-moth, the ghost-moth, the emerald moth, the pale brindled beauty, the drinker, the beautiful burnished brass, the peach blossom, the golden Y moth, the common tiger, the red underwing, and the little ruby tiger. Then, on the common and in the park there are the brilliant six-spot burnet, and—a little earlier in the season—the cinnabar, both of them fliers by daylight. The handsome emperor moth I have not been fortunate enough to take, nor the convolvulus nor immense death's-head hawk-moth. The hawk-moths or *Sphinges* are a fine family of insects, but I do not know that the wood is particularly rich in them.

One of the last butterflies of the season is the clouded yellow. It is a real favourite with many, because of its strong flight, its lovely colouring, and the uncertainty of its appearance. Setting aside the purple emperor, I consider the clouded yellow about the handsomest of all the butterflies which are found in the wood or its immediate neighbourhood. I have seen the bold yellow and black wings of a perfect specimen of the

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male of *Edusa* slightly shot over with a changing glow of carmine. These beautiful glowing and changing hues, which occasionally appear at certain seasons over the ordinary colours of both birds and insects, are interesting phenomena. I once saw, during the nesting season, a lesser whitethroat with a glow of carmine on its breast; and the Rev. Murray A. Mathew has given in the *Zoologist*, I think, an instance of a male marsh warbler just dead with its breast diffused with a delicate primrose yellow tint which proved, however, extremely evanescent. In the case of certain species of birds these extra hues appear of course regularly at the breeding season,[1] but the instances I have referred to appear to be of an exceptional character: it is, I take it, rare to find such colours on clouded yellow, lesser whitethroat, or marsh warbler. Though I have seen the clouded yellow a good deal within the last few seasons in various parts of the county, I have not seen its white (female) variety *Helice* since 1877. In that year the clouded yellow was extremely abundant in certain fields around the woods, particularly in

[1] 'In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove.'—*Locksley Hall.*

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one of rough clover heads. One could then have taken dozens of *Helice*, and literally thousands of *Edusa* (the ordinary form of insect), during the month of August. In 1878 I never saw a solitary specimen of this butterfly, either in the spring or summer. The problem of the clouded yellow remains unsolved, though it is one to which entomologists have given long consideration.

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CHAPTER VIII

The Silent Time

SUMMER in the woodlands seems to me to consist of three periods. First we have the lavish season, which I have dwelt upon in previous chapters—a time marked by a splendid vigour of Nature, when you seem almost able to see and hear things growing and springing into life and bloom. Then follows a period of comparative rest from the labours of production, when the sap has found its way to every live twig of the most backward oak, the undergrowth of bracken and copse grasses and numberless other green things is at its densest, and the birds have for the most part completed the work of incubation. Then it is that Nature, with as yet no sign of decay, seems to rest from her labours for a few brief weeks and to survey her perfect workmanship ; and this, surely, rather

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than autumn with decay and death stamped, often in letters of fire, on the leaf, is the true season of fruition and mellowness. Finally, there are the last few weeks of summer, when the wood is a great temple of rest and silence. This is a period which, I think, is commonly separated from actual Autumn by a distinct line, though occasionally, owing to a spell of fine warm weather, it may overlap a portion of the month regarded as belonging to that season, namely September. Last year (1898) this final stage of summer was long and beautiful, thanks to many weeks of constant sunshine at a time when we usually look for the winds and rains and even first sharp frosts of Autumn. We had a long succession of days extending far into September when the sun beat down with a tropical heat from perfectly cloudless skies. It was a time of burning days, of wonderful sunsets which flushed the west with delicate violets and purples and faint lemon hues, of cool evenings lit by moons which rose at first red-gold as the sun that had just dipped below the horizon, and later silver bright; evenings and nights star and moon illumined—delicious after the fierce heat of the day.

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During the first week of this marvellous September I was walking up partridges by myself in the clover heads and among the parched root crops, the leaves of which died in many parts and crackled under foot, so that the birds rose wilder than hawks and usually well out of gun-shot. The seasoned sportsman in the south of England is not altogether unacquainted, even in ordinary seasons, with weather which makes partridge-shooting hot, thirsty work. In the opening days of the 1896 season the partridge-shooter felt more like being drowned than roasted, but there have been years within my own recollection when one longed for a few more clouds to cover the sun now and then about mid-day, when tramping over stubble and roots. Such a year was 1880, when partridge-shooting in North Hampshire, at the beginning of the season, was decidedly trying to those who felt the heat. September 1880, however, compared with September 1898, could scarcely be described as more than pleasantly warm in our corner of the county. In 1880 we shot, I recollect, from eleven each morning till sundown, and never thought of giving up before the end of the day. In 1898 one saw

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guns dropping back towards their inns or wherever else their quarters might be, while the afternoon was yet young. When the hardened field labourer or harvester grows faint and sick and is driven to his home and bed with his work all unfinished, how can one wonder if the sportsman, fresh, perhaps, from town life, has to confess himself completely beaten after two or three hours' exposure to a very furnace? For my part I admit that two or three hours in the open fields were quite enough, and that there was but little inducement to follow up the sport after lunching on the shady side of a hedge or under a sheltering oak. Even the birds seemed to feel the heat and to seek what shade there was: under thick hedges and at the edge of the wood there were often more birds than in the open.

But in that temple of silence and rest, the woods at this time of year, the hottest day is never intolerable. In the Fir Tree Walk there is always deep shade, and in many of the smaller woodland paths the hazel and oak stems meeting overhead ward off the rays of the sun from those who walk or sit beneath. In this last stage of summer the woods are remarkably destitute

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of the variety of bird life and sound which characterise May and June. I take it that the summer birds of passage, excepting a few like the adult cuckoo and the late-arriving, early-departing swift, do not begin to migrate before September; and yet one looks and listens in vain for the warblers in the woods in the latter part of August. I had long suspected that summer birds of passage were few and far between at this time of year in the woods, before looking more closely into the matter in 1896 and again in 1898. At the end of August in both these seasons I was unable to see or hear a single nightingale. The call-note of the bird is so striking and frequent at an earlier period in the season that it would be difficult to be in the woods for an hour or two without hearing it, if the bird was still there. But I am sure that before September arrives all our nightingales, garden warblers, and blackcaps have gone. Nor have I been able to find in late August or September a single tree pipit, wood wren, willow wren, or chiff-chaff. All these soft-billed birds of passage seem to have left in a body. In the hedges of the fields around

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the woods, and in small spinneys and plantations, one may certainly, whilst partridge-shooting in September, come across an occasional whitethroat or some other warbler, but, so far as I have observed, not very often. We do see, on the other hand, at this season a few birds of passage which are not to be found in the district during the breeding season, such as the wheatear, and these are evidently already on migration.

There is one summer bird of passage, however, of which we may expect to see much more at this season than at any other, namely, the beautiful redstart. This bird, which may remind one a little of both the robin and the nightingale, rarely nests within the woods: once, and only once, have I found a redstart nesting with us: a displaced brick in the garden wall afforded nesting quarters one season for several species of birds. Titmice of several kinds competed for this site: a nuthatch took possession of it, and, the aperture being too large for the bird's taste, skilfully plastered it up with mud—the nuthatch can use mud for building purposes as neatly as the swallow or song-thrush—and finally a redstart came on the scene, and, hastily constructing its nest in the hole, laid

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therein five very shapely green-tinged blue eggs. That is the single instance of the redstart nesting with us that I can recall, but towards the end of August and throughout a portion of September we see much of the redstart on the common and in the wilder parts of the county around. Though a certain number of redstarts do certainly nest near the woods, I think a good many of these August and September birds must be visitors from other parts, staying with us for a short while on migration. The redstart in its adult plumage is one of the most beautiful of the smaller British birds. Its habit of flirting its tail from side to side instead of up and down was noted by the vigilant Gilbert White, who described the cock bird sitting very placidly on the top of a tall tree in the village and singing from morning to night: 'he affects neighbourhoods, and avoids solitude, and loves to build in orchards and about houses; with us he perches on the vane of a tall maypole.' In the north-western part of Hampshire, on the other hand, I have found the redstart frequenting not so much villages or hamlets as outlying barns and the like in lonely spots. Both before, during, and after the nesting season the 'flame-bird'

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persists in attracting attention by taking short flights along the hedges or among the furze and thorn bushes of the common, keeping some twenty yards in front of you as you advance, by uttering a single, rather intense note, and by shiverings of tail and wings. Titmice, finches, and warblers do not as a rule pay much attention to human intruders upon their resorts, except, of course, when their eggs or young are threatened. They fly off when disturbed and display no curiosity as to the appearance or movements of the intruder. The redstart watches you, and calls at you, and flirts its tail and wings at you in a way that seems to denote rather curiosity than alarm or anger. I have noticed the rock pipit aroused and excited by the presence of a human intruder near its feeding or roosting places long after the breeding season has passed. The robin will follow and keep an eye on one from rabbit hole to rabbit hole when ferreting in autumn or winter, but not from curiosity so much as from a desire to get worms and other food disturbed by foot or spade. The redstart seems to me inquisitive, the rock pipit excitable, and the robin simply practical and 'knowing.'

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Other birds which show up well at this season are the bullfinch, the turtle dove, the green woodpecker, and the jay. One sees much more of the bullfinch now than during the spring or early summer, and the green woodpecker is constantly to be both seen and heard in the open glades and the broader woodland paths. The latter bird feeds a good deal on the ground, preferring spots where there is short green sward, and it seems to be of a very solitary disposition. A little earlier in the year one may hear the young of the green woodpecker screaming for food from some oak-tree deep in the woods. The sound closely resembles the agonised cry of a rabbit attacked by stoat or weasel—so much so that, well as I know the sound, I have sometimes had to watch and wait before feeling fully satisfied that it has not been the latter.

But the jay is the bird most noticeable in the woodlands in the silent time. The jay's sudden *scritches* when disturbed in the high wood, and the ringdove's soothing 'world-old song,' as Charles Kingsley has described it, are often the only bird sounds, indeed the only sounds at all, one hears on a still August day in the woods, and they

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serve to bring out or emphasise the deep repose of nature before the summer is hurried to decay. And as the sounds of summer have dwindled away, so have the colours. Flower life and butterfly hang by a thread which the first frost of veritable autumn will cut.

My knowledge of the science of flowers is, I am afraid, of a very slight character. It is hard to conceive how any one with a love of Nature can fail to be interested in such subjects as the cross and the self fertilisation of flowers. Who, for instance, can regard as dull the story of how the familiar cuckoo-pint for purposes of cross-fertilisation imprisons the insects that venture down its sheath? And what wonderful tales are those which the botanists can now tell us about the way in which the tiny winged creatures are lured to the orchises and other flowers, and about the way in which Nature will sometimes fall back on self-fertilisation when cross-fertilisation has not been effected. But, on the other hand, we cannot all take kindly to the teaching which, in regard, for instance, to the pepperworts, tells us that 'their genus *Azolla* appears to bring them into contact with

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Jungermanniaceæ'; and again, that 'according to Mr. ——, *Marsilea* evidently appears to connect *Salvinia* with ferns; its important differences from *Salvinia* consist in the capsules which correspond to the secondary capsules of that family being developed within the substance of a modified leaf.' No doubt classical nomenclature and scientific arrangement—the dry bones of natural history—are necessary for purposes of close study. Let us keep, however, some of the old familiar names. The wild thyme and mints and wood sages and the marjoram, which grow in the wood and at its outskirts—are not their very names refreshing? The bees are as fond of the wild thyme—of which, by the way, there is said to be a rare lemon-scented variety—as they are of the blossoming limes. It grows in many a dry, sun-steeped spot in the glades and on the grassy slopes by the Hanging. The mutton of sheep fed much on this plant was declared by an old writer to have a particularly pleasant flavour. As for the marjoram, it grows in many places where the wood is not too high, and gives forth a delicious aromatic scent when crushed: the mints and the marjoram both flourish at this time of year.

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The Hanging, so called, is the steep northern point of the wood which here feathers down into the pretty valley of the Bourne, one of the stripling feeders of the Test. From the Hanging and the grassy slopes beside it there is a beautiful view of the country around. Few spots could be better for a picnic than this wooded hill, with its view of a typical North Hampshire district; of water meadows mingling with fields covered with yellow barley and corn burnt chocolate-brown by the ripening harvest sun; of old thatched cottages and solid red-brick farms; of great village elms, peopled by their 'black republics.' These familiar features form a charming setting for the larger picture which shows our highest south of England chalk-hills and the winding white road, which leads past the Tree-Legged Cross to one of the great show-places of this part of the country, Highclere Castle, famous for its rhododendrons, pheasants, and picture-gallery. Under the beech-trees, which line the Hanging, there is shelter always from the hottest sun. Here and here only at an earlier period of the year grows in quantity Solomon's seal, miscalled by some the wild lily of the valley, not a very rare flower, but a local

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"HAMPSHIRE HIGHLANDS."

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one. About here, too, though not under the beech-trees, the wood is gay for weeks with St. John's worts of several kinds, woody nightshade or bitter-sweet, pretty yellow cow wheat, the lovely and delicate dwarf cistus, and immense quantities of wild roses and eglantine. But now, though the woods are still green and refreshing to the sense, these plants belong to that wonderful vanished medley of summer. A little yarrow on the common, a few sprays of honeysuckle here and there in the woods—there is not much else left of all summer's brilliant array of flowers. Not many kind things are said of the yarrow in the south, but in parts of the west of England, notably in Somersetshire, the plant is used by poor folk as fuel.

