



A NATURE LOVER'S NOTE BOOK

by ERIC POCHIN



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To the Reader.

This note-book has been compiled of extracts from my diary and is therefore in the nature of a scrap-book of events that I have noted as the pageant of the year has unfolded itself. For me, however, it is more, much more, than that: it is the record of much happiness.

I live in a very ordinary place and am surrounded by ordinary English countryside, but I have found that to watch, to listen and set down has been a great delight.

Therefore if by reading it you may be persuaded to do likewise, then the purpose of this book has been fulfilled and you will share the substance of which this is but the shadow.

The Author.

1 NEW YEAR'S DAY.

Cold, damp and colourless except that now and then there came a brief splash of sunshine across the sombre landscape, lacking any warmth, but bringing a welcome relief to the otherwise dull monotony and of sufficient strength to awaken a desire for more. On the first day of the year, especially in the country, with time to think, one cannot fail to be aware of an uplift of heart. It may be only the thought of something new but it provokes a fresh outlook so that it is possible to see beyond the immediate surroundings. The year has in its bosom the promise of such richness and beauty that the thought of them transfigures the bare, lifeless fields and gardens. In the mind's eye they are dressed in the mantle of summer, there is a perfume of flowers to be and the silence is lost in birdsong yet unsung.

2 It is dark when I go to town in the morning and when I return home so I only see the countryside at week-ends and on such happy occasions when I can escape the usual routine. Small grey WINTER MOTHS were very numerous in the car head-light beams as I drove home this evening. It seems strange that so delicate a living thing should exist under such adverse conditions, yet the more one learns of nature the more one comes to realise that winter is not a time of death and decay but rather of rest; and the little moths are, as it were watchmen, wakeful to carry on the promise of life whilst nature sleeps.



4 A thin covering of snow lay over the countryside when I looked out this morning. It did not lie, but left a bitterness in its wake that the slanting sunlight could not dispel. The need of good downpouring rain lately has allowed mud to gather everywhere until the streets in town are thick with the greasy black slime. Despite the luxury of asphalt paving, town is much worse than the country at such times.

5 A HOUSE SPARROW chirped with great enthusiasm above my bedroom window at dawn this morning, trying by his cheerfulness to banish winter's gloom, and wandering PEEWITS were calling across the fields in the half-light. They and the GOLDEN PLOVER will not remain hereabouts at this time of the year if there is any hint of severe weather in the air. Of late the TAWNY-OWLS have been very noisy, calling to one another throughout the night. One seems to hear more of them before and during wet weather. Sometimes the LITTLE-OWL is the noisier. Both are common here but the BARN-OWL is rare. It is a pity the latter has become so scarce of late years for it does much good in the destruction of vermin.



6 Vast flocks of BLACK-HEADED, HERRING and COMMON GULLS were assembled in the low-lying fields along the river. Each year during the winter months they are more and more in evidence and in this district seem always to move from East to West as though the river valley was in the nature of a one-way route across the country. I often observe that birds' habits are apparently governed by very rigid laws. I watched a couple of GOLDCRESTS hunting among the withered stems of the catmint on the dry-walling near the sitting-room window. What tiny things they are to survive unprotected the rigours of our winter, especially as their food consists of insects, spiders and their larvæ and eggs. One knows when they are about by the often repeated call notes "seek-see," and I am always hoping that one may prove to be the rarer FIRECREST, a winter visitor from the Continent, which is similar except that its plumage is more contrasting with a white eyestripe and flame coloured crest. To-night is TWELFTH-NIGHT but how completely this once great festival has been forgotten. It is a pity that in the modern kaleidoscope we lose so many of the old colourful occasions of life.



7 A STOAT paid a visit to the pond in the garden to-day, crouching for some time on the edge, watching the goldfish with hungry eyes but he did not interfere with them. A year or so ago one came several times and was seen crossing the lawn with a goldfish in its mouth, but I could not prove whether it was a live one it had caught or a dead one found floating on the surface after recent sharp frost. In any case the stoat is very fond of fish. The GOLDFISH live all the year round in the small pond which is about two feet deep and have often bred there. During cold weather they keep at the bottom but I have observed them shining through a thick layer of ice.



12 A fine mild day and I have seen LAMBS for the first time this year. It is an old wives' tale that if the first you see have their backs towards you, it will bring bad luck. These most assuredly had. Unhappy omen for the year! Old sayings die hard among country folk as I have been reminded to-day by an old farm-labourer who acknowledged my salutation of "Lovely day," with "If Janiveer by bright and clear we shall have winter half the year." I never remember seeing so many MOLE workings as during this winter. Is it the open weather, I wonder or have the animals become more numerous round here? And how rarely one sees the little engineer himself.



15 This morning a SONG-THRUSH was singing from his usual perch on the topmost twigs of the larch tree in the garden. He has not been there since last November. In this district during the winter there appear to be two distinct types of song-thrush, the ones that haunt the gardens and others, usually in small parties, that spend all their time in the open fields and woods, shunning the vicinity of houses and farms. They are very shy and I feel sure must be visitors from the Continent. It is of course a fact that quite apart from the well-known migrants many of the local birds move southwards or south-westwards in winter. I often wonder how the choice is made; which should go and which remain. •



16 GREEN-WOODPECKERS are about again. One hears their raucous laughing call long before one sees the bird but the loping flight from tree to tree is very obvious. The weather as the month progresses has improved but though the fields are green through lack of severe frost there is little, if any, sign of new growth. It used to be considered that a mild winter was a disadvantage to agriculture because INSECT PESTS survived in greater numbers but there is argument now that quite the reverse is the case. In mild weather, it is stated, insects are tempted to emerge from shelter but perish through lack of nutriment, whereas in a hard winter they remain torpid and survive, and I suppose debate will go back and forth until our knowledge of the subject is more accurate. Lack of frost and snow this season is very apparent in the tattered remnants of last summer's flowered gown that still survive in the hedge-bottoms. The branching stems of ANGELICA and WILD PARSLEY still stand here and there above the tangled mass, yellowed and dry but complete to the dainty, complex seed head. Bright brown fronds of BRACKEN, shrivelled but intact, shiver in the wind and bare trails of BINDWEED wind their way upwards among the bramble and briars.

18 This morning as I drove to town the sun climbed over the horizon's edge surrounded by a nimbus of exquisite rosy clouds while flocks of circling PLOVER, like a halo hung above, were seen or lost as light or shadow fell upon their wings.



Whether it is the mild weather and sunshine I do not know but HOUSE-SPARROWS were quarrelling about the nest-boxes to-day.

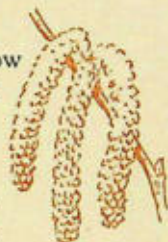
20 I watched a pair of GREATER-SPOTTED WOODPECKERS flirting in the apple trees, posing at one another with outstretched necks and playing hide and seek among the branches. How bright they looked in their pied and crimson plumage against the dull colour of the winter trees, quite mediæval in their simple finery. To-day spring seemed almost close at hand. One felt the sun; thrush, blackbird, robin and tits were singing; even a LARK poured forth his joyous spirit into the sparkling air, which seemed to carry a subtle something that reminded one of growing things. HOUSE-SPARROWS were again at the boxes near the house and the ROOKS were arguing noisily about last year's nests.



22 Yesterday was dull and colder and now it is bitter. Spring seems very far away, with the countryside silent like a fettered prisoner beneath the grip of winter's rude and ruthless hand; only a ROBIN broke the silence with his sad and quavering song.

25 It is frosty to-night but bright and clear without a moon and the whole of the northern sky is alive with light. Bright beams of pale green flow and ebb from the horizon to the zenith, while a silver veil floats from east to west. Aurora is dancing her cold austere pavane surrounded by pale ghostly stars.

26 I have brought home some sprays of HAZEL CATKINS and now against the cream wall of the sitting-room they are a source of greater pleasure than were the roses of summer.



28 PARTRIDGES were calling in the fields at dawn and ROBINS singing before it was light. I counted five in a very small area while waiting for the bus to take me to town.

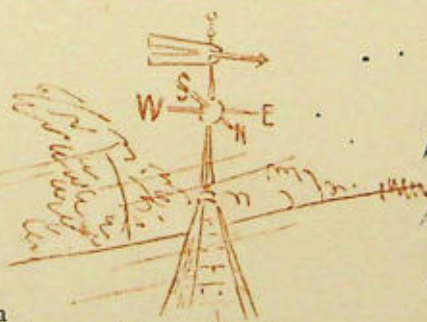
29 The month end has brought with it the DAWN CHORUS of the birds which all who live in or near the country may hear, if they care to listen for it, every day from now until the height of summer.



31 SNOWDROPS are showing as little silver patches in the grass and ACONITES as splashes of gold under the trees in the rockery. Purple DAPHNE is in bud and I have the urge on me to be in the garden and have started to dig

F E B R U A R Y

1 Country people say "A February spring is worth nothing." To-day the sun has shone brilliantly from dawn to eve but there has been a bitter wind from the east and the birds were quiet and kept in the shelter of the hedgerows, except a BLUE-TIT that sat in the prunus on the lee side of the house and sang persistently. I believe he had an eye on a nearby nest box and was endeavouring to persuade his mate to a similar line of thought, but she was very indifferent and spent the time about the bird table.



2 CANDLEMAS, but in these sophisticated days one rarely sees candles except on the children's Christmas-tree.

3 Snow showers to-day and walking home this evening I heard a FOX barking on the hill, otherwise the night was strangely still. I seemed to be alone in a white and silent world. Although the bark of the fox is high and thin it can be heard at a great distance. It is similar in this respect to the call of the cuckoo and the spotted woodpecker's tapping, which never sound loud, however near to the bird you may be, and yet have great carrying power.



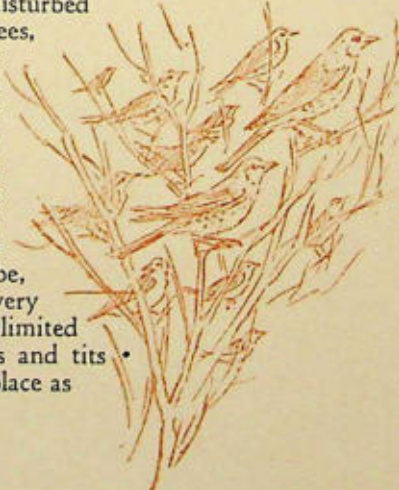
4 GULLS were along the riverside again this morning in great numbers. The herring and common gulls sit about the fields, but the smaller black-headed gulls never seem to rest but beat up and down the river, pausing now and again to circle here and there in a never ending search for food. They are now beginning to regain their black caps which were lost at the autumn moult.

5 BULLFINCHES were in the garden to-day. I knew they were there before I actually saw them by the low, often repeated whistle. I love to see and hear them and would not dream of shooting or trapping them, but in the garden I am always suspicious of their intentions. I wonder how much I misjudge them? In this district one never sees them in large numbers. They usually travel about in small parties in winter but pairs can be found in certain favoured localities the whole year round. I know of three such within a mile of the house and each is of a different character; an osier bed, a green lane and a small spinney.



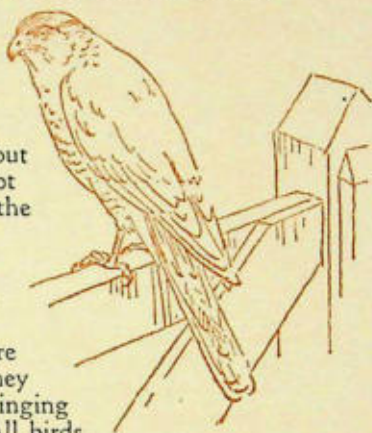
8 The wands of the WILLOW which are among the earliest heralds of spring are already growing colourful and show patchwork traceries of gold among the dull shadows of the valley.