A word before passing from the subject of plants to the practice, now dying out (but once so general among the cottagers and others), of using various field and woodland herbs for medicines. Nowadays the gatherers of simples are getting to be rare, and quack medicines are within the reach of the poorest and most remote. We do not very often see the bunches of dried simples over the great bricked hearth in the cottage of

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even out-of-the-way hamlets. Possibly the health of the community does not much suffer thereby. And yet the study of and hunt for plants, in the days when Culpepper's *Herbal* was a power in the land, must have been very interesting. In those times, too, many plants were utilised for making drinks described as agreeable and wholesome. One reads in Sowerby's great work on botany, for instance, that the leaves of the little wood-sorrel beaten up with sugar make 'an agreeably acid refreshing conserve, partaking of the flavour of green tea.' The yellow bedstraw of July and August was reputed, by reason of its power of coagulating milk, to be very serviceable in the making of the best Cheshire cheese; whilst the wood-sage was recommended as a good substitute for hops in brewing beer. From the roots of Solomon's seal a kind of bread, according to Linnæus, used to be occasionally made, and another old botanist assures us that the underground stems of the common brake fern or bracken are capable of being used for food purposes. These are experiments scarcely likely to find favour in these days, but it is certain that many forms of food, to be had for the trouble

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of picking, are neglected and overlooked. The terrifying name 'toadstool' frightens us away from various perfectly edible fungi which in other countries would appear in the markets. In Italy there are, I believe, regular inspectors of fungi; and the delicacy known as the black truffle, which Gilbert White mentions as being found at Selborne, is no doubt quite overlooked in many districts where it thrives. Wild strawberries grow in great quantities in these Hampshire woods, and, like the much scarcer wild raspberry, are of a delicious flavour. In the southern parts of Norway, in July, the children gather little basketfuls of the sweet fruit, and offer them to the people driving in carriole and stolkjærre. Presumably the Dr. William Butler quoted by Walton was referring to the strawberry of the garden when he said, 'Doubtless God could have made a better berry, but doubtless God never did.' In respect to delicacy of flavour, however, the remark might well be applied to the wild wood strawberry. Many of our common woodland plants were formerly sovereign specifics for various ailments. Out of the wild marjoram a preparation used to be made

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'much extolled as easing toothache from a carious tooth'; wood betony was once regarded as a cure for no less than forty-seven different disorders, and hence the saying, 'You have more virtues than betony.' The woody nightshade, too, which many people persist in confusing with the deadly nightshade or dwale—fortunately a much less common plant—was a specific in the last century. Saunders, the author of a work on botany, says he used it with great success for coughs and rheumatic disorders.

In this last silent period of summer the butterflies are as scarce as the flowers they love. The emperors, white admirals, and fritillaries, even in late seasons, have disappeared before this time, and there is no more chance of seeing Iris soar than of hearing Philomel sing. These things are now but memories, 'portions and parcels of the dreadful past.' The common blues, the sulphur, and the large whites are still to be found draining the sweets of the summer to the dregs in woods and common. The large white seems to have become more than ever abundant of late years, and I frequently see it in the London streets, as well as in the parks, where it is quite at home,

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as also is the cabbage white. Sometimes you may disturb from a hazel stretching over the woodland path a purple hairstreak, a butterfly I have found as late as the 9th of September, but it will be but a poor battered specimen, for *Thecla quercus* really belongs, not less than do the fritillaries, to July. There are, however, a few insects which seem to actually prefer the extreme end of summer, and even the first part of autumn, to the true butterfly time. Among these are the red admiral and the humming-bird hawk-moth. Among the *Vanessa* family of butterflies the red admiral can scarcely take the first place, even if the superb Camberwell beauty be set aside as too rare in its occurrence in this county to be considered. The peacock, or the harvest butterfly, as one sometimes hears *Io* called in North Hampshire, comes easily first. The wings, both hind and front, of this peacock are exquisite beyond comparison, so far as British butterflies are concerned, in variety and arrangement of colours as well as in the design of the markings. Here are a deep shimmering blue and a faint sky blue, yellow and fire colour, black and lilac, all in perfect harmony on the eyes on the front wing of the peacock. Black, with

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spots of this same blue that gleams or shimmers, is the colour of the eyes on the hind wings, with a bordering of a light colour I find impossible to describe. The ground colour of the front of the wings of this splendid insect is a deep, rich shade of terra-cotta. The red admiral has not this wealth of colour and design on its wings. It is a dashing-looking black, white, and scarlet butterfly, but still very beautiful when out for the first time on a late summer or early autumn day. It is not a very shy insect, and one can often come quite close and see it, settled on an oak or hazel leaf, opening and shutting its wings, and bathing itself in the sunshine. The black on its wings is lustrous and velvety, and, examining closely, one sees that it has two little specks on the hind wings of that blue which appears in all four eyes of the peacock: indeed, the colour is common to the peacock, red admiral, large tortoise-shell, small tortoise-shell, and Camberwell beauty. The red admiral, though found much in fields and open spots, is yet very fond of woods, and I have watched it soaring in August and September about the tops of the oak-trees, somewhat after the way of a purple emperor.

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There are a good many moths one associates with this season of the year, such as the vapourer, which is very common about the lime-trees round the house throughout a genial, early autumn; but a far finer and more interesting insect I look for now is the humming-bird hawk-moth. Markwick, in a note in White's *Selborne*, says, 'I have frequently seen the large bee-moth inserting its long tongue or proboscis into the centre of flowers, and feeding on their nectar, without settling on them, but keeping constantly on the wing.' The humming-bird hawk-moth first appears in the early summer; but in Hampshire, on the Isle of Wight as well as on the mainland, I have seen much more of it in the latter part of August and through a mild September. It will affect a bed of geraniums, if it cannot get phloxes, and will return day after day at the same hour to sip their sweets. It darts with well-nigh incredible velocity from flower to flower, or from bed to bed. You see it hovering over a phlox, and next moment you are aware that it has transferred its attention to a blossom in another bed several yards distant. The eye, no matter how keen, cannot by any

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means always follow the flight of this insect even in the daylight. Mr. Knapp in his *Journal of a Naturalist*, a book which is not perhaps so much read now as it deserves to be, has a delightful study of this insect. He made such friends with his humming-bird hawk-moths that they allowed him to stroke them as they hovered over the flowers, and he says he has seen them counterfeit death, when apprehensive of danger, by falling on their backs in the box in which they have been placed, and appearing in all respects to be quite devoid of life. As soon as the opportunity has arrived, they have come to life and made their escape.

I have alluded to the regular visits of the humming-bird hawk-moth to its favourite bed of garden flowers. It is not in this matter by any means singular among insects. A friend tells me that he has noticed the convolvulus hawk-moths coming to the garden at exactly the same time evening after evening, so that he has known when to go out and find them; whilst the hornet, I believe, is equally punctual. The same thing has been noted in regard to various birds. In Frank Buckland's *Curiosities of Natural History*

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we read of the punctual way in which a kestrel performed its beats, and the hen harrier has been described as no less regular in its habits. The woodman and the field labourer can tell the time to a quarter of an hour without the aid of a watch, and many of the wild creatures in field, marsh, and woodland seem not less sure as time-tellers. The wood-pigeons, says the keeper, will come to drink at the pond on the common between such and such an hour in the afternoon in hot September weather: it's no use taking your gun and waiting in concealment for them before then. Experience teaches one he is quite correct: the wood-pigeon can be punctual like the convolvulus hawk-moth or the kestrel.

If it is quiet and lonely in the woods in the daytime in this last period in the life of the summer, how much more quiet, how much lonelier, when the leaf begins to darken and the rose and lemon die out of the sky! One evening at the extreme end of August last year I went and stood for some while at a spot, which in May and June had seemed teeming with life more than most other spots in the low underwood in the coppice called Ridges. A barn owl, after

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mice among the ricks, no doubt, sailed noiselessly by me once or twice as I left the fields of stubble and entered the wood, but I neither saw nor heard anything of the nightjars, which were breeding here in June, and not a single bird's note broke in upon the silence. The carol of the cricket hidden deep among the copse grass alone told of the presence of life. It was a soft, balmy evening, the trees were still green and fresh, and not a yellowing leaf on oak or hazel gave warning of the rack and ruin into which autumn must shortly plunge all the woodlands. But summer, like youth, is sometimes snatched away very suddenly. It may go gradually, one leaf turning sere after another, just as the hairs sometimes turn from black to white one at a time, and as the lines on the forehead come at first single spied: or it may vanish with such suddenness that, having gone to rest on what we take to be still a summer night, we wake to find the day is autumn. When the corn is garnered up, and the woods have lost the bright colours of flower and butterfly, and the nightingale's call-note and the nightjar's strange song of the dusk are lis-

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tened for in vain, we recognise that the end may be very near, and that to change summer into autumn may be scarcely more than the work of a single bitter night.

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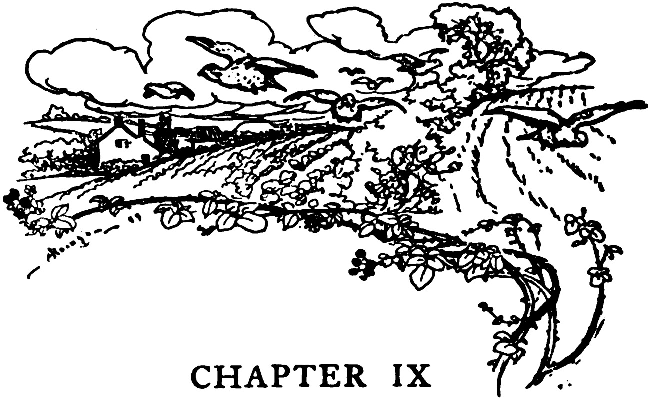

CHAPTER IX

In the Autumn Fields

To the sportsman who takes delight in the fishing-rod as well as the gun, there really is scarcely a month out of the twelve which will not offer its diversion in a county like North Hampshire. April, May, June, July, August, even September, or a portion of it, are all possible for the trout-angler on the Hampshire chalk-stream, although the first of these months may not always be particularly alluring from a fly-fishing point of view. September must ever be *the* partridge month, whether there is much or little lay, whether the birds are forward or backward. Similarly October may be regarded as the pheasant month, even though many do not look for sport among these

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birds until later on. In November comes the woodcock, and in this and in the two succeeding months we may find sport among the ground game and the water-fowl. Rabbit-shooting in February is very far from being out of the question, and March remains perhaps the one month in the twelve during which neither the fishing-rod nor the gun can with advantage be taken up: the foxhunter may claim that he then has 'the pull' of both angler and gunner. As for the all-round fly-fisherman, he has in the county taken as a whole 'the pull,' it would seem, of both gunner and foxhunter. Give him the river Test, and he will be able to angle for salmon at Redbridge in February and March, for trout almost anywhere between Overton and Romsey from April to September, and for grayling at Stockbridge and thereabouts during the rest of the season. As for the pike, he can take them whenever he likes in the Test without getting into deep disgrace. I cannot say that I have ever met the angler who divided his season up between the salmon, trout, and grayling of the Test, but certain it is that no river in England could offer finer prospects to the sportsman who

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desired to find water where these three branches of fly-fishing could be pursued in the course of the same season.

In the preceding chapter I had something to say about partridge-shooting last summer—it would be absurd to speak of the early part of September 1898 as autumn—on burning days when even seasoned sportsmen were driven home while the afternoon was yet young. Ordinarily we look for and get very different weather from this in September, and I cannot help thinking that, as a rule, the month is more fitted for gun than rod, though trout do sometimes rise well throughout it. Few spots are more delightful on a mild early autumn day than the fields of a North Hampshire farm. Here a field of stubble, there a few acres of clover heads that scent the air; here a little hazel and oak spinney, there a group of farm buildings with a fine old thatched barn standing on short, thick legs of stone; here a late crop of barley or oats still uncut after harvest-home, there a strip of mustard still in brilliant yellow blossom. How can they say that our south-country scenery is monotonous and unlovely? Why, the little fields of almost any

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quiet Hampshire farm, with their straggling hedges and their variety of crop and colour, form a beautiful picture often enough by themselves without reference to those peeps of distant purple hills and downs and water meadows which are so familiar to every one who knows Hampshire, Berkshire, or Wiltshire well. Then we have about most good-sized farms in this part of the country lanes and grass-grown roads, which add not a little to the attractiveness of the scenery. I do not say these byways are equal to those of parts of Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, where you are often delighted to discover admirable roads, perfect seclusion and remoteness from the 'beaten track,' and charming scenery all combined. We make even our high-roads of very rough material—nothing is much rougher than flint—and cycling in these small branch and farm roads in Hampshire is usually out of the question. But the partridge-shooter, passing from field to field, soon grows familiar with their windings, and comes to much appreciate their glimpses of the surrounding district.

In our corner of Hampshire immense bags of partridges, such as Norfolk or Cambridgeshire

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sportsmen are accustomed to, are very few and far between. Our fields are commonly rather small, and hedges therefore very numerous, so that the county is naturally more adapted to the old style of walking up the birds than to the newer one of driving them. Occasionally, it is true, one hears of big bags in the district made on the large and famous sporting estates. For instance, three guns on the Highclere estate on September 19, 1895, killed two hundred and thirty-eight brace of partridges, whilst on September 14, 1897, the same three guns killed two hundred and twenty-three and a half brace. No doubt, from the point of view of those sportsmen who take much delight in 'records,' these bags will seem poor indeed compared with the huge total of birds put together by seven guns at the Grange near Alresford, in the centre of the county. In four days four thousand one hundred and nine partridges were killed, six hundred and seventy-two brace being the bag of a single day—October 18, 1887. This, I believe, is the biggest bag of partridges on record for the British Isles. Presumably these very 'big days' afford a good deal of excitement, though I cannot honestly

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say that they seem particularly splendid to me: there surely may be such a thing as surfeit in sport.

I should be inclined to say that twenty brace of partridges to three or four guns at the beginning of the season was a distinctly good day's sport in our corner of the county; and that a ten or twelve brace day would not be thought by any means a very poor one. Though our bags are not big ones, the county is a very good one for partridges. I am often puzzled to hear birds spoken of as 'very scarce this season,' when in point of fact they seem to me to be very numerous. I heard the partridges so described last season, and the statement seemed to me wide of the mark. During the first four days of September I was shooting by myself without the aid of keeper or dog, and I certainly managed to walk up a great number of birds. They were strong on the wing, rather wild, and among them was a decidedly large percentage of old birds, but scarce assuredly they were not. The difficulty was not to find the partridges, but to get within range and to scatter them so as to be able to deal with single birds.

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Partridge-shooting by oneself is hard work, especially on a hot day, or a very wet day when the soil cakes on the boots. One does not get the minutes of rest which fall to one's lot every now and then when walking up birds with several other guns, and a great deal of ground, heavy and light, has to be covered, much of it often without result. Moreover, game in the pockets weighs very heavily after a while, as do a few trout in a creel or bag slung over the shoulders. I admit there have been occasions when, at the end of a day's sport with rod or gun at a distance of several hard miles from home, I have felt sorely tempted to, at any rate, partly relieve my full creel or pockets and trust to finding the spoil next day. Does not Francis Francis somewhere confess in one of his delightful angling sketches to having thus unloaded himself when tired out and a long way from home? Such things have been done by fagged-out sportsmen. Yet, despite its drawbacks and difficulties, a solitary day's sport with the gun among the partridges will often be a very happy one. It is a real source of satisfaction, now and then, to do everything oneself, to find one's game, to success-

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fully stalk it—and partridges, in these days of short stubble, with often but little cover in the way of turnips and the like, want a good deal of stalking—and, last and not least, to carry it home. After such a day in the 'happy Autumn fields' one knows what a healthy and by no means unpleasant feeling of thorough tiredness is, and looks forward to the long, deep sleep well earned. No form of sport with rod or gun, unless it be grouse-shooting on the Scotch, Welsh, or Derbyshire moors, is more conducive to a grand night's rest or to a healthy frame of mind and body than a hard, long day among the partridges in a county of hill and dale like ours.

The partridge is the game bird of the farm, but the one, two, and three year old shoots bordering on the fields are favourite resorts of a few coveys, and two or three broods of partridges have been hatched out among the dense thickets of the common ever since I can remember. These birds feed much on the close-cropped turf on the open parts of the common, and are then of course almost unapproachable. One must drive them into the thickets, and trust to getting them up with the aid of a dog or a beater or two. In the

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thickets of the common, and also in the shoots in the woods, partridges lie very close and get up in an irregular covey.

However strong on the wing or wild partridges are, one can reckon on getting within easy range of a covey or of single birds marked down in young wood. A covey of birds flushed in such a place will often rise in batches of two or three at a time and scatter in all directions. I have often come unexpectedly on a covey fifty yards or so inside the low shoots, and surprised the birds as they have been dusting themselves in the sun in the woodland path. They have run into the shoots and allowed me to get right in their midst before rising. But, once on the wing, they have scattered broadcast and flown 'as wild as hawks' in all directions. It is by no means easy to always kill your right and left when partridges are marked down and flushed in the shoots. The birds lie close, but are apt to fly very hard and in all directions. I have known birds repeatedly go backwards and forwards between wood and farmland. Shooting one very windy and rainy day in September 1896 we found several coveys of strong wild birds in a large

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field of thin turnips. On one side of the field were the woods, at this point terminating in a steep hillside. On the top of the hill were some high beech-trees, and just beyond these, out of sight, several acres of young shoots. We walked up a covey of birds, which flew up the hillside and over the beeches into the shoots beyond. Another covey also rising very wild did the same. Climbing the hillside we beat the shoots, and back went the birds over and through the high beeches, down the wooded hillside, and into the turnip field beneath. We returned to the turnips, walked up the birds again, and back they went in the same way to the shoots. Each time I managed to get shots at birds in the shoots, but in the turnips they always rose well out of range. I thought that climbing up and scrambling down that steep hillside several times without a rest was about as hard a bit of work as I had ever known when shooting or fishing, but prettier sport one could not wish for. Only, a man must be in good physical condition to thoroughly enjoy work of this character.

A great deal has been written within recent years about the life-history as well as the shooting

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of the partridge, but no statements respecting this game bird have interested me so much as those made respectively by the late Mr. Thomas Andrews, of the famous Crichmere trout-breeding establishment near Haslemere, and by the Rev. H. A. Macpherson. Both relate to the same question, namely, Is the partridge a wiser bird than of yore? Mr. Andrews stated that when telegraph wires were first set up in this country, many partridges lost their lives by flying into them, but that as time went on the birds grew wiser, fewer and fewer coming by their end in this way. For myself, I have only once seen partridges fly into telegraph wires by the road-side. Pheasants, however, I am told, will frequently get killed in this manner unless precautions are taken, and in districts in Buckinghamshire and elsewhere I have noticed that small pieces of metal are attached by preservers to the telegraph wires to save their game from this fate. In this connection I am told that when wire fencing began to come into general use in certain parts of the Argentine Republic, large numbers of one of the species of the birds there called the tinamu were killed by them; but that by and by the birds grew

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accustomed to the wires, and far less commonly came to grief.

Mr. Macpherson, in writing on the habits of the partridge, remarks: 'Many partridges still nestle out in the open fields, but experience plays an important part in the economy of Nature. The frequent destruction of nests in the open meadows has convinced many female partridges of the advantages supplied to nesting birds by other shelter afforded by the briers and brambles that festoon the banks of the older and untrimmed hedgerows.' These two assertions, namely, that partridges are learning through experience (1) the danger of wires, and (2) the danger to their eggs or young of nesting in the open, are very interesting, though they will perhaps strike some naturalists as over bold. Sportsmen and keepers are repeatedly heard to declare that certain birds of prey, and certain other suspect birds, as, for instance, the jay, are much easier to approach when you are without your gun than when you carry it with you. Would they have us believe that the jay of to-day, through the persecution of its ancestors, has learned the deadly character of the gun? Certainly it does often *seem* much

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easier to get near wild animals when you are without a gun than when you have one; but then, to raise the arm when you have not got a gun is usually to alarm a shy bird or beast quite as much as to raise it when you have. A jay or rabbit which recognised and dreaded a gun would be about equal in intelligence to a cunning old trout which recognised and dreaded a fly-rod!

It is often stated in regard both to the crouching partridge and the feeding rabbit, that you have much more chance of getting within shot of these creatures if you affect not to be watching or stalking them. A keeper, and a very smart one, too, with whom as a boy I used often to shoot rabbits in the woodland walks in summer-time, believed so much in this that when the quarry stopped feeding to look up suspiciously, he would casually pluck a few hazel leaves and try and make believe that the last thing in his mind was to interfere with the rabbit. It was ridiculous, no doubt, but he firmly believed in this plan, and strongly advised me to always follow it. Some people are convinced that the way to get to partridges in stubble is to pretend that you are not after them at all, and they even go so far as to advise

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you not to look too fixedly at the birds. In practice I cannot say I have ever found any devices of the kind useful in stalking shy animals. No doubt what is known as the half-moon method of walking up birds in the open is sometimes a telling one, but that is a very different matter: the half-moon plan probably *confuses* the birds now and then, and is therefore effective. The two great rules of the stalker should be, first, to move very slowly, always hiding himself as much as possible; secondly, to avoid making the least noise. Where considerations of sound and scent rather than sight come in, the good stalker of course will always, when practicable, approach his quarry in the face of the wind: precautions in regard to scent are perhaps only needful where large animals such as deer are being stalked.

Walking up partridges, as I have stated, is the general method in our part of Hampshire, the regular drive being not often resorted to. Nor is the kite used save rarely: birds lie close if the kite is flown over them, and, when they rise, fly low and swiftly—offering by no means over-easy shots. To scatter a covey of strong partridges within a thick hedge by means of the kite is

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to get some very pretty and lively shooting. Occasionally a covey can be driven to such a hedge without the aid of a kite. I recollect once shooting at partridges which rose singly out of a thick hedge on a boisterous day. They rose on my side of the hedge in the teeth of a gale which blew and tumbled them about in the most perplexing way. I could not have believed partridges at short range—they got up within fifteen yards or thereabouts—could be so very hard to hit. My companion, who had fewer, but, I fancy, much easier shots, made merry over my discomfiture.

There is not much diversity in the bag obtained on a Hampshire farm on a September day, but now and again we get a little unexpected fun among a small colony of rabbits which have settled in a spinney or quiet thick hedgerow. Sometimes a dozen or more rabbits are discovered by the harvesters hiding in the last standing strip of a field of thick barley, and there is a great scene of excitement as one bunny after another is dislodged to run the gauntlet of fire on its way to the nearest hedge. And then there are one or two species of birds which we always associate

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with the first weeks of the partridge-shooting. The landrail in some seasons is quite abundant in North Hampshire: I have a note in my diary of twelve and a half brace of landrail killed by one gun in a few days' partridge-shooting on a small farm. The landrail, though a good bird for the table, offers but poor sport owing to its weak, short flight and its skulking habits. With old-time gunners, who always used dogs in partridge-shooting, it was probably less a favourite even than it is to-day. Blaine in his bulky sporting Encyclopædia drolly refers to the landrail thus:—'Talk of sport! we think that we ourselves have been, and should be yet, as fond of shooting as any man living, were we not obliged to stay at home all day, ay, and trim the midnight lamp also, to complete the work before us. Yet with all this attachment to the dog and gun, we do not now think that the tantalising crek from the finest and largest expanse of meadow that was ever beheld could tempt us to commit ourselves by entering it. No, no! we have seen our staunchest pointer *dumfoundered* in the pursuit.' The landrail is found breeding far from water and water meadows,

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but somehow one associates it with such spots rather than with those in which it is often found and added to the partridge-shooting bag. That this sluggish, skulking, weak-flying creature should be an accomplished traveller, crossing and recrossing the sea on its way to and from us, seems not the least among the strange facts of migration. One might suppose that the landrail, the spotted crake, and the water rail were among the birds least fitted for the perils and fatigues of migration; yet the last-named alone among the three stays fairly often in England during the whole season.

I was delighted to come upon a quail early last September when walking through a field of mustard among the low hills. The bird, which I almost trod upon, declined to rise, but scuttled away into the hedge at hand, and I had not any great desire to try and dislodge it. Once or twice before I have found single quails among the same hills, and at a little place called Binley, well away from 'anywhere,' a friend, some eighteen seasons since, came upon a bevy of the birds evidently bred there. On the farms about Combe, too, quails are seen and shot in September. The

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numbers of quail found in this county seem to be about the same now as they have always been. They are but little known or observed, and I doubt if many keepers or farmers know them by sight or even name. Possibly all they know of this little game bird is what they have read of it in the Bible on Sundays.

A bird sometimes seen by the partridge-shooter in North Hants is the stone curlew (*Œdicnemus crepitans*), now, practically speaking, the one English bird of the *Otididæ* or bustard family. I have seen it stated in more than one quarter—and the statement is probably only too true—that the stone curlew or thicknee is much scarcer than it used to be in England, and that from certain districts it has altogether disappeared. It is therefore gratifying to learn, from a perfectly reliable source, as I have quite lately, that this curlew is by no means yet giving up the wild and lofty range of hills which divide Hampshire from Berkshire in the north-east of the county. In answer to my inquiries, a sportsman, who takes an interest in other birds besides game ones, writes to say: 'The Norfolk plover breeds regularly with us. When partridge-

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shooting on the downs on the 25th September 1897 I counted between forty and fifty on the wing at once. Two were seen as late as the 2nd October 1897.'

Here then is at least one stronghold left to the last of our bustards in the south of England. In Gilbert White's time the bird was common in the neighbourhood of Selborne, and the naturalist often referred to it in his letters to Pennant. He heard it clamouring as late as the 31st October, and he declared that the bird 'congregated in vast flocks in the autumn' near the house of a friend of his in Sussex. The stone curlew is a bird of the night, and I fancy I have heard, when returning home after dusk, its distant cry overhead, far away from its usual haunts. Its eggs, which are laid on the bare ground, commonly on a fallow, are instances of what is called assimilative coloration, being hard to find by reason of the way in which in appearance they match their surroundings.

A good many years ago two fresh unblown eggs of the common curlew (*Numenius arquatus*) were brought to me, but unfortunately I have no note as to where they were found. I have never

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myself seen in this district the curlew, which has always seemed to me one of the most interesting of our British birds, owing, no doubt, to some extent to the wild spots which it loves to frequent, and to its extreme shyness. In the wildest parts of that poor and bleak but fascinating Irish county, Roscommon, I recollect seeing many curlews which the peasants rightly described as the hardest of birds to get within shot of. How the curlews of *Locksley Hall* bring out the wildness and desolation of the scene!—

> '. . . as of old the curlews call,
> Dreary gleams about the moorland, flying over Locksley Hall.'

The Latin names of our birds are as a rule not of much interest, except for purposes of scientific order and classification, but the curlew's generic one, *Numenius*, *i.e.* new moon, seems certainly rather a happy one when one glances at the shape of its long beak. Just before writing this I received a letter from an evidently very ardent lady angler. She describes the beauties of her favourite stream, the Northumberland Coquet, in the beautiful spring-time with 'the dipper, the sandpiper, and the whaup (the curlew) nesting all around, and the trout rising like mad.' We

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have none of these delightful birds around our woods, and I cannot say that I have seen the sandpiper even on the upper Test or the Anton.

The landrail, the stone curlew, and the quail—the two latter of course being far scarcer than the first named—are the only birds of note one associates with partridge-shooting in the early part of the season; but occasionally one may put up strange visitors to the turnip or wheat fields in September. Some years ago I flushed a common or full snipe in a field of thin standing corn miles from any bit of swampy ground or water meadow. No doubt it was on a journey and resting for a few hours. Sometimes at this season, too, partridge-shooters put up a nightjar among the roots, the bird being then on migration. Red-legged partridges, though a few are shot each season, do not seem to thrive very well in this district. Last September I was rather surprised to put up one a hundred yards or so inside the woods and in quite high shoots. The 'Frenchman,' as is well known, will perch in a hedge. 'Red-legged partridges,' says a great authority, 'will congregate in packs, perch on hedges, and, if wounded, often go to earth.'