10 Mixed flocks of FIELD-FARES and REDWINGS were busy searching the nearby fields to-day. The former when disturbed fly up at once to the tops of the nearest trees, sounding their throaty clattering call, but the redwings are inclined to move to a greater distance and their whistle as they fly off sounds somewhat petulant. The ebb and flow of bird life over a given area is most fascinating to observe. Few birds remain in one place for long. Blackbirds, robins, hedge-sparrows and wrens seem to be the more stay-at-home and the crow tribe, once settled in a locality, do not move very far, but even these exceptions migrate to a limited extent. Finches, buntings, larks, wagtails and tits are constantly on the move from place to place as weather and food supply demand.



12 Open and mild days so that I have been digging and clearing up in the garden. The THRUSH who has made the rock garden his particular domain has been singing from his place in the larch all day long. He is telling all other thrushes that this part of the garden belongs to him and at the same time hoping by his charm to attract a suitable mate.

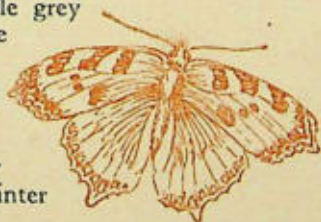
13 A strange silence was about the garden this morning and then I noticed a SPARROW-HAWK sitting on the gate and knew the reason for it. I have often noticed this phenomenon when a sparrow-hawk is about and sometimes it is positively uncanny, not a note or a movement of birds anywhere in the vicinity.



14 ST. VALENTINE'S DAY and his flower the CROCUS is blooming in the more sheltered parts of the garden. YELLOW-BUNTINGS are already back in the lane where later on they will nest, and a HEDGE-SPARROW has been singing on the hedge at the back of the border. All birds have their individual nesting areas, whether it is a few square feet as in a rookery or acres as in the case of the carrion crow, and birds of the same species generally speaking respect the privacy of such, though combats not infrequently take place. In some species the males arrive first and not only announce their right of possession by song but also endeavour to attract a mate thereby, as in the case of the thrush. In other species the already mated pair arrive together, linnets being a typical example.

15 A keen wind from the N.N.E. has been blowing all day and this morning when I drove to town a flock of STARLINGS was flying into it at forty miles per hour, by my speedometer, and stretching on either side as far as the eye could see. The starling is a real nomad, never staying in one place for long except at nesting time and in its adherence to a particular roosting place to which it will return night after night from long distances.

18 The SALLOW buds are already tipped with pale grey fur but JAPONICA against the south wall of the farmhouse is in full bloom. While talking to the farmer about his lambs, which he tells me are doing well, I saw a SMALL TORTOISESHELL butterfly settle on the bright blossom in the sunshine for a few moments and then as quickly disappear. Truly the wealth of summer whilst winter still lingers.



21 A CHAFFINCH was singing in the garden this morning. He has been about for some time so that, if all goes well, here he will continue to sing and a mate will come along, detached from some passing flock and will build her exquisite little nest in a fork of the apple tree.

- 23 The THRUSH of the larch tree has a mate, for I saw her busy building in a low bush in the rock garden while I was dressing. Early morning seems to be the favourite time for nest building. Birds are most active then. In the bright early morning sunshine I watched a pair of RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGES in the lane.



What lovely creatures they are, so vivid with their brilliant red beaks and legs and the black bars on their lavender flanks. They are quite common round about here and one often hears their "cluck-a-cluck-cluck" during the spring. PEEWIT flocks are very large and numerous just now and among them are a few GOLDEN PLOVER. One can pick the latter out by their high-pitched whistle, rapid flight and slightly smaller size.

- 24 Breakfast by full daylight this morning. There is a feeling of spring in the air. COLE-TITS were swinging like little acrobats on the drooping branches of the larch. GREAT-TITS singing "See-saw, see-saw" were busy inspecting a nest box and pecking at the entrance hole as if to enlarge it, although it was already adequate, but a pair of TREE-SPARROWS who had nested there last year felt a prior claim so that a battle royal ensued in which a couple of BLUE-TITS joined for a few minutes. Then quite suddenly, as is the way with most wild creatures, all parties seemed to lose interest and went their various ways, the nest-box forgotten.



- 26 A ROBIN sat on the handle of my spade this afternoon every time I left it upright in the ground and while I was using it he flew to the hedge, puffed out his breast and sang against another robin in a nearby tree. Each was proclaiming his territorial rights and daring the other to trespass.

- 27 The WILLOW and ALDER catkins are lovely down by the brook, the former like pale yellow tassels and the latter lambs' tails of red wool. A YELLOW-BUNTING is singing his "little bit o' bread and no cheese" in the lane and I shall hear him there until the drowsy days of August. Meantime his mate will build two nests and rear two broods in the tangle of briars in the ditch.

- 28 To-day about the bare brown stems of the FORSYTHIA there is a golden haze.



MARCH

1 THE MONTH OF MARS, but certainly no blustering warrior is marching in. Instead comes spring so joyfully with nesting birds and such a wealth of early blossom that makes the gardens gay.



2 A typical March morning, bright and clear with the dark sap-filled branches of the trees fretted against an azure blue sky. PEEWITS are wheeling and tumbling in the breeze over the fields, there seems to be bird song everywhere and the hawthorn hedges have that purple sheen that betokens rising sap and forming buds.

3 The golden yellow stars of the COLTSFOOT are shining this morning on their sturdy stems along the field road, the PRUNUS in the garden is sprinkled over with pale pink blossom and the almond trees have little clusters of buds along the twigs. The PARTRIDGES have paired. They are most amusing to watch as they chase one another in a seemingly aimless manner round and about the fields. The ROOKS' NESTS in the spinney are growing bulkier each day. Rooks do not use fallen twigs for nest construction, but break new ones from the living branches so as to ensure a sound structure and they rarely leave an incomplete nest unguarded, or their friends and relations would be borrowing twigs to furnish their own.



4 The FORSYTHIA is now a mass of blossom and in the sitting room its golden bells have replaced the alder catkins which in their turn had displaced the hazel sprays of January. I sowed broad beans while the CHAFFINCH sang his lilting song above me in the apple tree. When I talked to the postman about early seed sowing his verdict was, "Ah, they'll do best in the packet till March is out." All WILD DUCK, and there are several species that habitually winter on the local reservoirs, seem to have gone northwards though odd parties will still be coming and going for some time yet. A few stay to rest, such as MALLARD, TUFTED, SHOVELER-DUCK, and TEAL, but the great majority leave. What a fascinating thought it is to ponder on their unpremeditated journey; most probably it will carry them beyond the Arctic Circle. By comparison my own journeyings seem very circumscribed.



6 A PIPISTRELLE BAT was flying up and down on the sheltered side of the house last evening. This is the first occasion I have seen him since last autumn. Bats hibernate, but in very mild weather they may

often be seen on winter evenings—just to have a snack between snoozes, as it were.

PEEWITS called all through the night. I have often noticed how active these birds are during the hours of darkness.

The flocks are still about but growing smaller and smaller and pairs are already in their accustomed nesting fields. GREEN-FINCHES have returned to the gardens, but as yet I have not heard their song. It would appear as though odd birds break away from passing flocks when they reach a place that suits them, or it may be that they return to the neighbourhood in which they were reared or have nested before. At any rate they re-appear regularly in their accustomed haunts. WATERVOLES are about again down by the brook. They do not hibernate but keep much to the shelter of their holes in the winter months. I wish people would not look upon them as rats, for they seem to me to be so much higher in the scale of animal society. The TREE-SPARROWS are now constantly about the nesting box which they occupied last year.



- 9 There was such a sharp frost this morning that it reminded me of the old saying, "March frosts are May frosts," and I looked at the swelling buds of the apple trees and wondered. To-day a GREENFINCH was singing. Although it is a somewhat monotonous song there is such a joyousness about it that it is very dear to me. STARLINGS are carrying odd bits of straw into a hole in the old apple tree and MAGPIES are building in the tall hawthorn hedge. About here magpies are usually seen in pairs all the year round except from May to August when family parties predominate, but occasionally in the winter months there may be an odd flock of as many as twenty-four. What a dazzling picture they make. Settled in a tree they tend to harmonise with the network of branches, but as they lift their wings to hop from branch to branch or in flight, their black and white plumage reminds me of the old bioscope and its flickering screen.

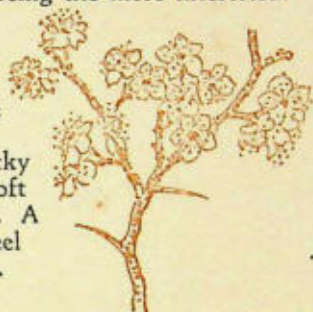


- 10 As I left home early this morning there was a queer mixed flock of PEEWITS, FIELD-FARES and STARLINGS over the fields uncertain whether to go their own ways or remain together, thus creating a whirling, wavering medley of movement in the sky. At Gloucester on a business trip I saw a small MONKEY in a faded red jacket seated on a hurdy-gurdy organ. Poor little waif, so infinitely pathetic, shivering in the keen air; if he had said to me, "What is all this about?" he could not have expressed the question in his eyes more clearly; and the crowd was laughing at him. Thank goodness this sort of thing becomes rarer each year.



- 11 I picked up some scraps of iron age pottery in a local sand-pit to-day. What strange stories of the past lie under one's door-step. Looking at the scrap in my hand I could not help thinking of the potter who fashioned it, a girl most likely, and wondering what might have been her outlook. To touch the past so closely brings it very near to one.
- 14 A heavy fall of snow in the night and everywhere is white this morning just to remind us that winter is not far behind. How woebegone are the flowers peeping through the white covering. In spite of this TITS were inspecting the nesting boxes again, though they did not appear to be very serious about it, the male birds being the more interested.

- 15 The snow has quite disappeared and I saw the first CELANDINE to-day and
 "Spring has cast her bridal veil upon the
 thorn for my delight,"
 for the BLACKTHORN is in flower. The sticky chestnut buds are breaking and there are soft green shoots at the end of the LILAC twigs. A BUMBLE-BEE crossed the lawn, making me feel I should redouble my efforts in the garden.



- 17 To-day the LAWNS have been cut so that the garden begins to look as though someone was about it. There is also an empty packet marking a row of PEAS!
- 18 Frost again, bad omen, but the air soon warmed and LARKS were singing. The GREENFINCH sang all day about the garden. I watched him displaying his golden yellow wing-bars by flying hither and thither in a zig-zag course overhead.

"Not purposely from place to place
 But fluttering to fill a space
 With patterings of grace,"

and singing his happy roundelay all the time. Each day that comes brings some new beauty of blossom to the fields and garden and the wealth of bird music seems to increase as the vagrant flocks of finches and buntings along the hedgerows grow less. LINNETS are back in the garden chirping and singing and rarely still. The pairs seem very devoted to each other and are never apart, feeding, flying and playing together.

- 21 The first day of spring with DAFFODILS dancing on the sloping lawn beneath the bare tracery of the trees and the rockery spread with the purple of AUBRETIA and ALYSSUM'S golden web. A pair of ROBINS built a nest in a cycle saddle-bag between the time a workman came to work and when he left at night. The nest was therefore lifted carefully to a place between two packing cases nearby where the birds continued next day to complete their work. Unfortunately the cases had to be used so the nest was moved again to a more secure position and there the devoted pair reared a fine brood of five youngsters.