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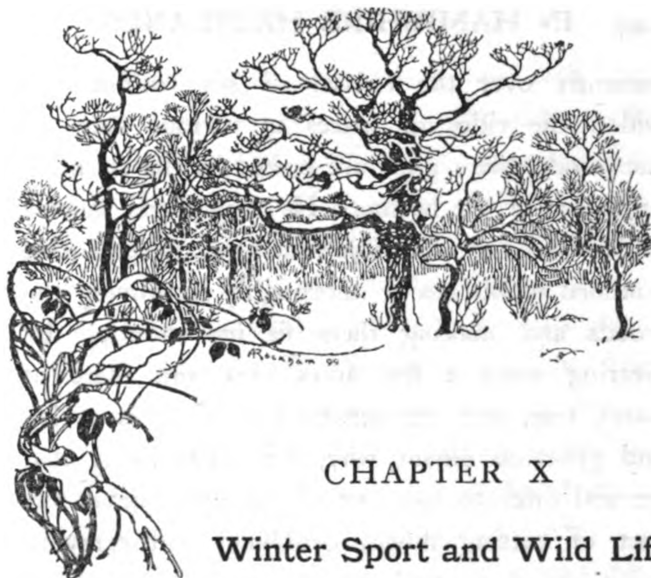

CHAPTER X

Winter Sport and Wild Life

FORESTRY and game preservation on a really considerable scale do not by any means always fit in well with each other. The country gentleman who sets great store by his underwood as well as his timber, and whose income is in whole or part derived from wood sales, will be the first to assent to this, however fond he may be of sport with the gun. The sporting tenant, who is not interested in the proceeds from wood sales, and whose one object is to get up a huge head of ground game as well as of pheasants, is apt sometimes to chafe rather im-

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patiently over the refusal of his landlord to widen the rides or spaces in various parts of the woods where guns are posted by the scientific organiser of the battue. He very likely cannot understand the objection which that unreasonable landlord of his has to thoroughly improving the woods and making them fit for shooting by clearing away a few acres here and there of hazel, oak, and ash scrub; and if he is a rich and generous tenant, why, it is quite likely that he will offer to pay out of his own pocket the cost of cutting down, grubbing, and carrying away the same underwood, provided the stuff be regarded as his to sell for the trifle it will fetch as firewood. He offers, in short, to improve and beautify — from a sporting point of view — the woods, and is amazed to find the owner unsportsmanlike enough to kick at the proposal.

And then there is the question of 'getting up rabbits.' The tenant very likely has taken special pains to secure the services of keepers who are quite famous for getting up in a very short space of time a stock of rabbits which has run deplorably low. Well, by keeping an eagle eye on

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poachers, by killing down every conceivable wild creature which might by a sufficiently violent stretch of the imagination be regarded as a possible destroyer of a young rabbit or two, and by instituting a rigorous close season for his favourites, the paid keeper certainly does manage to get up a splendid head of ground game. What a pretty sight to peep into the fields bordering on the woods on a summer evening, whistle gently, or hit the ground with your stick, and instantly see countless little white tails scamper away in droves into cover! What rare sport we shall be presently having amongst these brisk fellows when the leaf's off! The landlord ought of course to be delighted if he comes down and happens to see all those white tails, and ought to vow that he never had such a tenant before and wouldn't lose him on any account. Sometimes, perhaps, the landlord does register that vow, but I have known instances where he has registered a vow to just the opposite effect. I have a letter by me from the owner of one of the noblest and most famous wooded estates in the district, indeed in the whole of the British Isles. Here is an extract from it:—

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'Between the lot of these gentlemen (*i.e.* his late sporting tenants) this fine old estate with its beautiful forest and woods has been eaten up by *Rabbits*, and the mischief done is *incalculable* and *irretrievable*.'

To make clear the fact that good forestry and game-preserving on a big scale may sometimes clash rather badly, it will be well to describe briefly some of the chief features of wood-farming on a Hampshire estate. Fifty acres of underwood and several hundred oak and ash trees—the number of the latter being inconsiderable—are sold and cut every year. The underwood composed of hazel, oak, birch, ash, sallow ('withy,' as the woodmen call it), with here and there a little wild cherry, beach, spindle tree, hornbeam, etc., is ripe for cutting every fourteenth year, and, after it has been sold and cut, the oak trees which have been marked for the axe are felled, and stripped of their bark in April—the time when the sap is running very freely up the trunk. The price of underwood, like that of oak timber, is no longer what it once was. Coal, among other things, has perhaps had something to do with bringing down the value

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of underwood, just as iron and steel have affected the price of the best and hardest English oak: then, too, agricultural depression has certainly had much to do with the depreciation of the underwood, which is largely used for making wattle sheep hurdles: for the farmer, who has been ruined or is not far removed from ruin, cannot keep the number of sheep he would, and therefore does not want the hurdles. At the same time, though underwood, like other good English produce, has fallen in price, it still finds a ready market when ripe and really good. The best stems of the hazel, ash, and oak are used for hurdle-making, and the finest Hampshire hurdles are in demand in various parts of the south of England, going to customers, in some instances, even north of London; whilst the great bulk of the remainder of the underwood is made into fagots and sold for fuel—a lot of one hundred and twenty fagots being known locally as a 'hundred.' Hurdling goes on through the spring and summer, and a smart woodman can make as many as nine or ten hurdles in a day. Ten dozen hurdles go to a 'pile,' the price at the present time being about seven shillings and

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sixpence per dozen *in the coppice*, out of which half goes to the woodman. Birch, which grows freely in some parts of the wood, is not so valuable as hazel, but it is put to several uses. At present birch is in favour for turnery and toy-making, while its twigs are used for vinegar-refining and for the tops of steeplechase hurdles. Thus good English underwood has still its uses, and the hazels in the large wood with which this volume deals have long had something more than a mere local fame among buyers of wattle hurdles.

How is it, I have often heard people ask, and have wondered myself, that though once in every fourteenth year or so the time comes round to once more cut several hundred trees, or 'sticks,' as they are sometimes called, the stock of timber in a wood like this shows no sign of exhaustion? An oak takes more than fifteen years, nay, more than three times that space of time, to reach maturity in the wood, and yet, though this cutting has been going on probably for matter of centuries, there are few spots which you can describe as very bare, none as deforested, so far as the timber trees are concerned.

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It is indeed not easy to explain how one can go on cutting year after year and generation after generation, hundreds of matured trees every fourteen years or thereabouts on the same fifty acres or so of ground, and yet not sadly reduce the stock. Perhaps the true explanation may be sought for in the fact that in all parts of the wood young stripling trees, oaklets, if I may use the word, are always coming on and imperceptibly growing into fine timber. By Hampshire custom, when *underwood* is sold there is an implied condition, and at auctions a printed condition, that all *single* stems of oak, ash, and beech shall be left standing when the cutting takes place. These single stems are called heirs or saplings. The oak heirs are no doubt propagated by acorns, the ash heirs from seed, and the beech from mast. Thus the wood sows itself, and within the memory of man no oak or other forest tree, but the fir, has ever been planted, save by Nature. As every one who has dipped into Evelyn's great work or James Brown's *Forester* will readily understand, the knowledge of when to cut trees, and of what trees to cut, cannot be acquired except through experience. Roughly speaking, the system pursued in regard to

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this particular Hampshire wood is to carefully select for cutting those trees that show signs of decay at the top branches, or anything like canker or disease at the butt, *i.e.* just above the ground. Trees crowding one another too much, and therefore retarding one another's growth, are thinned, as a rule, and very old trees, which are recognised by their thick and their scaly bark—the grey hairs and wrinkles of the forest—will also be marked for the woodcutter's long, lithesome saw. Trees are preserved as much as possible at equal distances from one another over the entire woods, but in practice it is naturally enough found impossible to always adhere to this general rule.

In the spring, as we have seen, when the hurdler and fagot-maker are at work among the underwood, the bark-stripper works at the fallen oaks. What is called the pipe bark of the oak-stubbs is now used very little, or not at all, foreign chemicals being preferred ; but the larger bark of the trunks of the oak-trees still finds a market, if not always a too lively one, and very delightful it is to saunter through the woods when the aroma of the stripped bark scents the air on a soft April day. The sounds made by the

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tools of the bark-stripper and by the gloved hand of the hurdler are always pleasant. Few out-of-door lives can be healthier to a man of good constitution, and many must be far less tolerable than the woodman's. He lacks neither shelter from storm nor shade from burning sunshine, and a great portion of his life is passed away in scenes of much quiet beauty. I know it may be argued that he is too hard worked to pay attention to the charming scenes in which he labours, and that in bad weather the woods are not pleasant to spend the whole day in. Yet my experience is that woodmen, as a class, are a fairly long-lived one, and that they are honest, cheery, open, often intelligent fellows. It is not uncommon to find woodmen who have lived the allotted threescore years and ten, and have been at the same work, if not in the same wood, since they were little lads, and yet can still bend their somewhat stiffened limbs over the hurdle-making frame. For the matter of that, you may find in this part of the country old fellows and to spare, of over seventy, working all weathers in the open fields. At midday in the great heat of last September (1898), whilst cycling among the downs

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where Hampshire, Berkshire, and Wiltshire meet, I stopped to talk to an old farm-labourer who had been harvesting. He was in his eighty-seventh year, and still carried unrepining the heavy harness of labour—labour in all weathers, at all seasons of the year. He had had, I suppose, between seventy and eighty years of unremitting toil in or very near these same fields in which he still earned his bread by the sweat of his brow. Up at five, or at the latest six, every morning, and abed at eight or nine every night—such was his great rule of life. Had he ever been in London? No; but once he had been quite near it, and two or three times he had been in a railway train, and quite a long way off from this hamlet where he was born. Then I asked him whether he had heard of Mr. Gladstone's death, whether he knew that Mr. Gladstone had died an older man than himself. But of these matters he had no knowledge: they were 'not for the likes of' him. Seventy-five, or, say, even eighty years of work in or about this very village, and still working at over eighty-seven years of age without any thought or hope of a well-won rest; indeed, there would not be any real rest till the

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time came to add a new green mound to the row of nameless, unrecognised ones up yonder in the church and on the hillside. I thought of John Brown in *My Old Village*. 'If a man's work that he has done all the days of his life could be collected and piled up around him in visible shape, what a vast mound there would be beside some! If each act or stroke was represented, say, by a brick, John Brown would have stood the day before his ending by the side of a monument as high as a pyramid. Then if in front of him could be placed the sum and product of his labour, the profit to himself, he could have held it in his clenched hand like a nut, and no one would have seen it.'

I have digressed; but it is hard to write of bark-stripping and wattle hurdle-making without saying something of the healthy life the woodman leads, and the woodman reminded me of his fellow-villager, the farm-labourer. I think I have said enough to convince people who have thought much about this matter that a wood to yield its annual income must be farmed, as it were, like the arable land which surrounds it. The most dreaded foe of the careful wood-farmer is the rabbit. Hares do a certain amount of damage

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among the young and tender shoots, and I have occasionally seen the top twigs of very young hazels bitten off so clean by a hare, that they have looked almost as though cut by a sharp penknife. The hares in our wood are not very numerous, but I fancy their numbers might be largely increased without much damage being done to the underwood. Rabbits, on the other hand, if not kept down, are destructive almost beyond belief. They spoil the crops of underwood in two ways: first, they eat up the tender twigs of the young shoots which spring up from the stubbs after the underwood has been cut and cleared away; and secondly, when snow covers the ground and they can get no grass to feed upon, they turn their attention to the stems of the older underwood, which they strip of its bark often as high as they can reach. Hazel, holly, ash, sallow, birch, oak —nothing comes amiss to the rabbit, which must eat bark or perish. I have seen it stated that the rabbit will not touch rhododendron, hawthorn, or spindle tree. About the rhododendron I cannot say, but I have seen hawthorns and spindle trees stripped perfectly naked in the woods after a spell of very severe snow and frost

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combined. I have seen a spindle tree not only naked as to its main stem, but also as to many of its smaller branches and even slender twigs, and so high from the ground, too, as to leave no doubt whatever in my mind as to the climbing powers of the rabbit when pressed for food. After the great snow of the winter of 1880-81 had thawed, the woods in many places presented an odd appearance. The bark of the hazel and other underwood was untouched up to a distance of about a foot or eighteen inches from the ground, and above that point the stems were naked for a foot or thereabouts. After the snowstorms had ceased and the frost rendered the surface hard and crisp, the rabbits came from under ground and ate upwards as high as they could reach; when the snow melted, they found a certain amount of green stuff, and so left alone the bark on the stems. Hazel bark, when the sap is not rising, is probably a form of food-stuff which the rabbit only partakes of when there is nothing palatable to nibble at; but it seems to be nutritious enough, judging by the excellent condition rabbits are often in when they have been feeding on it for a while. Underwood thus barked does not die, but its growth

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is retarded, and the buyer is naturally enough induced to regard it askance.

But it is among the young shoots that the rabbits, when very numerous, do the most shocking damage. Acres and acres of young shoots may be practically destroyed in a few days, or rather nights, and fourteen years later the unfortunate owner finds such and such a lot of underwood brings in pounds an acre less than it should do, owing to the destruction of the shoots by the rabbits. If the young shoots from the stubbs are eaten by rabbits in two consecutive years, they often die away altogether: then the only thing to do is to replant, or else to allow a bare, unproductive patch in your wood. The birch sows itself much more freely than the hazel, and it is therefore a somewhat useful underwood about spots which have been laid bare by the rabbits; but it cannot be expected to quite fill the sad gap. I say nothing here about the possible damage an over abundance of rabbits may do to the store of *timber* in a wood by eating up the baby oak and ash trees which have only just broken through the soil perhaps, because I have no present experience in regard to this. It

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is hard to doubt, however, that they will pick up any tender young tree they may come across in hard weather.

Woods which have been much punished by rabbits soon get a bad name among underwood buyers, and commonly deserve it, for it is a long time before the last signs of the mischief disappear. Some landowners deliberately allow and even encourage the destruction of their underwoods by rabbits, and endeavour to make up by what they get through the sale of the ground game killed during winter months either to local or London dealers. If their underwood is of a poor quality apart from the depredations of rabbits, such a plan may be a good one—though the price of even the best Hampshire snared rabbits often drops as low as eightpence or even sixpence—but no number of rabbits can make up for the destruction of really good underwood. In a single night an over abundance of rabbits may do harm which will be visible for a generation. I could point out certain spots in woods bare save for a few birches and perhaps some firs that have been planted there since the harm was done by rabbits upwards of twenty years ago.

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The fact is, if the owner of good woods wants to save his property, and at the same time get plenty of rabbits for shooting, he must begin to wire and to shoot early in the autumn, and by the time the severe weather has set in he must have got his stock down to reasonable proportions. He certainly need not be afraid, if his wood is a large one, of exterminating the race. The rabbit is truly an amazingly prolific animal. I have some notes concerning the rabbit compiled a good many years ago when I was in the woods from morning till night, many and many a long day, sporting, ferreting, and prying into wild life in every corner and thicket. In these I find it stated that the rabbit usually has some four sets of young during the season, and sometimes more than four. A doe will bring forth twenty or twenty-five young in the course of the season, and some of these young before the year is out will very possibly have their litters too. The number of young varies from four to eight, and April is usually the first month when the litters are to be found in any number. The young are not often born in the regular burrows, or 'buries,' as the country-folk often say, but in

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a tunnel of about five or six feet in length dug for the purpose. In this tunnel the doe makes a very snug nest of moss and of fur from her own body; and when she is about to leave the young for any considerable space of time, she fills up the entrance with earth. Late in the season I have more often found litters of young rabbits within the regular burrows.

The rabbit in the big wood is like the pike in a deep stream, the horse-radish in the garden: there is no way of getting rid of it entirely, even assuming that one desires to. A few years ago, with one companion, a keeper, and some dogs, I shot on two consecutive days over several hundred acres of wood and common land which really looked as if they were deserted altogether by rabbits. For months past the late tenant had been killing down the ground game by ferreting, by wiring, and by shooting. On the common we did manage to pick up a few rabbits, but in the woods our total bag for the two days was something like half a dozen—and this on land which had been celebrated for years for its large stock of ground game! There was a thin coating of snow which had lain on the ground for several days, and

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yet you might walk for half a mile or more and never see a single mark of a rabbit's pad. It looked like a really clean sweep, and one began to fear there would be no rabbit-shooting on that estate for years. Nevertheless, within a season or two there were again rabbits and to spare—rabbits to wire, to shoot, and to ferret without reducing their numbers to anything like vanishing point. I am not fearful lest the rabbit should become extinct within the British Isles.

We scarcely expect to begin rabbit-shooting in earnest in the woods till after the first heavy fall of the leaf towards, say, the middle or end of October, but on the common it is practicable for a couple of guns to commence earlier than this. The high-lying breezy common, with its 'toothed briers, sharp furzes, pricking goss or thorns,' affords some of the liveliest sport among the rabbits that can be desired. The thickest cover cannot be shot till the leaf is well off, but there are plenty of isolated bushes with an undergrowth of bracken, coarse grass, and the like, which hold rabbits in the daytime. With three or four keen spaniels and terriers, two guns, one posted on either side of the small but dense bit of cover,

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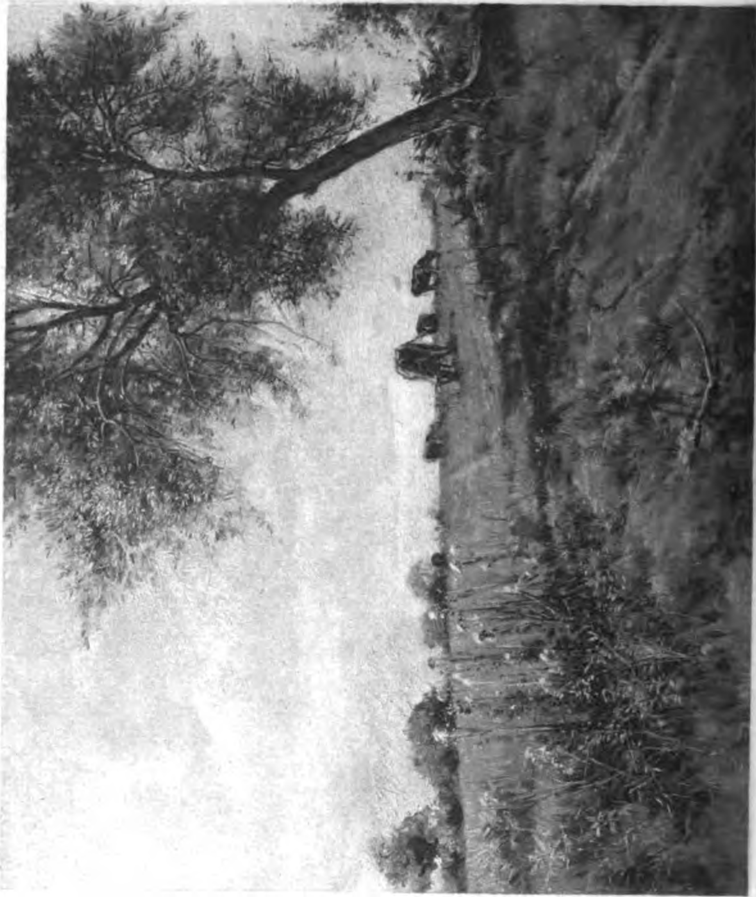

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"*THE BREEZY COMMON.*"

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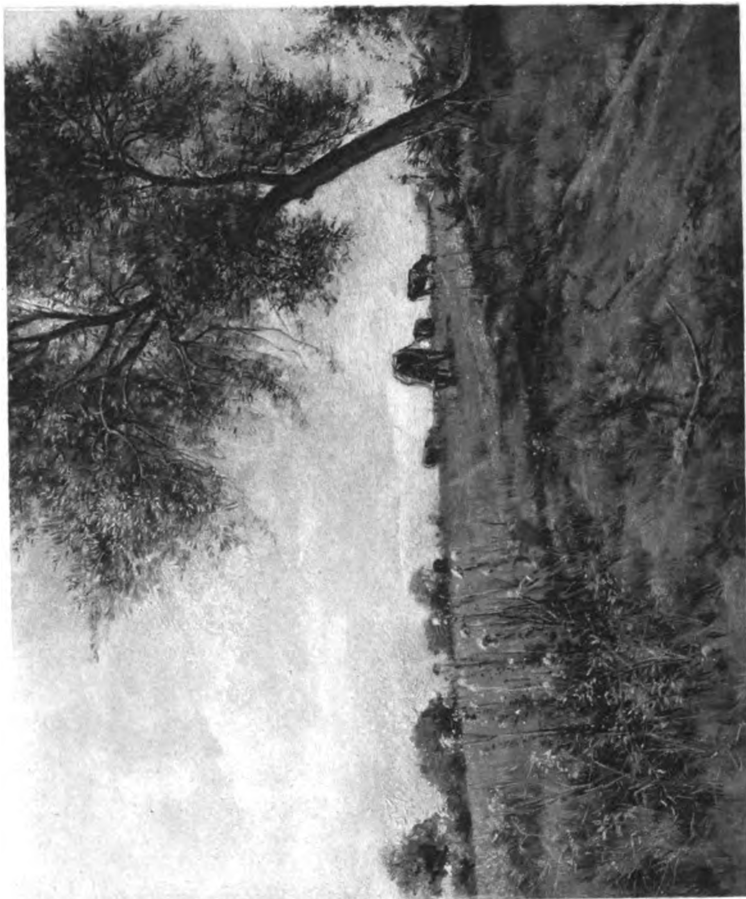

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will get plenty of shooting. Now and then, if very hard pressed, the rabbit when dislodged will make clean across the open common to some cover a hundred yards or more distant; but more usually it will scuttle away to the nearest patch of cover, so that it is generally a case of snap-shooting. Two guns are ample for this form of sport, and, indeed, more than that number are apt to be in the way and even dangerous to each other. Rabbit-shooting accidents *will* occur from time to time in spots like this when the shooting-party is too large, as it is not possible to preserve a line for long and the guns cannot see one another in such thick cover. Rabbits are very partial to making their 'forms' under the shelter of the thickest furze bushes, where they lie very close, and even the dog which spares itself least gets tired of bursting through these terribly punishing bits of cover after the first hour or two of hunting. The keeper or the beater, who is well protected by high leggings, will not hesitate to go in among the low patches of furze round which the dogs run eagerly waiting for the first sight of the rabbit they can scent, but shrink from bursting in among those cruel spikes. Out he comes, often

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almost knocking against a dog or two in his frantic haste, and in a flash is half-way across the bit of open which divides the furze bush from the miscellaneous mass of dense cover where is safety. It is quick work for the gun, and a double shot is often out of the question should the first barrel fail to bowl him over. Every now and then, too, the shot has to remain unfired owing to the fact that the dogs are at the flying rabbit's heels: one can sometimes scarcely help half getting up the gun at the rabbit when the dogs are dangerously near, but no one under such circumstances will be so unsportsmanlike as to pull the trigger. Rabbits are always more plentiful on the common than in the wood, and they lie much more above ground there, the cover being in most places far thicker. On the common it is nearly all snap-shooting, only an occasional rabbit taking boldly to the open. In the wood, on the other hand, when the leaf is well off in November, one can often get something like a deliberate and unhurried aim at rabbits crossing, or getting up under the feet and going straight away over a fairly open piece of ground in the shoots.

The woods are nowhere divided up scientifically

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for shooting purposes, and the usual method is to shoot from one ride or woodland path to another, the guns all entering the cover at the same time at a given signal and endeavouring to keep as much as possible in line. Scattered among the guns, and in line with them, will be two or three beaters, perhaps, and from half a dozen to a dozen dogs are used. Some of the very best dogs for rabbiting I have ever known have been small spaniels with terrier blood in their veins. I can recall two such dogs which we used for years, and better ones for rabbiting, whether on common or in wood, no man could wish for. Beagles are also often used for rabbiting, but unless under perfect control they are exasperating dogs when they get on the track of a hare. An obstinate beagle will follow a hare in the woods—you will scarcely meet with a hare on the common from year's end to year's end—for a matter of miles. All the whistling and shouting in the world will not bring the brute back till its own chosen time. The man with the obstinate beagle is a sad nuisance. His loud whistlings to his dog, which is giving tongue a quarter of a mile off or more, the vows he registers to thrash that dog when it

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does return—how painfully familiar to some of us are these things!

The pleasures of the first regular rabbit-shoot of the season on a clear, crisp November day in the woods are scarcely to be despised even by those who do not hide their preference for big bags of rocketing pheasants, driven grouse, or partridges. The air of the bright winter morning in these high spots in the chalk is a rare tonic, and there is a beauty in the bare woods which the eye gets to love only less than it loves the flush of spring and the perfect beauty of June. In many a spot the pink berries of the spindle tree give a dash of bright colour to the sober-tinted landscape; and later on, when the hard weather comes, the evergreen firs, which are sprinkled here and there throughout the wood, and the brown bracken, which is everywhere, have their exquisite filigree of frost and frosted snow as lovely and delicate as any feature of the summer-time.

The berries of the spindle tree will hang on the whole of the winter long after the last leaf has fallen, and next to the well-named traveller's joy, or wild clematis, this is the most ornamental of all our south-country hedgerow bushes at this time of

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year. The mezereon, unfortunately, is not to be seen in these woods. Its pretty fragrant blossoms are, or were, not a great while ago, to be found in Harewood Forest, a few miles off, where it has long been recognised as growing in a wild state, and Miller in his botanical dictionary says that it has been found in various woods in the neighbourhood of Andover, and transplanted into many gardens round that town. Early in April the mezereon's bright blossoms are to be seen in a good many cottage gardens in Longparish, Hurstbourne Priors, and elsewhere, and in the first-named I have noticed a fine dark variety. It blossoms even before the snowdrop dares, and in mild winters may be discovered by its strong smell as early as the beginning of January, which is, however, exceptionally soon even for mezereon.

To revert to sport: if a good number of beaters were used, and the chief burrows ferreted and stopped up the day before the shooting-party assembled, there is little doubt that bigger bags of rabbits could be made, even in those parts of the wood least adapted to the battue system, than one can expect to put together by using only dogs and walking the woods in line.

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For half a dozen guns to kill over a hundred head is very exceptional, and indeed sixty or seventy head at the beginning of the season has always been regarded as distinctly good. Such sport may seem trivial to those who are accustomed to bags of over three and four hundred rabbits, and to whom bags of over a thousand rabbits are by no means unknown. But certainly there is no form of rabbit-shooting which calls for more skill in the sportsman than does this one of walking in line and trusting to dogs to put up most of the game.

Rabbits put up by dogs have a way of travelling very quick, and to bag them in the high wood or in shoots of three or four years old is a harder thing than to stand at one's ease in a broad open space and take them as they cross. The gunner himself, too, will put up a good many rabbits as he walks through the fern, bramble, tufts of dead coppice grass, and he must be very quick and wide awake to make sure of adding to his score. Rabbits, when they lie above ground in the daytime, like to find a snug place if possible among the dead undergrowth of the wood, but in the high wood of

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from twelve to fifteen years old, where there is hardly ever any 'lay,' they may often be found in their 'forms,' in among the stems of hazel or oak. Hares, too—which seem to prefer the high wood to the shoots—often lie in similar spots. As hares never hang or dodge about like rabbits, but go straight away to considerable distances, one or two guns will sometimes desert the line and get well forward to the next woodland path, where they may get a few fair open shots. Frequently, when several dogs are giving tongue, rabbits will steal about, apparently listening, and undecided as to the best direction in which to go: a hare in the woods never does this, but canters straight away, and will frequently leave the woods and take to the open fields. Hares rarely form any considerable part of the mixed bags made up in the wood and on the common, and half a dozen to every seventy or eighty rabbits would be well above the average. There are probably a good many more hares in the wood than commonly supposed, but one rarely gets within shot of them when shooting in line with dogs: to shoot hares in a large wood you need plenty of beaters, and the cover,

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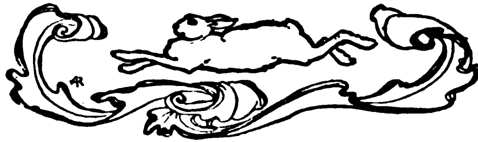
moreover, should be divided up for sporting purposes. Hares, I fancy, breed at times late in the season. I heard in 1880 of leverets, only a few days old, found on September 24 in a wood in the district, and I have other notes of hares breeding during the same month. The really large, thick wood is not by any means the natural home of the hares, but I should say, only the resting-place of a certain number during the daytime.