23 The weather has changed and is dull and cold. The GULLS are still about the fields by the river. The SALLOW, or as we call it, the pussy-willow, is in full bloom and on warm days is surrounded by the sound and movement of bees. Walking by the field hedge I saw a STOAT coming towards me carrying a young rabbit. I remained still and he did not notice me until he was within six feet of me, then he stopped, put the rabbit down and sat up to take a better look at me. It was very funny to watch his indecision and the working of his mind torn between uncertainty of what I was and desire for his dinner. Slowly by almost imperceptible movements he worked the rabbit and himself into a position where he fancied himself hidden; then snatching up his dinner he bolted.



26 The male GREENFINCH was leading his mate round the garden searching for a nest site to-day, LINNETS were twittering together on the lonicera hedge and BLUE-TITS were cleaning out the nest box on the verandah. Here again the male birds were taking by far the most active part in the proceedings. MAGPIES were among the sheep on the hill collecting wool to line their domed nest and the CARRION-CROWS are already sitting on four or five speckled blue-green eggs.

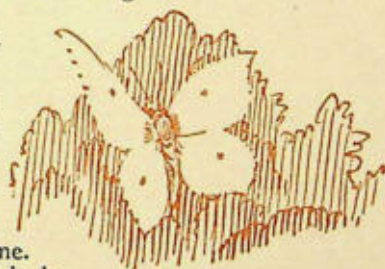
28 ALMOND blossom fills the gardens of suburbia with rosy clouds and jewel PRIMROSES glow in the cottage gardens of the village.

31 As in the seed catalogue one sees and plans a garden of delight, so in the neat packets of vegetable seeds one tastes into the future.

To-day I have been thus happily engaged and armed with a rake and line have watched the labelled rows add to one another with no small satisfaction. A THRUSH is sitting on eggs in the deodar and a BRIMSTONE

BUTTERFLY crossed the garden like a pale flame.

So to confound the old adage March came in with the lamb and goes out with the same but garlanded with spring flowers.



APRIL

1 ALL FOOLS' DAY, but old ways and customs do not survive in this adventurous age except as a relic in a name. One would not wish them to linger past their time any more than the ducking-stool or torture-chamber, but it is a pity that so many of the Saints' days and similar festivals intended to mark appreciation and thankfulness of spirit should be neglected, for we have much to be thankful for. The HAWTHORN hedges are already splashed with vivid green and there is gold upon the GORSE. Seven



strangers were feeding at the edge of the pond across the fields this morning. They were WIDGEON taking a brief rest on their long journey northwards to breeding grounds, probably in Scandinavia or North Russia.



As they flew up with a clatter of wings and harsh alarm cries, I could not help saying to myself, "Next stop . . . ?" and wondering where it might be. FIELDFARES were assembling in a large restless flock in the tree-tops this evening and as I watched them they rose in a noisy cloud. At first they seemed hesitant, rising and falling in odd little parties, then as if impelled by some definite signal, the whole flock rose together, paused, circled and then headed North-East, their throaty chuckling dying away in the distance. I felt quite lonely for a time after their departure.

- 2 DAISIES are sprinkled about the fields, their wide open eyes showing brightly on the greensward. This evening at sundown they will go to sleep and all that will be seen of them will be little pink buds half hidden in the grass. A short time ago we dug up a number of roots, packed them closely in a shallow dish with a little earth and since have watered them freely. Now in full flower they are the perfect spring centre-piece for the polished table. In one field ROOKS were bowing to one another like decorous bishops at a tea-party. They are comical creatures to watch at this time of the year and the rookery is a place of noisy argument from dawn to dusk. A BLACKBIRD is building an untidy nest in a shrub near the kitchen window. Pieces of root and hay leave no doubt of its position and as in the case of the thrush it is the hen that seems to do all the work. A pair of ROBINS have been furtively examining nooks and crannies of the rock garden for a nest site but I believe they have now found more congenial quarters in the ditch.



- 3 The WILD ARUM or cuckoo-pint is poking its shiny green spikes through the dead leaves under the hedge. As children we called them "lords and ladies" and stripped them to see the coloured centre. I remember I never liked doing it, I thought it cruel and preferred to take just a peep inside until they opened on their own account. There has been much wind and rain and a MISTLE-THRUSH true to his other name of "Storm-cock," was loud in prophecy from an oak tree on the hill, sending his clarion notes ringing across the valley. He worked himself to such a frenzy of passion that he could not rest, but flew round and round singing the whole time. Although the lark is the best known of our songsters that sings and flies at the same time, there are quite a number of birds in which this characteristic is normal, and many more will do so on occasion under the influence of excitement: greenfinch, pipits, whitethroat, sedge-warbler and linnet come to mind. To-day, from my office window in town I noticed

another rare stranger. About the size of a pigeon, slate grey, with sharply pointed wings and a short tail, it flew past with leisurely grace, six easy wing beats and a glide repeated regularly, and I recognised a PEREGRINE FALCON.

4 A sharp frost this morning and the daffodils are drooping their lovely yellow heads and looking very sick. In Derbyshire on a short visit I saw CURLEW, SNIPE and PEEWITS on the moors all in amorous display; either in nuptial flight or ceaseless whistling. Bird display is wonderful in its variety, each species having its own particular form of expression. Some include such normal behaviour as feeding and preening, but in a stylised form, while at other times it takes on an extraordinary character. I have watched a male blackbird ruffle his feathers, droop wings and tail and open his beak wide to impress his mate with its bright orange interior. Curlews indulge in butterfly-like flight, snipe drum by the vibration of air in the outer feathers of the tail while in swift downward flight, and the pee-wit's noisy wing beats as he tumbles over the ploughed fields is well known. To learn bird display is more than a study, it is to make friends.



The WILD CHERRY or GEAN is in full bloom along the edges of the woods. The BIRD CHERRY with its erect white racemes of flower seems to come a little later. Each evening from the large colony of JACKDAWS in the old quarry at the back of the hill a small party of birds with much calling and chatter sets out towards the west. I don't know where they go, or why, and I never see them return, but they are most regular in this and have done so for several weeks.



5 The roses are pruned, borders are dug, potatoes set and there are thin green lines of seedlings stretched between the empty seed packets in the cleft sticks and the marking pegs; the rock garden and the flowering shrubs are better than "the picture on the cover" so that I feel my plot is in good order and I can relax: a great sense of satisfaction. A pair of REDSHANKS were at the brook this morning. They come each year at this time, remain a week or so and then disappear until next year. I believe mated pairs move up the river valleys from the East Coast in search of a nest site. Hereabouts they used to nest, but recent drainage has so dried up the valley that there is no suitable place for them. Odd pairs of SNIPE still nest here. They require a similar habitat but are less conservative. At this time too, one or two

GREEN-SANDPIPERS appear by the edge of the stream and stay a few days, but they do not nest in this country and are on their way north. The CHIFF-CHAFF, first of the summer warblers to arrive, is back. I listened to his monotonous "chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff" for some time before I found the bird among low bushes overhanging the water near the old ford. When they first arrive in this country chiff-chaffs are usually found near water, maybe the insects on which they feed are more numerous there. Splashes of gold mark the old course of the stream bed across the meadows where KING-CUPS are in blossom. The garden to-day has been full of song and movement, greenfinches and linnets seemed everywhere and tortoiseshell butterflies have fluttered hither and thither in a constant procession of bright colour.



- 6 To the Cotswolds for a few days and on the way a SWALLOW passed us flying northwards. But one swallow does not make a summer and to-day it has been cold with an odd snow shower now and again, an unfriendly welcome for the summer migrants.
- 7 Change again and it is bright and warm. To-day I have been favoured with a special confidence. A BRAMBLING, winter visitor from the Continent, and rather like a chaffinch but with a white back and black head, was friendly enough to permit me to the intimacy of so personal a matter as bathing and toilet making. At no greater distance than six feet he allowed me to watch him so that I could see every detail of his lovely colouring. Tiny WILLOW WARBLERS, just up from Africa, were singing so lustily in one small spinney that their song, which to me has much the same quality as a robin's but is shorter, had quite lost all its gentle sadness and was quite ecstatic. A flock of fifteen MAGPIES that kept very much together made a lovely display of flashing black and white, but for all that I cannot help thinking of them as thieves and vagabonds. Nests in the garden at home suffer much from their depredations; their crimes are usually carried out in the early morning when no one is about, for I have heard them chattering in the half-light while I was still in bed.

- 8 The sheltered Cotswold valleys harbour much of spring's young loveliness. There is a profusion of PRIMROSES, WOOD ANEMONES and VIOLETS of many shades of colour. Masses of GARLIC were growing round the ruins of a Roman villa at one place, while at another I found the curious TOOTHWORT in flower. Its fleshy stem is quite devoid of leaf. In fact it looks most like an exotic fungus. A pair of THRUSHES were feeding four sturdy youngsters almost ready to fly. Watching JACKDAWS circling higher and higher until they were mere specks against the sky and then come tumbling down, chasing one another in headlong flight, made me feel they must have a very definite sense of play. The strange thing is that they do not seem to play more often. In



a small disused limestone quarry were six or seven ADDERS sunning themselves on a heap of lichen covered stones. Two were evidently mating for what I took to be the male wound himself round the other in several coils while their tiny forked tongues flickered in and out. They were just at my feet and there was a strangeness in watching what seemed affection in such cold blooded creatures. My slightest movement sent them sliding quickly to the holes among the stones, but not for long; they were too appreciative of the warm sunshine.

10 At home again. BARLEY is showing through the ploughed and cultivated earth and the ELMS have a red haze of flowerets about their tops. WHITE, TORTOISESHELL, BRIMSTONE and PEACOCK BUTTERFLIES are about the garden. SWALLOWS and MARTINS have been passing over at odd intervals and although the GULLS have left the river, a flock of twelve passed over, flying sedately in some semblance of a V formation.

13 There have been two days of heavy gales and rain, but the storm has blown itself away. Children down in the low-lying meadows are picking posies of COWSLIPS and LADY'S SMOCKS.

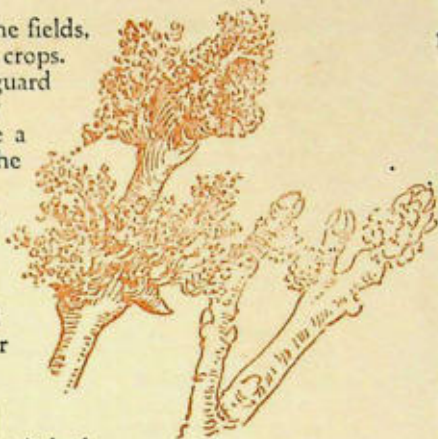
The latter, *cardamine pratensis*, sometimes produces a sport which is double. I have some of these plants that regularly flower in a damp place in the rock-garden and are much admired for their dainty beauty. SWALLOWS are back at the farm and SAND-MARTINS at the sandpits. The HOUSE-MARTINS seem to be always a little later than their cousins. BLUE-TITS are building in the nest-box on the verandah. Both birds take a hand in this, but last evening I noticed that although the hen roosted in the box she would not allow the cock to share it with her. He seemed very upset about it, but finally made the best of a bad business and flew off by himself. I heard curlew passing over the house during the night.



15 The winter bird visitors are now rapidly leaving us and summer birds are coming in to replace them. Every day there is a good-bye and a welcome so that it is difficult to keep check on all the movement. TULIPS are in bloom. How graceful they are and what a variety of colour and form one may choose, from the tiny wild types to the stately Darwins. A THRUSH'S nest in the garden with three youngsters was robbed four days ago: I suspect the magpies, but it might have been a cat. Yesterday she had completed a new nest, rather a ragged affair and with no mud lining and now to-day there is one egg in it. How insistent is the urge to maintain the species.