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CHAPTER XI

Winter Sport and Wild Life—*continued*

At the end of October the woodcock begins to appear in Hampshire woods, though the great majority of these birds do not arrive till November. The wood and the common are in some seasons favourite resorts of the woodcock, and as many as a dozen have been flushed during a day's rabbit-shooting. The chance of getting a brace of woodcock adds much to the pleasure and zest of rabbit-shooting, and in the prevailing desire to be the hero of the day a good many rather wild shots are fired, I am afraid, in the course of the season. I have sometimes

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put up woodcock in the three or four year old shoots, which have offered the easiest of flying shots, the birds travelling straight at first and much less rapidly than a partridge. But as a rule the woodcock is a decidedly difficult bird to hit, though an extremely easy bird to bring down if hit. He twists like a corkscrew, and when he has got fairly on the wing will often dash in and out among the trees at a high speed. A successful right and left at woodcock in our North Hampshire woods and coppices is probably a very rare occurrence, though common enough to be quite unworthy of record in Ireland, if not also in Norfolk and one or two other English counties. Chantrey's right and left at woodcock are as immortal in the world of sport as in that of sculpture. One late afternoon in midwinter I flushed three which were lying within a few yards of one another in high wood; it is very uncommon to find two, much less three, so close to one another. In the daytime woodcock will lie often enough on the dead hazel leaves in an open spot in the woods. Once, whilst I was ferreting, my eye met that of a large woodcock squatting on

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some leaves in the high wood, within half a dozen yards of me. This bird had made for itself a regular 'form' like a rabbit's, and was probably sleeping when I disturbed it. It did not rise till I was within a yard and a half of it and could almost have knocked it over with a stick.

The woodcock has its regular feeding-ground chiefly, I believe, on the common or in soft spots in the woods, and in the dusk of a winter's evening you may see the birds twisting over and among the oaks on their way to these places. It is a curious local belief that the woodcock lives by suction of the ground and nothing else: the error very likely owes its origin to some keeper or keepers having seen the birds plunging their long beaks into the soft soil. It is not often one finds undigested food in the stomach of the woodcock, as it feeds by night, but some years ago I did discover a beetle in an autopsy on a bird shot in the morning. Gilbert White tells us he was never able to find anything in his autopsies on woodcock but 'a soft mucus, among which lay many pellucid small gravels.' No matter what the woodcock feeds on, its entrails are dainty and

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appetising. A certain naval officer, having had a woodcock given to him, invited a friend to dine. The ship's cook removed the entrails of the bird, which made the captain very angry. He sent for the cook and protested in forcible language against what had been done. Next evening the two friends dined together again, and a goose formed the chief course. The cook, resolved not to get into trouble again, served up the bird with its entrails carefully cooked and arrayed on toast. The lady who told me the story was unable to say what happened when that strange dish was served up.

For years I have kept a careful look-out, and have made many inquiries, but have never discovered any instance of the woodcock nesting in the wood. Occasionally a bird is seen in the early part of April, but not later. More than five-and-twenty years ago, however, a pair of woodcock nested in a large wood—now almost entirely grubbed—on the other side of the little valley of the Bourne, and Mr. Maber, the Earl of Carnarvon's head keeper, tells me that the bird does occasionally nest at Highclere. About twenty years ago a woodcock was found sitting

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on four eggs (ultimately safely hatched) in a coppice called Big Pen Wood, which, owing to its rather marshy character, is a favourite spot with woodcock. Mr. Maber tells me that he has also found the woodcock nesting on the Duke of Grafton's estate in Suffolk, which is less remarkable. I can hear of no instance of the woodcock staying to nest in the upper Test valley in the neighbourhood of Newton Stacey or Wherwell, though the bird frequents Harewood Forest in the winter months. In the south-east and south-west of the county the woodcock nests more or less regularly. 'The woodcock still breeds pretty freely in the New Forest,' writes the Hon. Gerald Lascelles in answer to my inquiries; 'and there are few seasons in which I do not hear of several nests.'

The first woodcock of the young gunner in the south of England, where the bird is never really abundant—what a thrilling experience that is! My first woodcock I can never forget whilst any memory of sport remains to me. The exact spot where the bird was flushed, the two spaniels with which I was shooting, the character of the day—a bright, warm November one—the way in

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which the bird flew, the distance at which I brought it down, the exultation over my unlooked-for success: these and other even more trivial incidents are to-day as vivid in my memory as they were some twenty years since. The joys one derives from bringing down one's first woodcock, from netting one's first glorious purple emperor butterfly, from hooking and landing one's first good trout with a small floating olive dun, cannot be put into words: they elude one like the glimmer on the emperor's wings.

The weights of game birds are not without a certain interest. The woodcock, it is well known, occasionally attains to a surprising size, but I have never heard of one which approached that monstrous bird of which Yarrell tells us in his *British Birds*. I take two entries from my notebook on this subject. 'A woodcock which I shot to-day (December 26) weighed little short of 1 lb. avoirdupois. A partridge (English) weighed the other day was exactly 1 lb. avoirdupois, whilst two others weighed about 1½ oz. less apiece.' . . . 'Three woodcock shot here (one on December 30th and two on January 1st) were weighed. One was just over ¾ lb., and

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the other two were exactly ¾ lb. apiece.' 'It may interest you to know,' writes A. C. C. on October 9, 1898, 'that I weighed last week, one evening after shooting, 40 brace of English partridges. These scaled 67¾ lbs., or almost exactly 13½ oz. a bird. Ten brace of French partridges scaled 20¼ lbs., or say 1 lb. a bird. They were old birds and young taken just as they came, rather more young, however, than old.'

The pheasant, like the jack snipe, has the secret of how to be fat in apparently the leanest of seasons. When the weather is most severe, both these birds are plump and excellent for the table. Our pheasants are now entirely wild, save for such artificially reared birds as may find their way now and then to the wood from smaller plantations and coppices in the neighbourhood. Considering the extent of the cover, they are certainly not abundant from the game preserver's point of view, but there are few parts of this great wood where a nest or two may not be found in the spring. Two thousand rabbits, seventy hares, and two hundred and sixty pheasants, or a total of two thousand three hundred and thirty

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head, exclusive of a few woodcock, etc., are the figures of the game-book for one year—1897.

In the case of a large wood, one can never fail to be struck by the rather terrible truth of the words of the hero of *Maud* in his bitter mood—

'For nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal';

It says much for the great fecundity of the rabbit that the little animal ever thrives and increases, no matter how numerous its hunters, human and other, may be. To keep down stoats and weasels in a large, thick wood requires the constant services of several keepers. You cannot take many walks through the woods, either in winter or summer, without seeing something of one of these bloodthirsty little creatures. The stoat is less abundant than the weasel, but by no means rare. It is the more powerful animal of the two, and therefore perhaps the more destructive among game. The most remarkable thing about both stoats and weasels is the concentration which they display in hunting rabbits. They will stick to the same rabbit, chasing it sometimes from burrow to burrow, from thicket to thicket, though plenty of opportunities may

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present themselves of seizing another rabbit which they meet with while engaged in their terrible work. A rabbit has no chance against either a stoat or a weasel, unless it can get to the small end of a blind hole, and, squeezing himself in, prevent the pursuer from getting at a vital part; in which case the balked creature will simply scratch the rabbit's back absolutely bare of the last vestige of fur. The ferret will do the same in the rare instances where a rabbit gets out of reach in this way. I recollect once digging down upon a rabbit after a long wait, and discovering a portion of the poor animal's back perfectly naked, the ferret having been scraping away at it for over an hour. Hares, I fancy, do not, save where they are very numerous, so very often fall victims, for it is the habit of the hare to go straight off to a great distance. Unless, therefore, the stoat or weasel can damage the hare, or seize it in the 'form,' the chances must be much in favour of the latter: a stoat or weasel, I take it, is not likely to follow a hare for miles from wood to open fields or the reverse. Both stoats and weasels will bolt before a ferret: I have seen this myself several times

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whilst ferreting in the woods. Keepers have told me of cats bolting before a ferret, which, however, should not be placed in holes where a fox is suspected of dwelling, as in that case it may not come out again. That weasels and stoats should often bolt before a ferret, which a large rat will sometimes boldly face, does not say much for their courage. The weasel, indeed, I believe to be an arrant coward. When itself pursued in the open, or in the low shoots, it screams with fear as loud as the wretched rabbit screams in death agony. It is also a well-known fact that a spirited old doe rabbit will, by showing a little courage, frequently drive off a stoat or weasel which is threatening her young. Stoats sometimes make their nest and have their young in holes in trees at some height from the ground. A friend told me he once saw a stoat bring down her young from an elm tree, dropping them one by one from a low branch to the ground. When all the stoats were together they made a bee-line to the nearest hen-roost. He thinks he never saw a prettier sight!

The rabbit's human enemy in the shape of the poacher has of course to be reckoned with. I am

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not going to defend or extenuate poaching, but I must say I have no difficulty in understanding the fascination of it. The professional poacher, unless he be of a singularly phlegmatic temperament, must live a life of excitement. Of the ruffian who goes about with a short gun in his pocket, which he will use against a man as well as a pheasant, I say nothing; but there is the poacher, beyond doubt, who would rather never lay another wire for rabbit or pheasant, rather never ferret another burrow than take away or injure human life, and who in some respects has quite the instincts of the sportsman. I do not want to pat him on the back or urge him on to fresh exertions, but I do say that there is something to interest one about this hunter of game. There must be excitement in the possibility that you, the stalker, are yourself very likely being stalked, in the thought that the gentleman in the brown velveteen with his gun under his arm—the cynosure of every village eye —may emerge from that bush yonder in the grey of the winter morning just as you are placing your hand on the wired rabbit, and exclaim, 'I know you, so and so: it's no use your running!'

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The poacher has to be constantly on the alert, ready to be off at the least sound of a suspicious character in the brushwood and thickets around. At any time when ferreting he may have to hastily snatch up his nets and leave the burrow with his ferret inside, not daring to wait till the rabbit bolts. Often he must hear the tread of the keeper along the woodland walks whilst he is ferreting or setting or examining his wires, and then trust him to keep as still as death, far stiller, may be, than is necessary, till the footsteps die away in the distance.

There is always something alluring even in the work of snaring the wild animals of the wood when one has the perfect right to do it. The cruel old gin-trap, though still legitimate when set within six feet of a hole, or actually within a hole, has happily gone almost entirely out of use, so far as rabbits and hares are concerned, in our part of the country. Four single wires twisted together are invariably used for snaring rabbits, and sometimes six for a hare. The wire loop or slip-knot is set over the rabbits' run or jump. There are two ways of securing and setting this snare. One way—by far the neatest

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and best, though not always the most practicable —is to suspend the loop from a stem or sufficiently strong twig above the run or jump by means of the stout piece of string attached to the end of the wire. The other method is to set the wire over the spot selected by means of a small cleft stick which holds it in position : the string is in this method tied to a stout, short stick which is driven into the ground and carefully concealed from the rabbit's view. The snares are commonly set towards the evening, and visited very early next morning. After a little practice almost any one can snare a rabbit or hare, but the casual amateur snarer will never be able to compete against the professional, who gets to know to a nicety the exact spots in which to set his wires and the way in which to avoid arousing the rabbit's suspicions—for there should be the least possible disturbance of, or contact with, the ground round the spot where the snare is set. I am afraid I cannot agree with those who tell us that rabbits are often killed almost instantaneously by these wires through the breaking of their necks. Such is not my experience, but I am sure that wiring is far less painful than

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trapping, and we owe what is practically the abolition of the detestable old gin-trap to the Ground Game Act. As to the pole-trap for feathered vermin, it is a detestable instrument which I am happy to say is never seen in our wood. The pole-trap is a contrivance of disgusting torture, and it destroys perfectly innocent creatures such as the charming brown or tawny owl.

One of the most active, successful, and daring poachers I ever heard of in the district was a lady poacher. This extraordinary female was known far and wide, and she had the reputation—of which, small doubt, she was proud—of being one of the most skilful hands at snaring pheasants as well as rabbits and hares. She would find out exactly where a family of pheasants was living, and setting several loops of two wires twisted together—a rabbit-snare would have been too stiff—in certain gaps in the thickets, through which she knew the birds were in the habit of walking or running, have a sort of 'drive' on her own account. Many a pheasant would fall to her lot in this way, and her bulky appearance after one of her expeditions would often tell its

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own tale. 'Belle'—which is the name I shall describe her by—dressed in a very short skirt made of a strong material, which enabled her to get about in the thickets almost as easily as a man, and it used to be said, probably truly, that she knew pretty well every rabbit burrow of any size in the woods, as well as in several large coppices around. From time to time she was caught by a sharp keeper or keeper's watcher, and sentence was passed upon her a good many times by the magistrates, but on the whole 'Belle,' considering her persistency, evaded justice with singular success. I recollect seeing her on the common and in the woods now and then when I was out shooting or ferreting by myself, and I recollect that she always seemed extremely intent on gathering wood—wood, I fancy, that was never taken home to burn, and was dropped as soon as the intruder was out of sight. 'Belle' has disappeared from the neighbourhood, but there are few keepers round about who have not a tale or two to tell, illustrating her complete mastery of the poacher's craft. There is no doubt that she was a poacher in a thousand.

In some parts of England the badger, of

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which we have heard so much in recent years, is still fairly abundant, but in ours the animal ever since I can remember has been somewhat scarce. The badger in this part of the country is rather a vagrant, moving about from wood to wood. Sometimes for months together you might search the woods without seeing a sign of one of these animals, and at other times there will be perhaps three or four about. A badger or two in a large wood, where rabbits are very plentiful, will do but little harm, and it seems absurd to levy war upon these interesting creatures as enemies of the game preserver. One fox in a few nights will play more havoc in the coverts than a couple or more badgers in a month. Digging out a badger used at one time to be a regular though not very frequent sport in the woods. I recollect once going with the keeper to see the great burrow in the clay and chalk of the Hanging, in which a badger had just taken up its quarters, having arrived from a wood on the other side of the valley. We had no sooner reached the spot than the keeper exclaimed that some one had been there within the last twenty-four hours. There were some signs of digging,

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the marks of several heavy boots, and, when we came to look more closely into the matter, we discovered spots of candle grease at the mouth of the largest entrance-hole. The truth dawned on the keeper at once: a party of poachers had been to the spot during the past night, and no doubt secured the quarry. It must have been an exciting 'badger hunt' that by the feeble light of a few tallow candles on a dark, cold winter's night. I have known a badger dig for over an hour, and fight the various dogs, chiefly mongrels from far and wide, with the utmost spirit for a long while before being secured. The badger backs out of the hole, which has often enough been dug by the spades of the hunters, is seized by one of the party, who understands the job and will not shrink from it at the critical moment, and is plunged head foremost into the sack held open to receive him. Brock, poor fellow, then recognises that the game is up, and makes no further disturbance, but allows himself to be carried off without a struggle. It is a curious fact that rabbits are often to be found inhabiting burrows which hold badgers, but it should be added that they use only those passages which are too small

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for their enemies to get through. The rabbit would appear to have a far greater horror of a ferret—and no wonder—than of a badger. It will not use the burrow in which a ferret has been for at least a fortnight, unless it happens to be driven there by dogs. I cannot say whether a stoat or weasel is equally repugnant to the rabbit in this respect; but perhaps not, seeing that the ill odour of the ferret is exceptional even among the *Mustelidæ*. I never used to think of ferreting the same burrow more than once in a fortnight, or once in three weeks. One word here, by the way, on ferreting. Is it not a rather curious fact that rabbits always bolt so badly before the ferret on roaring days? I have again and again noticed that rabbits bolt best on dry and still days. Yet they are extremely acute in hearing, and will often prefer to 'lie up' and meet death from the ferret rather than bolt if there has been any disturbance or loud sound outside their holes. One must keep very quiet when ferreting, and above all refrain from talk.