18 I heard the CUCKOO this morning, turned over the money in my pocket and then laughed to myself. What savages some of us are in our beliefs and disbeliefs. LINNETS have chosen for their nest a small rosemary bush just outside the dining-room window. Considering that the hen can see almost every movement in the room while she is sitting it seems a queer place for what is a somewhat timid bird. PARTRIDGES sometimes venture on to the lawn in front of the house during the winter, but this morning a pair were there, though what brought them is hard to tell. Some years ago a pair nested in the herbaceous border.

20 PEEWITS are still sitting on their nests in the fields, some almost hidden in the fast growing crops. Meantime the male birds keep constant guard and spend no little time in driving away marauding crows that in some cases have a nest full of voracious youngsters to feed. The ASH is in flower but the OAK is in leaf, so according to the old tag, is it to be a splash or a soak? The TITS were carrying feathers into the nest-box to-day so that they must have nearly completed their labour and any day the little brown spotted eggs will begin to appear, one each day for eight or ten days. The CHAFFINCH has built her nest of lichen in the old apple tree bound together with cobweb and lined with hair, and in such a position that it looks like the stump of a sawn-off branch. To-day there are eggs in it with plum coloured markings on the blue ground.



22 Three WHEATEARS were on the hill as I walked over this morning before breakfast. They use this little rough knoll as a stopping place both on their journey north in spring and back again in the early autumn. None nest in the district. The HOUSE-MARTINS have arrived and were hawking for flies over the village; and a YELLOW-BUNTING was so busy with his courting in the middle of the road that I had to pull up the car or I should have run over him. With wings drooping, head thrown back and mincing steps he looked most comical, but it was obviously a very serious matter to him. I am never tired of watching the intricate patterning of life and though I laugh, it is from happiness in being able to share in its fulness and not from any feeling of superiority.



25 There were eight WHITE THROATS singing in a hundred yards of the lane this morning. I presume them to be overnight arrivals that as yet have not had time to spread themselves over the countryside. YELLOW-WAGTAILS have also arrived. I watched them coming in from the south-east in ones and twos. Among the summer migrants the males seem to arrive first in the district which they choose to make their nesting area. Here they sing, proclaiming their right to the locality and wait the arrival of a suitable mate.

27 A KESTREL hovered for some time over the garden this morning. There have been a number of FIELD-MICE about during the last few days and kestrels are great mousers. The kestrel has pointed wings, a long tail and is bright red brown, while the sparrow-hawk, which is somewhat similar in size, never hovers, has rounded wings, is dull brown (female) or slate (male) and catches its prey by chasing it down. There has been an affair of some heat between the BLUE-TITS and TREE-SPARROWS that



have now commenced to build in another nest-box near the tits. The latter have taken a small tree close to the verandah as part of their rights, the male using it much as a singing post and they resent its use by the sparrows. This morning while I was dressing and the latter birds were quietly resting in between some very active building operations, the two tits set upon them by clinging to the twig beneath them, upside-down and pecking at their feet. The sparrows were completely nonplussed and beat a hasty retreat, whereupon the male blue-tit sang a paean of victory from the topmost twig.

28 The WOODS that until recently were so dark now have a film of young green here and there and the MEADOWS and fields are vivid with the mantling of spring. The golden chalice of the BUTTERCUP is opening to the sun. Soon the individual flower will be lost in a golden carpet and my shoes as I walk across will be smothered in gold dust. Young BLACKBIRDS are about the garden making their presence quite unmistakable by their frequent squeaking. A pair of KINGFISHERS were flirting down by the brook as I passed over the old red-brick bridge, and I saw one hovering over the water like an animated jewel before it plunged with a little splash to emerge again with a strip of silver in its bill.



30 There is a blue mistiness in the wood where the BLUE-BELL leaves were such shining green, RAGGED-ROBINS decorate the ditch, the rooks' nests are nearly hidden in the increasing foliage. The CHESTNUT leaves are spreading like small fans at the tips of the branches and on the hedges now green are small white bouquets of HAWTHORN blossom. The flower is here before the month.

MAY



1 The tide of growing things is higher each day so that there is no need to go far afield to make new discoveries. The GRASS along the edges of the lanes and in the meadows perceptibly becomes more lush with the branching stems of the WILD PARSLEY reaching up to overtop all else. The silver stars of the STITCHWORT and red, yellow and white DEAD NETTLES decorate the ditch and PURPLE ORCHIS is peeping from its spotted sheath of dull green leaves here and there in the fields. To-day TREE-PIPITS are singing from almost every other tree down the lane. From a favourite perch the bird rises into the air trilling and then floats back again to a series of louder and more sustained notes. Time

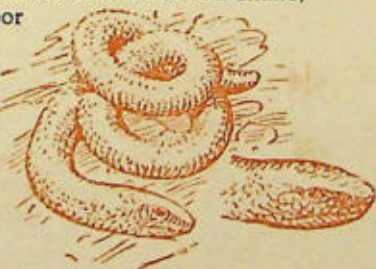
after time the performance is repeated until one begins to realise that for him the moment is all in all and the morrow with its cares, even the next few minutes, does not come into his consciousness. Three species of pipit are common in this country, all are very similar but each has its particular habitat though these naturally overlap. The TREE-PIPIT frequents average countryside with a fair sprinkling of trees, the MEADOW-PIPIT the open uplands, and the ROCK-PIPIT the more rocky coastline. The first is a summer migrant and is common in this district, the second does not nest about here but is a frequent autumn and winter visitor, the third is rarely seen so far inland. The name pipit comes from its call-note, "peep-peep." By the brook, where the cattle have trodden the edge, HOUSE-MARTINS are collecting mud for their nests under the eaves; and among the osiers a SEDGE-WARBLER is singing his rattling little song interspersed with the call-notes of other birds, for he is a great mimic. Where there are a number of these little warblers it is good fun to try and pick out the various birds they imitate.



- 2 The winter-sown WHEAT is now almost high enough for the wind to send little waves rippling across it; and watching it grow, even at this early stage, I cannot help thinking of the harvest to come. Unlike the pipit singing in the lane, how much of my life is spent in setting a store against the morrow, both materially and in my mind's eye. SAND-MARTINS are round the hencoops in the field collecting bits of straw and feathers to line their nests in the bank at the sand-pit. The workmen there say they would not have the birds disturbed on any account because they keep the pit clear of flies during the summer months.

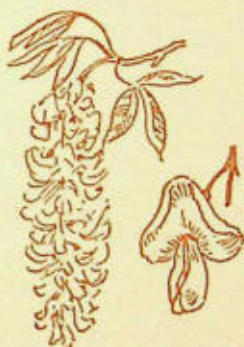


- 3 Before breakfast in the garden I noted two things particularly. One was the exquisite beauty of the pink flower tassels on the drooping sprays of the LARCH. These are the female flowers, those of the male sex being small yellow catkins. The other point was that the TREE-SPARROWS were pulling leaves off the woolly-mint and catmint to carry into their nest box. The habit of decoration is quite a well-known feature of nest construction among certain species of birds, but I wonder why the sparrows should choose, from all the plants in the vicinity of their nest, such strong smelling herbs. I believe very little is known about birds' sense of smell. What an extraordinary antipathy most country people have for reptiles. Whenever one hears of a snake, it is always a poisonous one; and that poor little legless lizard the SLOW-WORM almost invariably comes into this category, though it is much less harmful than the house-fly. To see one quietly sunning itself on a dry bank always reminds me of a polished bronze casting.



5 There has been a sharp frost this morning, the lawns are white and I think back to March. A LESSER WHITE-THROAT is singing again this year in a short piece of dense hedgerow across the field where I have known a pair to nest for the last two years. From my own observations I have been struck by the regular return of the small summer migrants to exactly the same spot each year. The lesser white-throat is not nearly so plentiful as the common white-throat, but its monotonous little song is very easy to identify. Consequently it is a simple matter to mark down the bird's nesting locality; and it is remarkable how year after year they or their nestlings return to the same place. SWALLOWS that come regularly to the same barn are another example. The FINCHES seem to maintain small flocks into the breeding season longer than other species. One year I noted a large linnets flock on May 16th. To-day there are quite a number of small flocks about, such as linnets, greenfinches and redpolls. Throughout the breeding season there must be a number of unmated birds or how is it that casualties which occur every day are so quickly made good.

6 A CUCKOO woke me at dawn this morning by calling just outside the window, another was on the hill and a third in the field beyond the garden; then I heard a female's bubbling chuckle so that I knew she was courting. The cuckoo is polyandrous, the female often courting two or three males at the same time. In the garden the procession of FLOWERING SHRUBS goes on without a break. After the forsythia and almond came the crimson prunus and ornamental cherries. Now the laburnum holds the field; with lilac, philadelphus, viburnum, deutzia and weigelia still to come. By careful selection one may have blossom until the autumn berries take pride of place. January and February are the only difficult months to bridge, but daphne mezereum and witch-hazel can help here.



8 SPOTTED-FLYCATCHERS were searching for a nest site round the house early to-day. The little wood on the hillside is a favourite place for their arrival from overseas and early in May there are often quite a number there hawking for flies among the new leafage of the oaks. They are comparatively silent birds but at this time their constant chirping and fluttering among the branches is bound to attract the attention. From here most of them spread to the surrounding district, but one pair at least remain to nest in a hollow against a tree-trunk or among the climbing ivy. Others will nest in the creepers on old walls. They are a great joy in a garden on account of their engaging habits.

10 Arriving in Dublin this morning I found the CHESTNUT candles alight and LILAC blooming in Stephen's Green. Running past Howth Head on the Liverpool boat I was fascinated by the GUILLEMOTS, RAZORBILLS and PUFFINS in the bay. As the steamer reached them they either upended to dive displaying a momentary white rump or seemed to leap from the surface of the water and skim away showing only their dark upper parts.



- 13 We think our English countryside green, but Ireland is truly named the emerald isle. Never have I seen such verdure elsewhere nor such colour in the landscape. GOLDFINCHES were everywhere when I passed through County Roscommon yesterday; either singly, in pairs or small parties. At home as a nesting species they are very local, but in autumn and winter odd charms of five or six are frequently seen, and what a delight it is to watch them feeding on the thistle seed-heads.
- 14 At Galway the first SWIFTS of the year are wheeling over the old city's tumbled roofs and from the bridge I have been looking at the SALMON, almost like sardines in a tin, so closely packed were they, waiting to climb the weir of the Corrib river and so to the lake beyond, the lake of the three hundred and sixty-five islands.
- 15 To-day among the grey lichen covered rocks of Blackhead, County Clare, overlooking the mighty sweep of Galway Bay, with the Arran Islands a misty blur to seaward, I have had the infinite delight of finding BLUE GENTIANAS and the warm coloured cushions of SAXIFRAGE. Here is a paradise of alpine plants and one day I shall come back, when time shall wait for me while I explore. Later, in the crevices between the grey stones of an old priory, I was enchanted by the variety and delicate grace of tiny FERNS. Later still, in the evening sunlight, while examining a weather-beaten piece of basalt marking an ancient grave and crudely cut with Ogham lettering, a tortoiseshell butterfly with but half-grown wings settled there quivering with new life. In that kindly warmth, surrounded by living beauty, I tried to measure the meaning of it all, the ancient and forgotten dead, the brief and fragile span of the butterfly and my own being.