In shooting ferreted rabbits in the wood, more than one gun is undesirable and even unsafe. I always prefer the party to consist of only my-

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self and the keeper or one companion, and it is essential for the gunner and the ferreter to stand close together to avoid any possibility of an ugly mishap. Bolted rabbits are uncommonly hard to kill in cover, and they have a habit of coming out of their burrows in the most unexpected way. Many burrows have what are called 'pop' holes, which the ferreter is very apt to overlook. These 'pop' holes are small, round, straight shafts often well concealed by broken or coarse grass. Keepers sometimes say that the artful rabbit deliberately designs them as secret exits from the burrow. Probably their origin is quite accidental. The rabbit in tunnelling will occasionally no doubt meet some hard substance which causes him to work upwards almost to the surface, and he or some other rabbit may then very easily sink a small, straight shaft into the passage beneath. When the rabbit bolts from one of these unobserved exits, he is often nearly out of shot before the surprised gunner has time to bring his weapon to bear. Ferreting is fairly good fun when the rabbits bolt freely, but it is weary work when they 'lie up' on stormy days. At such times, especially when the burrow is deep, there is often

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not the faintest sound to guide one as to the whereabouts of the rabbit and ferret, and it is rarely any use digging on chance. A spade is a heavy tool to drag about in the woods from burrow to burrow, and some will prefer to risk the chance of the rabbit refusing to bolt and allowing itself to be killed by the ferret underground. A good, stout, well-sharpened stake of oak or hazel will do instead of a spade when the ground is soft, and it can be cast aside when done with. Some people tie a line round their ferrets' necks before putting them into a burrow, but this precaution is not often a success. The twine will very likely get twisted round a root, and the ferret, moreover, scarcely works so well under this restraint as it does when free. Others attach a bell to a small collar placed round the ferret's neck, but I have never myself found this of much assistance in the case of large and deep burrows which pierce the clay and enter the chalk.

There is this to be said in favour of ferreting: it is a quiet, leisurely kind of sport, which enables one to see and enjoy a good deal of the wild life of the winter woods. When the weather is hard,

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and the snow lies on the ground, we see more of the wild life of the woodlands than through the late summer and the autumn. Flocks of several hundred long-tailed, coal, marsh, and great titmice, accompanied by golden wrens, tree-creepers, and nuthatches, frequent both the high and low wood at this season, and work up and down, searching every nook and cranny for food. Often one may see a sparrow-hawk following flocks, to presently swoop down and seize a dainty morsel. Then there ensues a vast commotion, and sometimes the hawk has to submit, even whilst engaged in tearing to pieces its prey, to the indignity of a mobbing by the excited titmice. He is not, however, to be shaken off by clamour, and will enjoy his meal in spite of the uproar. The twittering of the long-tailed titmouse and the sharp, loud cry of the nuthatch are very familiar sounds of the winter woods. The nuthatch, I believe, like the squirrel and the dormouse, takes thought for the morrow. At any rate, I have found in a hole in a lime-tree, inhabited by a pair or more of these birds the whole year round, a store of hazel nuts. Squirrels collect nuts and acorns, which they store up in their nests or

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'dreys'[1] for winter use. The squirrel is an attractive little animal full of sprightly ways, and a superb jumper. Possibly he retards the growth of the young larches a little now and then by nipping off their tender tops, and he may even suck a few birds' eggs from time to time—though I am not clear about this—but the keeper may rest assured that he is not worth powder and shot. Squirrels build new nests for the reception of their young every spring—they have two sets of young, one in April and the other in July—but they frequently use old nests to shield themselves from the cold. Four or more squirrels will sleep in the same nest in bitter weather. In the same way wrens will crowd together in a hole in a thatched roof or in an old nest and sleep in a bunch. Jesse, in his *Natural History Gleanings*, says that he once took three or four wrens out of a snug hole. But one bitter winter evening I took upwards of *thirty* of these birds out of a hole in a thatched roof. When released they went back one after another to the same spot.

[1] The country-people in North Hants, as already mentioned, and also in and about the New Forest, speak of a squirrel's 'drey,' and hardly ever 'nest.' The word, according to Mr. Wise in his delightful work on the Forest, means in the Midlands 'a cage.' William Browne, the Pastoral Poet, uses it in connection with squirrels. The squirrel itself is often called the 'scuggy' or 'scuggie.'

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Long-tailed titmice sleep in a bunch on tree or bush, and partridges in a bunch in the open fields, often enough in the midst of the frozen snow.

Cruel are the privations and sufferings of many of the winged creatures of the common and woodland when the snow lies thick and the frost shrivels up even the leaves of the laurels round the house. On the common and in the open spaces the unfortunate fieldfare becomes a mere bag of skin and bones, a feathered skeleton. The jay itself, as I showed in a previous chapter, will actually come near to dreaded man and his works when an Arctic winter drives it there; but the fieldfare, though so nearly related to the thrush and blackbird of our shrubberies and gardens, will not venture within a hundred yards of the house in the woods. He hops about the common, growing feebler and feebler every day, till one night he drops dead as he roosts. Goldfinches, bullfinches, thrushes, blackbirds, jays, starlings—these with the fieldfares seem to be the first to suffer. In the open fields the larks, which form immense flocks, get some green food to keep them alive, and the wood-pigeon may be found fairly fat in the midst of a general bird famine. Among the

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flocks of finches and other birds to be found in the fields and open spaces in the woods during the very severe weather is the handsome brambling. The siskin I have myself not happened to see farther south than Oxfordshire in winter. Golden wrens seem more numerous in winter than in spring or summer, and these lovely little birds with their burnished, glistening crests do not appear to suffer nearly so much as one might expect. The golden wren, shaking the snow from the fir as he flutters from stem to stem, and often hangs for a second or two head downwards, is one of the daintiest of woodland sights. In April the golden wrens weave nests of moss as dainty as themselves in the firs of the shrubberies and plantations. 'Small, but a work divine,' is the tiniest British bird's nest. Very pleasing, too, on crisp winter days is the midget music of this cheerful mite.

Vast flocks of pigeons, composed principally of wood-pigeons, with a few stockdoves and rock-doves added to their numbers, used to roost in the woods some twenty years ago, feeding by day on the swede and turnip tops in the neighbouring fields. Nowadays one does not often see these legions, but flocks of some hundreds, if not

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thousands, frequent the woods every hard winter. Although the wood-pigeons, which have settled in the London parks and several of the larger squares,[1] are so tame and confiding, the bird is ordinarily one of our wildest species, especially during the autumn and winter months. As spring draws on, the wood-pigeon loses a little of its wildness, and I have often got almost under one of these birds hovering like a hawk, as they will sometimes do, thirty or forty yards above the underwood, where the nest will presently be built. In winter you cannot often get within shot of the wood-pigeon in the daytime, except by surprising the bird in the underwood, when it will sometimes blunder up from the ground, or off from an oak or fir tree, affording a difficult snap-shot. It is next to impossible to get at the large flocks feeding in the open fields, but capital and exhilarating sport may be got by shooting the birds when they come to their roosting-quarters in the evening.

The wood-pigeons, during cold weather, always look out for as warm, or, to use a favourite word

[1] Amongst other places where the wood-pigeon has nested in London of recent years outside the parks are Mecklenburg Square, Bloomsbury, Fountain Court, Temple, and the Little Cloisters, Westminster Abbey.

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in this connection with keepers and woodmen, as 'succoury' a spot as possible, and they shift their roosting-place according to the quarter in which the wind sits. There will be in a large wood quite two favourite roosting-places, and two guns, one stationed at each spot, will often be able to do considerable execution, as the pigeons when shot at in the one spot will fly very likely to the other. The birds come in just before dark, and it is an exciting moment when fifty or more, after circling round several times, drop down into the very oak or fir tree under which one has been crouching and waiting for the arrival of the flock for half an hour or more. One must shoot the birds sitting or not shoot them at all in this situation, but it is by no means always the case of an easy 'pot shot.' Some of the pigeons will be sure to see the gunner the instant they alight, and he must select his bird or birds and fire without delay; otherwise every pigeon will be up and off before he has time to aim. The birds alight close to one another, often weighing down the branches by their combined weight, and it is possible to secure a brace and even two brace at a shot. It is also possible to get nothing, though an apparently true aim has been taken at three or four birds almost touching

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one another. The wood-pigeon's plumage is so close and thick that the bird takes a great deal of killing, and there are usually a certain number of twigs and small branches between the gunner and the pigeon which help to divert a part of the charge. After being shot at, the pigeons will very likely fly off to the spot where the second gun is posted, and may when shot at there return to the first alighting spot.

There is a solemnity and a glamour about the winter woods in the fast-fading light, which add not a little to the fascination of the sport. When the ground is covered with the frosted snow, which may often be seen glittering in the daylight, and later on also, when the moon is up, at a distance of a hundred yards, every sound falls with intense clearness on the ear of the sportsman as he lies in wait for his quarry. The scamper of the rabbits over the frozen hazel and oak leaves, and the hesitating step of the hare, can be heard at considerable distances. The night side of Nature in the deep wood has, too, a certain eeriness, such as the wild-fowler on the moonlit marsh will often be conscious of: an eeriness that not repels but attracts the lover of Nature. The voices of the tawny owl and the roaming fox, the

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ghostlike forms of the 'grey grown oaks' along the woodland walks are familiar sounds and sights to which the oncoming winter night lends a certain indefinable mystery of its own.

A great wood to be enjoyed and understood should indeed be lived in the whole year round. Each season, each month, has its own beauties and delights which cannot pall, cannot lose their freshness. On the dreariest midwinter day we may think with a pang of the great days lived among the wood-warblers and fritillaries and blossoms of the summer-time past; but if we glance back with regret, we also look forward with joy to the time when the larches put on that tenderest green of theirs, and the wind-thrush builds, and the beautiful wild cherry-tree flowers, and the sulphur butterfly awakes to tell as clear as clear can be of the coming of spring.

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INDEX

ALICE HOLT FOREST, 5.
Amport, 10.
Anna Brook, or Pilhill, 7.
Anton, 114.
Anton at Clatford, 114.
Avon, the river, 9.
Aylmer's Field quoted, 49.
Azure blue, 189.

BADGER, 283.
Badger hunt, an exciting, 285.
Bagley woods, Oxon, 188.
Bark-stripping, 250.
Bean goose by Test, 134.
Bere Forest, 5.
Bentley wood, 5.
Bewick and garden warbler, 50.
Bidwell, Mr., and cuckoo, 92.
Birds' eggs, mysterious markings on, 146.
Birds in confinement, 69.
Bird-life in severe weather, 291.
Bird's-nesting boys, 141.
Birds' nests in curious places, 146.
Birds' 'note of alarm,' 75.
Birds' song can rarely be written down, 74.
Birds which breed late, 164.
Blackbird's undersong, 52.
Blackcap as singer, 50.
Blackcap, female, singing, 50.
Blackcap singing whilst sitting, 50.
Blackcap's nest in peculiar position, 67.
Blackcap's undersong, 51.
Black-veined white, 183.
Blaine on landrail, 237.
Blaine's *Encyclopædia of Sport* referred to, 131.
Blind paths, nests near, 47.
Blowing Stone, the, 16.
Bluethroat, 41.
Blue titmouse, habits of, 156.
Botany, dry bones of, 208.
Bourne, the river, 7.
Brambles, birds' nests in, 46.
Brambling, 157.
Bramshill House, scenery of, 3.
Brent goose, 21.
Bret Harte quoted, 172.
Britford; a good place for birds, 21.
British Birds, with their Nests and Eggs, Butler's, quoted, 160.
Brown argus, 189.
Brown hairstreak, 183.
Brown's, James, *Forester*, 249.
Buckland's, Frank, *Curiosities of Natural History* referred to, 218.
Butler, Dr. William, quoted, 213.
Butterflies, hybernating, 184.

Digitized by Google

Butterflies in late May and early June, 66.
Butterflies in late summer, 214.
Butterflies, professional collectors of, 184.
Butterfly season, real, 185.
Butterfly year, 1877 a good, 191.
Butterfly year, 1879 a bad, 186.
Buzzard in Johnson's *Dictionary*, 171.

CAMBERWELL BEAUTY, 190.
Carlisle, Major, on Test, 98.
Carrion crow at Chelsea, 71.
Carrion crow, 176.
Chafin quoted, 23.
Chalk-hill blue, 189.
Chalk stream, the, 23.
Chantrey's 'right and left,' 270.
Chiff-chaff's familiar notes, 75.
Chilton-Foliatt, 16.
Chute Forest, 4, 5.
Clifden blue, 189.
Clouded yellow, 196.
Clouded yellow, variety of, 197.
Clutterbuck, Rev. R., quoted, 26.
Coal titmouse, number of eggs laid by, 156.
Cobbett's, Richard, 'acre of hares,' 27.
Cobbett's, Richard, *Rural Rides*, 14.
Collectors, feeling against, 138.
Combe, church and churchyard at, 12.
Combe Gibbet, 13.
Combe, hills at, 10.
Comma butterfly, 190.
Common curlew, 240.
Common or corn bunting, 157.
Coot known well to Romans, 133.
Crossbill, 158.
Cruelty to animals, movement against, 138.
Cuckoo calling at night, 59.
Cuckoo's egg found in various nests, 91.
Cuckoo ejecting young birds, 88.
Cuckoo in wren's nest, 89.
Culpepper's *Herbal* referred to, 212.
Curlews by Coquet, 241.
Curlews in *Locksley Hall*, 241.
Cutting timber, 248.