- 17 Home again. WATER-LILY buds are forming in the pond and the NEWTS that share it with the gold-fish are very active. They are fond of climbing up into the fresh water inlet and lying full length in the cool flow. After the breeding season they leave the pond and spend the winter months in a torpid condition in some damp and secluded hole, returning to the pond in the early spring. LUPINS are coming into flower in the borders, but the rock-garden is losing its colour.
- 18 The SWIFTS are back and last evening were screaming in wide circles high over the village. They are very regular in their coming and going, arriving about the 15th of May and departing the 15th of August. The vegetable garden is showing less and less bare earth and very soon hoeing will be the order of the day; whether this conserves moisture to any great extent is a matter of argument, but it does get rid of weeds and makes for tidiness, which to my mind is all-important in a vegetable garden.
- 19 This morning a pair of WHITE-THROATS were with the odd thrush and blackbirds on the lawn, an unusual place for them, but I suspect they were attracted by some small flies hatching there. The TREE-SPARROW is sitting on five speckled grey eggs almost hidden in the nest lining



of feathers. In contrast to the house-sparrow, both sexes are alike but one of them, the male, was carrying greenery into the box to-day.

- 21 The lanes are now embroidered with the white lace of the WILD PARSLEY, "grannie's lace" it is called in some districts. Here we call it keck. Everywhere there is a heavy scent of the HAWTHORN blossom, now fading and shedding its petals over the grass. PEEWIT chicks are running in the meadows near the brook and what consternation there is among the parent birds when one approaches. There is only one satisfactory method of finding a chick if you wish to examine the little mottled fluff-ball closely and that is to remain hidden until you can observe it move, then run out to the exact spot where you last saw it and look at every piece of dung to see if it has eyes, like glass-headed pins. Even then you must be careful or you will tread on it. In the brook itself are MINNOWS, STICKLEBACKS and quite a shoal of young TROUT. They all enjoy the warm shallows at this time of the year and the KINGFISHER reaps a good harvest, but in the deeper water PIKE and the larger trout lie in wait for them so that those that live must be wary fish. I found a brood of WILD DUCKLINGS on a secluded pool and the mother duck tried her best to draw my attention from the youngsters by feigning injury, flapping helplessly up the stream, but I was intent on watching the marvellous sense of camouflage by which the ducklings completely disappeared within a few feet of me and in less time than it takes to tell. Over the low-lying meadows a SNIPE was drumming or calling from the top of a power pylon. His mate flew up from under my feet, and there was the nest hidden in a clump of sedge, the four olive and bright brown eggs with their points toward the centre.



- 24 Cheeps are coming from the BLUE-TITS' nest-box this morning. During breakfast for the last week we have watched both parents in and out continuously trying to satisfy the hunger of eight gaping yellow beaks. It is said that the bright interior of nestlings' mouths is to enable the parent birds to find them quickly. The number of aphids, grubs and caterpillars which the tits have collected from the garden must be enormous.

- 25 The ASH is very late. The flower comes first but only now are the leaves beginning to appear. It is strange that so hardy a tree should be so late acquiring its foliage. Stumbling on a WHITE-THROAT'S nest, the bird fluttered out and along the ground for several yards, reminding me of the behaviour of the mother duck a few days ago. Many birds adopt injury-feigning to lure the intruder from their nests; but it is difficult to understand why it is more apparent in certain species, except that I believe it is practically confined to ground nesting birds. In my own experience I have noted yellow-bunting, reed-bunting, willow warbler and partridge, to name a few.



- 27 A sudden heavy gale last night has played havoc with the blossom and has actually blown over a laburnum tree in full flower. It is most distressing to see the wind tearing away the flower buds that promised so well, but after the storm is over there is a clarity in the atmosphere and cleanliness in the countryside which is some compensation.
- 30 A WREN is building a nest of moss inside one of the nest-boxes, but it may never be occupied, for the male bird who is working on it and sings the whole time, will build several and from among these the hen will choose one and then line it with feathers before laying her eight or ten eggs therein. I cannot help wondering what lies behind such seeming waste of effort, for each one is beautifully made. The ELDERBERRY and GUELDER-ROSE are both in flower, their somewhat similar cream cushions decorating the hedgerows rather like the stuffed lace affairs that adorned the dressing tables of a bye-gone age. In their decorative qualities what a contrast are these flowers to their fruits, the one purple black and the other brilliant red.
- 31 The last day of the month; and the first of the roses. Shyly peeping from the coverlet of green along the lanes is the pink and white of the WILD-ROSE. Very soon from the number of buds I have seen there will be a smother of them everywhere and yet I believe I could never have too many. To me the wild-rose is more than a flower, more than an emblem of summer:

"This frail delight

That split a kingdom with her pink and white

And drenched the land with England's blood

Then re-entwined

To lead proud Tudor sails through fire and flood

New worlds to find."



JUNE

- 1 This month the borders will take pride of place in the garden, every day adding to the variety and colour of the flowers. A

garden can be an unlimited source of happiness: I am always finding something new and each year about this time I flatter myself that it has never looked better. I am never tired of watching the new growth come into being and mature; there is a recurrent novelty in the process that never palls. To-day YOUNG BIRDS are everywhere, either following their harassed parents, continually demanding to be fed or sitting disconsolately hunched up as if they remembered with regret the warm comfort of the nest. The inevitable loss among these somewhat helpless youngsters is enormous. One rarely sees more than one peewit chick out of a clutch of four that survives to fly and tits that rear eight or ten youngsters never increase in numbers, so that of the whole family not more than two are left the following spring. Nature seems to demand this wastage.



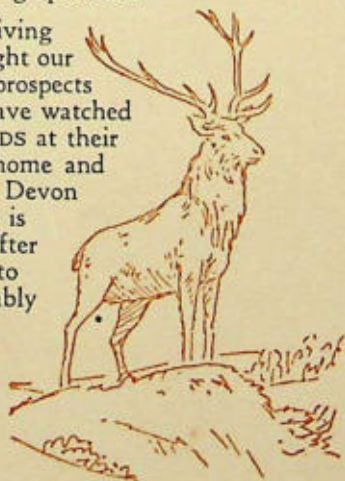
2 Showery but warm: good growing weather, the farmer says. There will be ROSES to cut in the garden before the week-end and the hedges will require the attention of the shears before long. *Lonicera nitida* (Chinese honeysuckle) makes an excellent low hedge if it is kept well clipped, but it very soon becomes leggy and loose if it is left. Its dense shelter is a great attraction for birds. The garden is filled with BIRD-SONG from first to last light and even longer, for larks in the field were singing in the dark this morning and a nightingale sang most of the night in the spinney at the bottom of the valley. On quiet nights, especially if there is a moon, sedge-warblers frequently sing throughout the hours of darkness in the osier bed. I have remarked before that bird music often sounds louder at a distance and this applies particularly to the song of the sedge-warbler at night. The meadows are losing their cloth of gold, but there is plenty of colour besides and the white DOG-DAISIES are beginning to sprinkle the fields with stars.

4 The PEEWIT flocks are reforming but at this time of the year the birds stand about the fields in a very disconsolate manner and it is not until ploughing commences and the autumn rain softens the ground that they become active again. One or two ORANGE-TIP BUTTERFLIES were about the garden to-day. They show a preference for plants of the mustard family, laying their eggs on the flower stems of the food plant. The caterpillars bear a close resemblance to the seed pods and the pupæ is like a dry leaf, attaching itself to the stalk at one end.

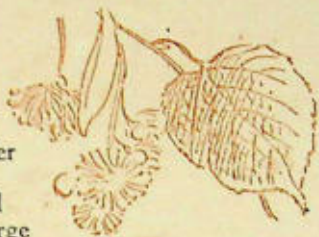


6 There has been heavy and sustained rain and the large black SLUGS are common along the edge of the grass verge in the lane. Slugs are repulsive looking creatures, but not all are harmful in the garden. One species at least gardeners should respect, for it is a large destroyer of garden pests. This is the SNAIL-SLUG or *testacella* and it can be recognised by the miniature shell it carries on its tail. Most slugs, however, are harmful and there are a great number of species and sub-species. Just after sunrise I saw a most wonderfully vivid and complete rainbow in the western sky with a dull orange moon lying low behind and in the centre of it. It was a strange and fascinating spectacle.

9 Here for a few days on Exmoor we have been living widely and well. During all the hours of daylight our roof has been the sky and what vistas and prospects have enchanted us. Across Dunkery Hill we have watched the shy RED-DEER, we have visited the BUZZARDS at their nest, have stalked the wary CURLEW in her home and have walked and marvelled at the beauty of the Devon lanes and their galaxy of flowers. The buzzard is believed to be extending its range over Britain after being nearly exterminated. It would be nice to see it more generally distributed, for it is reasonably harmless, destroys a great number of rodent pests and is a noble bird on the wing. The curlew winters on the coasts.



11 Could anything be more lovely than the LIME TREES in early summer? The leaves are so varied in size and of such a delicate and transparent green that the shade cast by the tree has a character entirely its own. Unlike most of the more common trees of Britain that rely on the wind for polination, the lime flowers with their large supply of nectar attract bees in hundreds; as anyone who stands beneath the tree in flower will realise from the hum of insects in the leafage above. Those who know it only as a recently planted tree in a modern city park or boulevard, should see it at its best in some stately avenue that has been growing a couple of hundred years. TURTLE-DOVES were in the garden this morning. I have seen them and heard their deep coo frequently of late and although it is unusual so near a house, I suspect a nest nearby.



13 Two young RABBITS have been in the garden. At this time of the year they are not easy to keep out, neither are they easy to get rid of once inside. To-day, although it may seem well nigh impossible, I caught one, fully three-quarters grown, in my hand. I stalked it quietly from cover to cover until it hid in a small bed on the lawn, where by a slow approach I actually got into a position where I seized it round the middle: and that was the end of one. The other was shot, so that the new green vegetables are safe again for the time being.

14 A THRUSH and BLACKBIRD have been singing together in the top of the larch this morning. It was unusual to see the birds singing in such close proximity yet paying no attention to each other. Blackbirds are much more common than thrushes in this district, especially in the winter, when the latter seem to migrate and are comparatively scarce. Pink and white WATER-LILIES are in full bloom on the pond and the native yellow in the deeper pools of the brook. As the GOLDFISH are regularly fed during the summer months they become exceedingly tame and a tap of the food tin on the edge of the pond brings them together in a few moments. Whether they can hear or whether the water conveys the vibration to them I do not know. They are quickly satisfied with a meal but very soon ready for another. There were twenty-two different species of birds singing in or about the garden to-day. The rise and fall of BIRD-SONG during spring and summer is most interesting to note. With each species there are peaks and declines from time to time until the silence during the moulting period, but in suitable weather there is song of one sort or another the whole year for those who have ears to hear it. The nightingale will be silent soon except for a throaty croak; and the robin too will stop singing until the end of July when his autumn song commences, in which the hen birds sometimes join. The reason that both sexes sing in the autumn is that during that season both have a territory to proclaim. The chaffinch too will be silent very soon except for the call-note "pink-pink."



16 I woke this morning to the sound of the reaping machine. HAYMAKING has begun and there is always regret in my heart to see the swathes go down. I love the tall-stemmed GRASSES, their variety of form and colour seems so infinite. From cocksfoot to foxtail and the dainty quaking grass they are perfect in their grace and beauty and it grieves me even to see them converted to the sweet smelling hay, although I realise that left to themselves they would become poor wind-blown withered bents. For some reason I always associate the ELM TREES with the gathering of hay. It may be because the elm is such a feature of the midland landscape and haymaking is an activity of wide prospects and the open sky. Three species of the elm are found in this country, the common or small-leaved elm, the smooth and the rough-leaved wych-elm. The outline of the first named tree is more broken, the leaf small and the bole very rough, but the three species are not easy to differentiate at a glance.



17 Just now the margin of the brook is a mass of vegetation from the starry white carpet of WATER CROWFOOT on the surface to the tall WATER BETONY at the foot of the bank; there are plumes of fragrant MEADOW-SWEET and spire after spire of purple LOOSESTRIFE. Among these the bright blue DEMOISELLE DRAGONFLIES flit hither and thither in hundreds, besides a host of other winged creatures. In this country there are forty or fifty different varieties of dragon fly. The most common include those with the long striped body and a spot on each wing, the four spot with two spots on each wing, the short, flat-bodied kind and the delicate demoiselle. Contrary to common belief, dragonflies do not sting. They live on small flies which they catch on the wing and so actually do a great deal of good.



19 As at the waterside, so in the garden during these long summer days, there is a host of flying creatures, large and small; the pond attracts an odd dragonfly, there are bees over the herbaceous borders and butterflies abounding; too many of the common white for the good of the green vegetable crop. I have been glad to see numerous LADYBIRDS about this season, for they keep a check on the aphid, the larvæ of the common seven-spot ladybird take a heavy toll of the green aphid on the roses. The curious HOVER-FLY is also the gardener's friend by keeping a check on the greenfly. This evening I have been watching LEAF-CUTTER BEES at work. These are the insects that cut the circular discs from the rose leaves. I followed one carrying its handiwork from the rose beds to a little round hole in the terrace floor and it duly pulled it inside where it will be used as the lining for a series of about six cells. Each cell as it is completed will be filled with pollen and the female bee, who does all the work, will lay an egg therein. The cell is then sealed and the process repeated with each in turn. The food provided exactly supplies the little bee during growth so that when spring comes it bites its way out and emerges as a full-grown insect.

- 21 The lovely blue MEADOW-CRANESBILL is in bloom in the lanes and the tall pink spikes of the FOXGLOVES reach above all other flowers in the garden. I like to see them standing up like cathedral spires about the rockery. Already the HAWS are forming in green bunches on the hedges where the wild roses are a riot of blossom. The dainty WHITE BURNET ROSE is also in bloom in the more open spaces. It does not climb the hedge but prefers to develop into low bushes at the edge. There are several varieties of the wild-rose; I think I prefer the deep pink one. Already the summer BUTTERFLIES are about the fields. To-day I saw the small copper and common blue, both perfect in their individuality; the meadow brown, so common on sandy heaths, and the wall butterfly that is similar but lighter in colour. GRASSHOPPERS were chirping everywhere.



- 24 MIDSUMMER DAY and as a rare treat in summer a family of GOLDFINCHES visited the garden. Their chinking call-note first drew my attention to them, then I saw the parent birds and three youngsters. They stayed for some time calling continuously, then passed on into the field beyond to feed on some thistle heads there. Many birds in the garden have second broods. A young robin without a red waistcoat was on the lawn, blackbirds were stealing among the fruit bushes and telling me all about it too, young greenfinches were calling in the apple trees. In the quiet of this evening there is a continual "plop-plop" in the pond where FROGS are holding some sort of a revel by the sound of it and every now and again I hear a gurgle as a goldfish rises to suck in some choice morsel on the surface.



- 27 The TURTLE-DOVES have built a nest in the thick hawthorn hedge at the bottom of the garden and the hen is sitting on two rounded white eggs. The nest is only a platform of interwoven sticks and it is a wonder that the eggs remain in their place when the bird flies off, but although it looks such a crazy affair it is remarkably rigid. The woodpigeon's nest which is of similar construction will stand the brunt of many winter gales as the number of derelict nests at that time goes to prove. The BLACKBERRY is coming into flower on last year's wood that climbed through the hedge and now spreads over it. Some blossom is white and some almost purple. There must be many varieties of the common bramble.



- 30 The YELLOW WAGTAIL is a common summer visitor and frequently nests in the meadows about here, but to-day in a field of cut clover about a quarter of a mile from the house I came upon a pair of the much rarer BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL which is the Continental cousin of the former bird and even more handsome; the male having a powder blue cap and bright yellow breast. Now I am wondering if there is a chance that they are nesting in the vicinity. The last day of June,

probably the peak of the year, and I have climbed to the top of the hill, a rugged knoll with a wide prospect in every direction. Here with time to stand and stare I am watching the clouds pass overhead like great galleons. It is a pity that so many of us are engrossed with the road in front and have little time to look about us for there is much to see. Cloud formations are so wonderfully varied and to learn of them is to know something of the weather. They are so beautiful, so restful that watching them induces tranquility, which in these troubled times is necessary for peace of mind. On this bright summer day at the turn of the year, the bounty of nature spread like an offering at my feet, my senses thrilled with the richness of its perfume and music and my head surrounded by this cloudy canopy, I am indeed a king.



JULY

1 To-day there is an atmosphere over the countryside that is hard to define, but it betokens the **TURN OF THE YEAR**. The great vigour of new growth has largely ceased and it is as if Nature was slackening her effort. The garden is still a mass of bloom and there is a riot of colour, both here and in the fields and lanes, but there are many indications that the prime has been reached and vitality and colour are already waning. The **HAY** is nearly all gathered in to the new ricks at the corners of the shorn fields where they wait upon the thatcher and there are sweet-smelling wisps of it on the hedges along narrow lanes where reaching briars and brambles have caught it from passing wagons. To-day a **WHITE THROAT** has been singing all day on the kitchen chimney. He seems to have chosen this unusual place as a temporary singing perch and every now and again he flutters up from it to voice the exuberance in his heart. This month the majority of birds become silent; some species have already done so, the chaffinch since the end of June, but many are still in full song. The cuckoo is becoming throaty and is inclined to overdo the "cuck-cuck." **FRUIT** is forming on the hedges. There are small green bunches of haws; the sloes on the blackthorn are quite large; and acorns and horse-chestnuts are bright among the dull leafage of the trees.



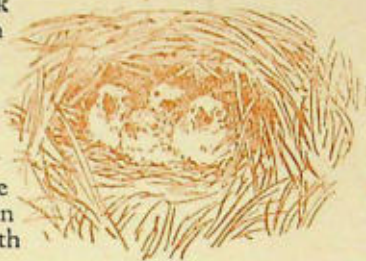
3 The young TREE-SPARROWS are chirping in the nest-box and quarrelling to reach the entrance hole to be first fed at each return of the parent birds. I have been surprised this year how quickly after one brood has flown the nest is cleaned, relined and another clutch of eggs laid; barely a week has elapsed, and by that time the first brood have left the vicinity. The hedges are still bright with the cream of the ELDERBERRY and the roadside with white and pink YARROW and yellow LADY'S-BEDSTRAW. To-day I noted a very dark red yarrow in the lane that must have sown itself from some garden. During a sudden heavy thunderstorm a large party of HOUSE-MARTINS appeared at some height overhead, wheeling this way and that, apparently enjoying the heavy rain. One group particularly intrigued me by their follow-my-leader evolutions in and out among the remainder. They appeared to me to be youngsters learning to fly.



4 I am very excited to-day. The BLUE-HEADED WAGTAILS have a nest, probably for their second brood. I was fortunate enough to find it last evening in the cut-clover field where I first saw the birds. The nest is very like that of the yellow-wagtail, but if anything is rather more exposed and more amply lined with hair. The four eggs are mottled dull-brown, lightly zoned at the larger end. To have such uncommon birds "at home" within so short a distance of the house is a great event. While hidden in some straw stooks watching the nest two LEVERETS came very near to me. They were about three-quarters grown and I had ample opportunity to watch their little nervous movements, nose-twitching and so on. They are not animals that one usually sees at such close quarters. Small mixed flocks of PEEWITS and STARLINGS are frequently seen at this time of the year and there are plenty about now. The young of both species are noticeable by their lighter plumage. The first real feathering of all young birds tends to provide camouflage for them, however bright their parents may be. WOOD-PIGEON flocks drift up and down the district at every month of the year, but from now on they will tend to grow larger, though I found a nest with fresh eggs only a day or so ago. I have been planting out brussel-sprouts and sprouting broccoli, taking advantage of the damp weather. The plants quickly become established under such conditions. Speaking of the prospect of fine weather to an old countryman, he informed me with all seriousness, "Them moles is diggin' for rain." WHINCHAT families are common in the more open pastures. One can always recognise them by their frequent "chat-chat," as if two pebbles were being struck together, and by the way they flit from bush to bush in front of one.



6 More rain and wind and the sky a patchwork of vari-coloured cumulus rain clouds with odd strips and pieces of brightest blue. How often in July is there a spell of almost March weather. The **WILLOW-WARBLER** usually builds a domed nest on the ground among the herbage, but in the garden to-day I found one in the top of a low hedge, three and a half feet from the ground level. When I peeped inside, it seemed to be filled with little gaping yellows beaks.



7 **RASPBERRIES** and cream for breakfast this morning. I believe that I like them better than strawberries. Although the birds about the garden are quite undisturbed the loss of fruit seems to be very small. Sometimes I use black cotton to persuade them away and I believe it is a help, but a lot depends on the weather. In time of drought they take more fruit, but the pond and the bird-bath help on such occasions. The worst culprits are the **BLACKBIRDS**, especially if there is a family of them lately out of the nest. The pond is a constant attraction for all sorts of birds and it is very amusing to see one taking a bath on a half-submerged lily leaf.

9 I watched a most interesting incident to-day. A pair of **MISTLE-THRUSHES** were making a great to-do in and about a large isolated oak in the middle of a field. They were actually attacking three full-grown **STOATS** that were hunting among the exposed roots. The birds' onslaught was to such good effect that the animals were driven to beat a hasty



retreat across the field to a nearby patch of nettles. The thrushes continued the assault by flying directly down at them and one repeatedly feigned injury, rolling about on the ground in front of the running animals. Meantime a party of **SWALLOWS** joined in the fray, so that the stoats were glad to find shelter. A **GRASSHOPPER-WARBLER**, which is quite uncommon round here, was singing his reeling song (like a bicycle free-wheeling) in the osier patch as I passed, so I assume that he is already on his way south. Odd **REDSTARTS** are about too. Their habit of flying along in front of one and the flash of brick-red on the back help one to recognise the bird. Apple and pear trees are already showing their promise with clusters of bright green fruit. What a wonderfully bright colour it is.

11 I heard the harsh calling of a **CORNCRAKE** last evening. Years ago the bird was common about here, but lately it has become very scarce and no one seems to know why. The modern reaping machine has been blamed because the bird, being a very close sitter, is cut to pieces before it can escape. The scarcity is general over the whole of south-eastern England, though it is still common in the north-



west and in Ireland. For a migrant it seems very awkward on the wing, much preferring to use its legs to escape pursuit. I have discovered that the BLUE-HEADED WAGTAILS share the brooding of the eggs, in fact the male bird seems to be the more attentive in this direction. I was struck by the anxiety of a WILD-DUCK when I disturbed her brood of seven that could already fly. She did her utmost to attract my attention by flapping about on the water, although the youngsters had flown away with every sign of maturity. The brown and white or pink and white LAND-SNAIL seems to be more common than it used to be. I am constantly finding empty or broken shells on the roadside following the attention of a thrush. This evening I have been cutting back the LAVENDER and trimming ROSEMARY bushes and now the air is laden with their scent. It is on my hands and coat. Sometimes we scatter the clippings on the porch, where they are trodden on, and keep others to throw on the fire during the winter evenings, so that the room is filled with perfume. For several nights just about sunset a GREAT-BAT or noctule has been flying above the garden at a great height. The flight is peculiar, with sudden downward darts at insects far below. It is said that the creature consumes during its sixty minutes' flight at dusk and dawn a quarter of its own weight in insects. One can't mistake it because of its large size. It has a fifteen inch wing span.