DANEBURY HILL, 3.
Daniel's *Rural Sports* referred to, 131.
Dartford warbler, 157.
Deforestation; effect on rainfall, 6.
Devil's Ditch or Wansdyke, 35.
Dictionary of National Biography quoted, 87.
Dingy skipper, 188.
Dipper, 30.
Domed nests of birds, 77.
Dotterel, 26.
'Drifting' the dry fly, 118.
Duke of Burgundy fritillary, 87.

EAST ANTON said to be Vindomis, 28.
Egbury Hill, 4.
Empress, 192.
Entrenchments, British or Roman, 3.
Evelyn on Hungerford, 16.
Evelyn referred to, 249.

Digitized by Google

Evening, birds singing in the, 56.
Eversley, 2.
Extinct British birds and insects, 138.

Ferreting, 286.
Fieldfare, 291.
Fille Fjeld, 159.
Fine tackle in angling, 115.
Flowers in late May and early June, 64.
Flower names, the old familiar, 209.
Forestry and game preserving, 243.
Fragrance of woods in June, 57.
Freefolk, mills at, 97.
Fritillaries, pearl-bordered and small pearl-bordered, 65.
Fritillaries, the larger, 195.
Froude at Bossington, 98.
Fungi, edible, 213.

Gamekeepers and wild life, 167.
Garden warbler, 73.
Garden warbler as singer, 50.
Garden warbler's nest, 45.
Garganey, 21.
Gilbert White and bustard, 24.
Gilbert White on nightjar, 80.
Gilbert White on stone curlew, 240.
Gilbert White on woodcock, 271.
Glanville fritillary, 182.
Golden-crested wren, 292.
Golden eye, 21.
Goldfinch by Test, 136.
Goonhilly Downs, 159.
Goosander or dun diver, 21, 31.
Gould and cuckoo, 88.
Grasshopper warbler, 157.
Grasshopper warbler by Test, 134.
Grayling butterfly, 195.
Greasy fritillary, 182.
Great Bedwin for rare butterflies, 182.
Great black woodpecker, 168.
Great black woodpecker, Mr. Gurney and, 168.
Great bustard, 23.
Great grey shrike at Homerton, 20.
Green sandpiper, 31.
Green woodpecker, 167.
Grey-hen, 31.
Grey phalarope, 30.
Grey wagtail by Test, 136, 147.
Grizzled skipper, 188.
Ground Game Act, 282.
Ground game, a splendid head of, 245.

Hampshire farm on an autumn day, 224.
Hampshire villages, a group of, 30.
Hanging, the, 210.
Hare, 267.
Harewood Forest, 5.
Hawfinch, 158.
Hawk-moths, 196.
Heat in September 1898, 200.
Henry White, Rev., and bustard, 25.
Highclere Castle, 210.
Hoare quoted, 23.
Hobby, 21.
Honey buzzard at Highclere, 170.
Honey buzzard, Gilbert White on, 170.
Hooded crow, 31.

Digitized by Google

Hoopoe, 31.
Houghton Mill, grayling at, 97.
Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* referred to, 17.
Humming-bird hawk-moth, 217.
Hurdling, 247.
Hurstbourne Park, 8, 95.
Hurstbourne Tarrant, 12.

Ibis's cuckoo list referred to, 92.
Inkpen Beacon, 8.
Insects feigning death, 162.

JACK SNIPE at Marsh Court, 130.
Jay, 154, 173.
Jenner on cuckoo, 83.
Jenyns and garden warbler, 73.
Jesse's *Country Life* referred to, 176.
Jesse on Test, 110.
Jesse on wrens, 290.
June; a month for the woods, 33.
June night in woods, 60.
June woods, sounds of, in evening, 58.

KESTREL, 172.
Kingfisher by Hampshire streams, 135.
Kingsley, Charles; his enthusiasm, 43.
Kingsley, Charles, quoted, 15, 207.
Kintbury village, 16.
Knapp's *Journal of a Naturalist* referred to, 218.

LAMBOURNE, the, 16.
Landrail, 237.
Lapwing, 131.
Lapwing's eggs, gatherers of, 132.
Lapwing, young; its comical device, 163.
Large tortoise-shell, 195.
Lathkill above Allport, 121.
Laverstoke, trout numerous at, 103.
Lesser redpole, 158.
Lesser redpole nesting near London, 142.
Linnet's eggs, dwarf specimens of, 143.
Littlecote Park, 16.
Longstock, 18.
Long-tailed titmouse, 148.
Long-tailed titmouse's nest, 150.
Long-tailed titmouse, number of eggs of, 152.

MAGPIE, 175.
Male birds incubating, 163.
Marble white, 190.
Marjoram, 209.
Markwick quoted, 217.
Marsh titmouse, 135, 155.
Marvels of flight, 172.
Mathew, Rev. M. A., and marsh warbler, 197.
Mathew, Rev. M. A., quoted, 78.
Matthew Arnold on nightingale, 40.
Maud quoted, 276.
Melodious willow wren, 78.
Merlin, 21.
Mezereon, 265.
Michael Drayton on Test and Itchen, 99.
Michael Drayton's *Polyolbion* quoted, 6.
Montagu, Colonel, and great black woodpecker, 168.
Morres, the Rev. A. P., 18.

Digitized by Google

Morris's *History of British Butterflies* referred to, 182.
Morris, Rev. F. O., on caged birds, 70.
Moss, Mr., a sick Test trout, 126.
Moths, some striking, 196.
My Old Village quoted, 253.

NATURE's busiest time, 61.
Natural May-fly used on Test, 110.
Natural history notes, 42, 143.
Natural History of Selborne quoted, 159.
Neolithic Age implements, 4.
Nettle-creepers, 75.
Netherton valley and rectory, 11.
Nightingale, 38.
Nightingale's call-note, 52.
Nightingale, Cowper on, 71.
Nightingale in confinement, 68.
Nightingale, mistakes concerning the, 38.
Nightingale's nest, difficulty in finding, 68.
Nightingale's song, Morris, Rev. F. O., on, 72.
Nightingale singing, view of, 39.
Nightingale's song ceasing after incubation, 73.
Nightingale's superb song, 49.
Nightjar, 80.
Nightjar's egg, 56.
Nightjar gun-shy, 83.
Nightjar migrates during daylight, 82.
Nightjar's nesting-place, 81.
Nightjar's whirring note, 80.
North Hampshire farm, characteristics of a, 7.
North Hampshire scenery, 1.
North-west Hampshire, scenery of, 3.
North-west Hampshire, woods in, 4.
Nuthatch, 289.
Nuthatch's nesting habits, 153.
Nuthatch's note, 75.

ORCHIS, BEE, 62.
Orchis, butterfly, 62
Orchis, green man, 63.
Orchis, purple wood, 63.
Orchis, spider, 62.
Owls hooting, question about, 173.

PARTRIDGE, big bags of, 225.
Partridge, device of, 161.
Partridge, life history of, 232.
Partridge in woods, 229.
Partridge, Mr. T. Andrews on, 232.
Partridge, Rev. H. A. Macpherson on, 232.
Partridge-shooting a healthy sport, 229.
Partridge-shooting, kite used in, 235.
Paulett, a famous Hampshire name, 10.
Payne-Gallwey, Sir R., on jack snipe, 131.
Peacock butterfly, 215.
Pearl-bordered fritillary, 186.
Pearl-bordered likeness fritillary, 182.
Peregrine falcon, 18, 22.
Peregrine falcon at Combe, 169.
Pheasants, 275.
Philosophical Transactions quoted, 84.

Digitized by Google

Pied flycatcher, 22.
Pigeon-shooting in the woods, 293.
Pigeons nesting in London, 293.
Pigeons, vast flocks of, 292.
Plants used for making refreshing drinks, 212.
Plants used medicinally, 213.
Poacher, the lady, 282.
Poaching, 278.
Poaching, fascination of, 279.
Pochard, 21.
Poletrap, 282.
Port Lane End, 49.
Port Way, 28.
Punctuality of wild creatures, 218.
Purple emperor, 191.
Purple hairstreak, 195.

Quail at Binley, 238.
Quail at Combe, 238.
Quarley Hill, 3.

Rabbits difficult to get rid of, 259.
Rabbits, harm they do to wood, 253.
Rabbit-shooting, 260.
Rabbits' 'pop' holes, 287.
Rabbits, prolificness of, 258.
'Rag' coppice, the, 43.
Rails migrating, 238.
Ravens in Hampshire, 25.
Red admiral, 216.
Red-backed shrike's egg, 56.
Red-breasted merganser, 31.
Red-legged partridge, 242.
Redstart, 204.
Redstart, Gilbert White on, 205.
Redstart's undersong, 52.
Reed-bunting by Test, 136.
Reed-bunting in winter, 157.
Reed-warbler by Test, 136.
Ringed dotterel, 162.
River's medley, the, 135.
Rock pipit, 206.
Rods for Test, 116.
Romsey, 96.
Rowley, Mr., and cuckoo, 92.
Rosebay or Persian willow herb, 63.
Rough-legged buzzard at Combe, 170.

Salisbury Cathedral spire, 9, 18.
Salisbury and neighbourhood, 18.
Salmon, Blue-Book (1898) on, 125.
Salmon feeding in fresh water, 125.
Salmon taking brimstone butterfly, 125.
Sand-grouse, 31.
Sarsen Stones of Stonehenge, 23.
Saunders, Howard, quoted, 79.
Scaup duck, 21.
Scenery enjoyed by partridge-shooter, 225.
Scenery of the winter woods, 264.
Scott's *Kenilworth* referred to, 16.
Sea trout and grilse in Test, 101.
Seebohm at Newton Stacey, 129.
Seebohm on tree pipit, 166.
Seebohm referred to, 51.
Sedge-warbler and cuckoo's egg, 91.
September on Test, 108.
September, wood bird life in, 203.
Shoveller, 21.
Sidown, 8.
Silchester, 2.
Silver-spotted blue, 189.

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Simples, 211.
Siskin, 292.
Small copper, 187.
Smew, 21.
Snaring wild animals, 280.
Snipe, bleating of, 95.
Snipe, French name for, 130.
Snipe perching in tree, 129.
Solomon's seal, 210.
Solomon's seal, bread made from, 212.
Southern Norway, crow and magpie in, 176.
Sowerby, work on botany, 212.
Sparrow-hawk, 172.
Speckled wall, 195.
Speed's Map of Hampshire, 5.
Spluttering rises of trout, 124.
Sport in Hampshire throughout the year, 222.
Sporting tenants, 243.
Spotted crake by Test, 134.
Spotted flycatcher, 163.
Squirrels, 289.
Squirrel's 'drey,' 290.
Stalking wild creatures, 233.
Starling, dwarf egg of, 145.
Sterland's *Birds of Sherwood Forest* quoted, 152.
Stoats, 276.
Stockbridge, 97.
Stonechats, habits of, 158.
Stone curlew, 22, 239.
Strathfieldsaye, 2.
Strawberries, wild, 213.
Striking a trout, 119.
Stuffed birds and preserved butterflies, 31.
Stype wood, 183.
Summer, three periods of, 199.
'Sugaring' for moths, 194.
Superstitions about birds, 173.

TANGLEY CLUMP, 8.
Tawny owl, 172.
Teal, 21.
Teal by Test, 134.
Tedworth, 18.
Tedworth hounds, the, 22.
Tennyson on a Test islet, 111.
Tennyson on yews, 13.
Test, angling in, 223.
Test at Longparish, 103.
Test flowers, 136.
Test scenery, 128.
Test, villages by, 96.
Test water flies, 107.
Testwood, salmon at, 100.
Tree-creeper, 149.
Tree-sparrow nesting near London, 142.
Tree pipit, 164.
Tree pipit, eggs of, 165.
Trout at Broadlands, 101.
Trout 'tailing,' 110.
Trout, wanton spirit of, 123.
Truffles, 26.
Tufted duck, 21, 134.
Tumuli in North-west Hampshire, 35.
Turle, Major, and jack snipe's eggs, 131.
Turle, Major, on Test trout, 105.
Twayblade, 61.

UNDERWOOD, sale of, 247.
Upton, Bourne at, 7.

VINDOMIS, 4.

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WALTHAM CHASE, 5.
Walton on the angler's life, 111.
Water-rail by Test, 133.
Waterton, Charles, and Audubon, 86.
Waterton, Charles, and Swainson, 86.
Waterton, Charles, on jay, 154.
Weasels, 276.
'Weeding' trout, 122.
Weights of game birds, 274.
Weyhill, 18.
Wherwell church, 97.
Whinchat, 159.
Whip-poor-will or nightjar, 81.
White admiral, 194.
White Horse, the, 17.
Whitethroat, dwarf eggs of, 145.
White-winged black tern, 21.
Widgeon by Test, 154.
Wild birds' notes never wearisome, 63.
Wild duck's device, 162.
Wild thyme, 209.
Willow warbler's song in late summer, 73.
Willow wren at Battersea, 70.
Winchester, 29.
Wind thrush (missel thrush), 296.
Winter bird life, 289.
Winterbourne or Porton Water, 9.
Wood argus, 195.
Woodcock, 269.
Woodcock, my first, 273.
Woodcock nesting at Highclere, 272.
Woodcock nesting in New Forest, 273.
Wood flowers, common, 211.
Woodlark, 164.
Woodman, the, 251.
Woolmer Forest, 5.
Woods in late August, 219.
Woodpecker, cry of young, 207.
Wood warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*), 37, 77, 79.
Wood warblers, eggs of, 54.
Wood warblers, nests of, 53.
Wood warblers, the, 37.
Wood white, 188.
Wye (Derbyshire) and Test compared, 112.

YARROW, 211.
Yellow wagtail by Test, 136.
Yew at Selborne, 13.
Yews in Hampshire, 13.
Yews near Bransbury, 13.

Zoologist quoted, 78.

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