- 15 ST. SWITHIN'S DAY and a shower came just after dawn. I hope that occasional showers will satisfy the saints for the next forty days. After the recent rain the cut grass in the meadows is quite green again. The TURTLE-DOVES in the hedge have two large awkward-looking chicks, very unlike their graceful parents. The turtle-dove is the smallest of the British doves and can always be recognised in flight by the swift down beat of the wings. Just now the dainty HARE-BELLS are at their best. They have a particular charm, I think, because they come when most of the field flowers are getting past their prime and they usually flourish in unfruitful soil. Swifts are wheeling and screaming over the hill in the clear evening light. No doubt the young birds are learning to fly, but they seem to be enjoying themselves whatever they may be doing.



- 16 The CORNFIELDS are beginning to change colour. They have lost their verdure and are growing paler. As the wind sends rippling waves across them, there is a silvery sheen on the oats and barley and the suggestion of gold in the wheat. The SPARROW FLOCKS are attracted by the ripening seed and hordes of them fly up from the hedges as one passes. I met my farmer friend to-day setting traps between the cornfields in an endeavour to destroy as many rats as possible before the corn is cut and stacked. PARTRIDGE coveys are beginning to appear. One party of fifteen rose from the corner of a root field as I approached. The young birds, looking much smaller than their parents, were just able to fly. It is remarkable how flat partridges can crouch, even in the short stubble one rarely sees them before they fly up.

17 BIRD-SONG is rapidly declining. The dawn chorus has almost died away. Only the greenfinch, buntings, hedge-sparrows and wren will be heard by the end of the month. Walking through the spinney I could not understand where a most objectionable smell was coming from until I noticed the black shiny head and white stalk of a STINKHORN toadstool. I have been planting-out LEEKS, putting them into a shallow trench so that I can soak them well if there is a dry spell. There was an amusing episode when two WILLOW-WARBLEDERS resented a WHINCHAT sitting on the telephone wire above their nest where the young ones were almost ready to fly. The whinchat was preening after a bath and despite requests and jostling by the warblers, refused to budge. At last the male warbler, in desperation, pushed right up to the other bird and sang his little song straight into his face and as loud as he could. This was apparently too much for the whinchat so that he departed and the relief and self-satisfaction of the warblers was too funny to describe. All but three or four of the thirty odd pairs of SAND-MARTINS have left the sand-pit. Their arrival in spring is much more regular than their departure, which has varied from mid-July to the beginning of September. Perhaps their stay at the nesting site depends on the successful rearing of two broods and as soon as this is concluded they leave. On the oaks new leafage is hiding the bunches of small bright acorns.



18 To-day has been filled with sunshine and warmth. The borders are massed with the colour of the summer flowers. Before breakfast I gathered an armful for a birthday gift and they filled the seat of the car like a multi-coloured cushion. The purple buddleia spikes have been surrounded by a dancing galaxy of the large SUMMER BUTTERFLIES, the PEACOCK and RED ADMIRAL (or the admirable as it used to be called). THRUSHES are becoming scarcer again, they may be hiding during the moult, and the BLACK-BIRDS when they venture on to the lawn look very ragged and woebegone. From now until September, one species of bird after another goes into seclusion while moulting is in progress and later emerges in its former haunts looking much cleaner and smarter, though not so bright as in its spring feathering. The actual date of the moult varies with the species, some moult twice a year, some have an extra partial moult and some merely wear off the tips of feathers to expose the brighter under-colouring.



22 There has been a tragedy! The BLUE-HEADED WAGTAILS hatched, and now the young have disappeared. They were opening little brilliant orange mouths yesterday and the male bird was brooding them late last evening so that some animal in the night or a crow early this morning has made a meal of them. The neat little nest is empty and forlorn. Losses among nestling birds are very heavy and if, as I suspect, they have already reared one brood earlier in the summer I suppose one



must be satisfied and hope that they may return to the neighbourhood next year, though one particularly regrets misadventure in the case of the rarer birds. A young ROBIN was on the lawn this morning looking very perky in his speckled waistcoat. Ploughing has already begun again, the newly turned earth attracting many birds. On one field I noticed a large flock of YELLOW-WAGTAILS, among them many youngsters in their brown bibs. There was a large concourse of SWIFTS above the house this evening wheeling round and round in a mazy riot of movement. I suspect they are preparing for their long journey if some of them have not already set out. The ROSEBAY WILLOW-HERB is common enough on any waste land, but I never saw it so outstandingly lovely as with the late evening sunlight on it. The slanting amber rays picked out the colour until it glowed as though it was on fire.



- 25 How rapidly the countryside changes colour at this season. Gone is the vivid green except for an odd patch of grass here and there that for some reason has sprouted afresh; the green of the trees has dulled, but there is a richness of yellow that is spreading, outweighing all else. Among the cornfields one can easily pick out the oats and barley now by their lighter colour and some of the wheat is ruddy from the rich red of the stems. At the edges of the crops the LESSER BINDWEED crawls among the stalks and in places climbs up them, while its small pink flowers of one day are so numerous in some places that they make a floral carpet.



- 27 Some of the APPLES are colouring, but even those that are not show vividly among the foliage and after a gusty night the windfalls are very bright upon the short turf in the orchard. Looking at an apple, its shape, its texture and its colour, one must conclude that it is a very lovely thing and yet so often we appreciate it only by its taste. GREEN-WOODPECKERS are noisy again after a silence of some weeks and young birds in their dull mottled green plumage are common. I was watching one to-day picking ants from an ant-heap. The green-woodpecker is a bird that may be changing its habits somewhat from woodpecking for insects to searching the ground for them. I so frequently see them on the ground. WASPS as well as birds appreciate the lily pond, for in dry weather several may be found there at any time of the day, apparently drinking on the lily leaves.

- 29 Several CURLEWS passed high overhead to-day flying in a south-westerly direction, a sign that the nesting season is over for them and that they are returning to the coast for the winter. The TIT families too are moving about the countryside. First one sees them in their separate families, then in the late



summer these join together in somewhat larger parties; they may even be of mixed species. Later the variety in one flock increases so that LONGTAILED TITS, GREAT-TITS, BLUE-TITS and MARSH-TITS are together. The numbers, however, gradually decrease as time goes on and the inevitable losses occur. This evening I saw twenty longtailed-tits, evidently two families in one party, their little fluffy black and white bodies flickering here and there in the hedgerow and disappearing as they passed down the lane. They move very quickly even when feeding and keep up a constant chatter as they go. The golden yellow flame of the RAGWORT glows in the waste places and thistles are very prominent in the patches of uncropped grass in the fields. Both are a bane to the farmer, but the former makes a glorious splash of colour where it flourishes.



- 31 This morning I found two grotesque green caterpillars with violet, yellow and red patterning on their bodies, and a spiked tail. They were rapidly devouring the succulent young leaves of a small poplar tree. I knew them at once for POPLAR-HAWK MOTH caterpillars, but they looked very fearsome all the same. This evening a golden glow lies across the fields and picks up the red upon the apples, the haws and rowan berries, so that despite the sunshine and warmth I know that summer is passing.

AUGUST



- 1 LAMMASTIDE, the festival of the first fruits or LOAFMAS, the celebration of the loaves baked of the newly gathered grain. In these days most of us associate August Bank

Holiday with relaxation by the seaside, but I am staying at home this year and to-day have been watching the reapers swing their scythes to clear the headlands ready for the great humming machines. The oats are ready and with every swing of the bright curving blade there is a sharp swish and a dry tinkling sound as the graceful plumes of seed fall to the ground. Given fine weather, the orderly procession of the harvest, from the cutting of the headlands and the noisy machine's ever-shortening journey round and round the field; the setting up of the stooks and the procession of wagons winding back and forth to the growing stacks until the task is completed, has always been a source of wonder and delight to me. So, on this first morning I think it right to give thanks that I am here to enjoy it and to offer a prayer that the harvest which promises so well may be safely gathered in. Neither am I alone in my praise, for GREENFINCH, YELLOW-BUNTING, WILLOW-WARBLER and WREN have joined me with their song.

- 2 There is a touch of autumn in the air: a heavy mist enveloped everything early this morning and later in the warm sunshine sitting on the dry and broken grass beneath the elms, a faded leaf fluttered to my feet. How active the young WILLOW-WARBLEDERS are and how bright in their first plumage; so green and yellow against foliage that is growing dull. They frequent the garden a great deal at this time and are always fascinating to watch in their tireless search for insects among the bushes. BUTTERFLIES are legion; I counted ten different species during a short walk over the fields.



- 3 A PARTRIDGE is sitting on a nest of nine eggs at the edge of a ditch near the garden. This is a late clutch, but I suppose her earlier nests have been destroyed. Later still is a BINNET which has only just completed a nest in the privet hedge. Calamity may have befallen an earlier family or it may be her third brood. The partridge is single brooded, so that this particular bird may have failed on several earlier occasions. They are very apt to desert if interfered with before a full clutch is laid. Birds vary in the number of broods reared in a season and much has yet to be learnt in this respect.

- 5 Another great concourse of SWIFTS was above the house to-day. They are definitely moving south and are gathering into parties for the journey: by the fifteenth the majority will have gone. The fields are dotted with the bright yellow stars of the HAWKWEED that remind me of small dandelions, but they will soon give place to the HAWKSBEARD which is similar but smaller with a branching stem. Purple knapweed is common too, and the yellow toad flax, the pink of the shrubby little REST HARROW still shows in patches on the older pastures. In the garden the borders are beginning to show gaps that cannot be filled again this summer. I had some raspberries to-day, but am afraid they are the last. Just now those uninvited guests, the WASPS, are numerous at meals. Wherever fruit or jam is about the wasps will find it and they seem to think it is so displayed for their particular delight.



- 7 Where a few days ago the fields were unbroken acres of golden-yellow they are now dotted with the standing sheaves of grain. MAGPIE families are roaming about the countryside and proclaiming their presence by constant chattering. JAY families, too, keep together for some time, but prefer the shelter of the more wooded parts of the district. You will never mistake them even if you do not see them, for their harsh cry, "craark-craark" is advertisement enough. Bird families are numerous everywhere, keeping together as they move from place to place where food attracts them until they merge into the larger winter flocks. In those species which do not normally flock the parties eventually break up, but many remain together well into the autumn.



9 To-day I was intrigued by a hen HOUSE-SPARROW with a most peculiar voice. She constantly repeated a high-pitched staccato note that I could not recognise at all and it was some minutes before I was able to identify the bird. Odd rooks sometimes have a queer "caw" and most birds when they sing have a particular phrase which is often repeated as if they were fond of it. This is very noticeable in thrushes and blackbirds.

12 The JACKDAWS have returned to the quarry. After the nesting season the place is quite deserted by them so that the STOCK-DOVES, which also nest there, have it to themselves. I imagine the latter must be thankful, for jackdaws would not be very pleasant neighbours. Having left the place for six or eight weeks, however, the jackdaws return and use their nesting cavities as roosting places until the spring. The stock-dove can always be identified from the wood-pigeon by the fact that it has no light bars on its wings and it is smaller. Odd parties of SWIFTS, HOUSE-MARTINS and SAND-MARTINS have been passing over. Migration is in full swing and seems to depend very much on the wind. Birds rarely fly for any distance with the wind, so that here movement usually takes place in a south-westerly direction against the prevailing wind, which is from the south-west. Birds must gain some support from a headwind, though they may not travel so fast. If during the migration periods the wind is in the wrong quarter, then they seem to head into it hoping, I imagine, to find a more favourable breeze further on.



14 The SPIDERS have been busy. Their webs are everywhere and one can do nothing in the garden without destroying some little spinner's handiwork. On a calm day web floats in the air or it is woven like a carpet on the grass, it appears miraculously between the spade you set in the ground and a nearby plant while your back is turned and stretches across your face as you walk through the spinney. The harvest are being carried until dark this evening. Already many of the fields are bare stubble, and in the evening and early morning, PARTRIDGE coveys are common, especially if the ripe grain has been scattered.

16 This morning was bright and fresh and the garden seemed to be alive with birds. It is peculiar how on some days they seem to be specially attracted here. At this time of the year it is understandable when flocks are reforming, but it is by no means confined to the autumn. To-day there are LINNETS, GREENFINCHES, TREE-PIPITS and BUNTINGS in large numbers, beside many other odd species. They flit here and there among the trees and bushes, to and from the pond and on to the lawn, chasing one another and playing just as if they were on holiday. In sharp contrast are the BLACKBIRDS that are moulting. Dishevelled and unkempt, they creep on to the lawn, looking thoroughly ashamed of themselves; very different from the sleek, tail-flirting rogues of the spring. I am very fond of the mauve flowers of the SCABIOUS family, but round about here the DEVIL'S-BIT which has the deeper purple flowers on branching stems is more common. At present it makes a new splash of colour on the fields.



- 17 A MISTLE-THRUSH brood was reared in the orchard of the farm this year, and the parents and youngsters have been about ever since. Now they seem to have been joined by other families, for there is quite a large party on the hill to-day. GRASS-HOPPERS are still singing in the dry meadows, but their heyday is past and soon they will be heard no more until next summer. Considering what a feature of the countryside they are it is strange we see so little of them and most of us know less. The WILLOW-HERB is losing its colour. The seed pods are breaking to release the downy seed that flies away so easily on the lightest breath of air. A young CUCKOO looking very lonely was with a party of PIED-WAGTAILS on the hill this morning. He spent a great deal of time in squeaking to be fed and was apparently being tended by several of the wagtails. I imagine he had been reared by a pair of these birds and others had joined them in their arduous duty. This is quite a well-known feature of the cuckoo's upbringing. The young cuckoos do not travel south with the older birds, who go sometime in July, but follow them during August. Their route is therefore quite unknown to them and the movement is entirely one of instinct.

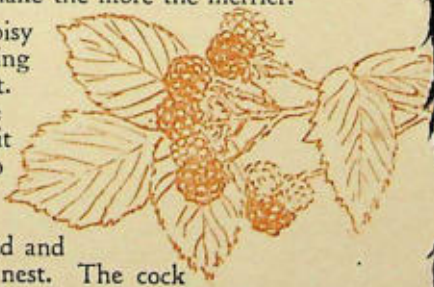


- 18 To-day a large party of SWALLOWS have made the house a temporary resting place on their southward journey. Two families are still occupied with household cares at the farm, so that these birds about the house must be from the north. They have been sitting in a row on the ridge-tiles in the sun and hawking for flies about the garden. There was a constant twitter and a little song from time to time. On one occasion quite suddenly they all flew up, uttering their sharp alarm cries to mob a quite innocent KESTREL-HAWK that passed overhead. They gave him no peace as they passed out of sight, but they soon returned and by their behaviour appeared well pleased with themselves. Hips are forming on the BRIARS and the ELDERBERRIES have a purple blush on the side facing the midday sun.



- 19 To-day the year of BIRD-SONG has met and overlapped. This morning a robin sang his full autumn song while a yellow-bunting was still singing his spring roundelay. The ROOK flocks have returned to forage among the local fields neglected by them in the summer and JACKDAWS from the quarry join them each day to make the more the merrier.

- 21 Wind and heavy rain to-day. OWLS are noisy again and GULLS were over the river, having been driven inland by storm on the coast. The growth of the BRAMBLE during the summer is astonishing. Not only does it flower and fruit at the same time, it also sends out great runners of new growth for fruit the following season. The LINNETS in the privet hedge have hatched and there are four sturdy youngsters in the nest. The cock



bird is very nervous, flying from bush to bush as one approaches, but the hen is quite matter-of-fact and proceeds with her work of satisfying her hungry babies. I have often noticed that the male bird is more nervous than the female. There was a whir of wings past the sitting-room window this evening as a covey of twelve PARTRIDGES flew down the small sunk garden within six feet of the house. Why they came so near I do not know, but they followed their leader in twists and turns among the trees like stunt flyers at an air-circus.

- 25 The WHEATEARS are on their way back to Africa. As in the spring, so during the last week in August and the first in September, they can always be found resting on the hill. It is quite in the nature of a hostel for them. Very often parties of YELLOW-WAGTAILS and TREE-PIPITS are with them. I never tire of watching these active and vivacious birds, running here and there to pick up insects from the grass or chasing one another in headlong flight. The GUELDER-ROSE berries are making a brilliant splash of colour on the hedges now. We brought home a lovely spray and it has the place of honour in the sitting-room. A chaffinch was singing what is generally referred to as the sub-song. Many birds sing an abbreviated and quieter version of their ordinary song in the early autumn.

- 26 A GREY-WAGTAIL was at the lily pond to-day. The bird does not nest in the district but prefers the vicinity of mountain streams. In winter it is often found in the lowlands, but never far from water, so that one must regard it as an honour that the little garden pond should have been graced by its presence. It looked lovely balancing on the rough stone walling in its blue-grey and yellow plumage. There were some other uncommon visitors there, a RED-BUNTING and a GARDEN-WARBLER, both bathing on the lily leaves and afterwards preening on a nearby willow.

- 29 The PARTRIDGE coveys are large and common in the stubble fields. The abundant food supply provides the nourishment to bring the young birds to full maturity quickly. The fluffy THISTLE seed heads in the field have attracted more GOLDFINCHES. To watch them is to see winged fairies, so light and dainty are they in flight: like the thistledown with which they are so often associated. HAWS are ruddy along the hedges in the lane, but I found honeysuckle still in flower in one place, and in another, great masses of the white flowering GREATER BINDWEED almost smothering the hawthorn over which it had spread its long creeping vines. By the roadside, too, the strong stems of ANGELICA with their heavy umbels of white flowers rise high above the shrunken and withering undergrowth.



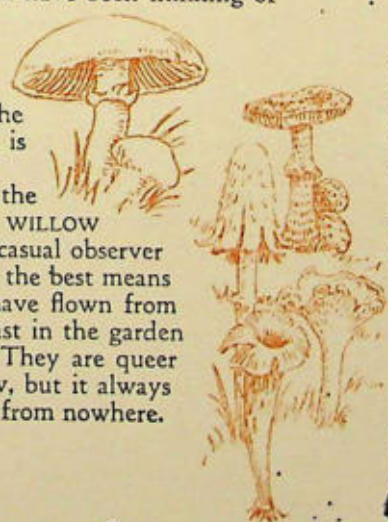
- 31 In the garden those heralds of autumn, the MICHAELMAS DAISIES and CHRYSANTHEMUMS are already glowing with colour in the otherwise somewhat faded borders. PLUMS are being gathered and the WASPS are living like lords. The holiday month of the townsfolk is over, but countrymen have been hard at work and now the crops are nearly all garnered, waiting the threshing machine; and the stubble fields the plough.

SEPTEMBER

- 1 Bang, bang go the guns as the PARTRIDGES are driven from field to field. Gradually their numbers will grow less and less until it will not be worth while to get the gun down and they will be left in peace again. I feel sorry for them. After their weeks of ease and plenty it is such a rude awakening. Another stranger was in the garden to-day, the LESSER-SPOTTED WOODPECKER. My attention was first drawn to the bird by its sharp "tcheck-tcheck," then I saw it near the top of an ash and at once noticed the black and white shoulder bars. This member of the woodpecker family is only about the same size as a sparrow and is usually seen among the smaller branches at the tops of trees. Walking through the rough undergrowth in the more open parts of the spinney this afternoon my lower garments became a mass of BURRS so provided with small hooks that each one required individual attention to remove it. In this manner the BURDOCK ensures the distribution of its seeds.

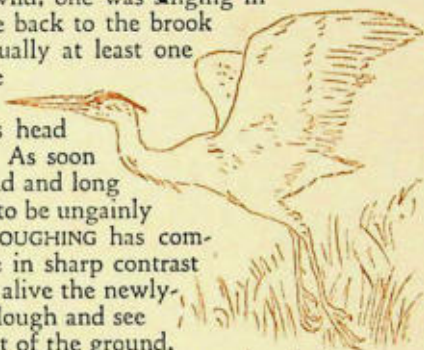


- 3 The mornings are misty and the day filled with warm sunshine. The year, Nature's year, seems to be yawning lazily as though it was time to think of sleep and summer sits like a mother in her easy chair, with all her tasks complete, her children grown up and gone, resting and growing beautifully old. On the other hand, I have been thinking of spring and planting out young cabbages.
- 5 To-day a CHIFF-CHAFF was singing in the spinney. He sings when he comes in March and when he goes in September and much of the time in between. Such a queer little ditty it is to make so much song about. Of the three leaf warblers that are common in this country the WOOD-WARBLER is the largest. Then comes the WILLOW WARBLER and last the CHIFF-CHAFF. To the casual observer the birds are similar in habit and plumage and the best means of identification is the song. The LINNETS have flown from the nest in the privet hedge and that is the last in the garden this season. MUSHROOMS are in the fields. They are queer things, very nice with fried bacon or in a stew, but it always seems extraordinary how they suddenly appear from nowhere.



You may walk across a field in the evening and see nothing, then next morning you will find that the little white buttons, seeming so soft, have forced their way through the hard soil in little groups. The spawn must be spread by horses and cattle; but an airman has informed me that planes flying from 'drome to 'drome are also a means, that the spawn is carried on the wheels. TOAD-STOOLS in variety and colour are still more strange, in fact, so much so that they are often positively repulsive. On the other hand, many are quite handsome. The *fly-arganic*, which is poisonous and has a red cap with white spots, is often used by artists to decorate pictures of fairies.

- 6 Despite the fact that the THRUSHES seem to have very largely left the district and those that remain are very wild, one was singing in the spinney this morning. HERONS come back to the brook at this time of the year and there is usually at least one down in the water meadows. Next time you observe one fly up, watch how he jumps from the ground and throws his head forward to obtain a horizontal balance. As soon as he is well on the wing he tucks his head and long neck between his shoulders. They appear to be ungainly birds until one sees them in flight. PLOUGHING has commenced and the dark brown furrows are in sharp contrast to the pale stubble; and how wonderfully alive the newly-turned earth appears to be. Follow the plough and see the dark brown snake that twists itself out of the ground. Two lonely SWIFTS were struggling against a sharp south-westerly wind this evening.



- 7 Now that the crops are cut, the first heavy autumn rain has encouraged the weeds that have lain dormant so that a film of green is creeping over the stubble fields. Though autumn is here the pageant of WILD FLOWERS is by no means over. We made a list of sixty in bloom during a short walk in the rain this afternoon. Among them was the BURNET-ROSE: surely the last wild-rose of summer. From someone who has just come ashore from duty in the North Sea, I hear that one night last week when the boat was about ten miles from the coast of Norfolk, a party of about thirty GOLDCRESTS came aboard in a very exhausted condition. They came in from the north-east and the crew were very zealous in their endeavours to revive the tiny mites but many died. The next day the remainder flew towards the English coast.

- 9 One or two cold nights and the marrow plants begin to look very sick. It is a sign of the season that my diary so frequently repeats the phrase, "mist this morning." Immediately the sun has gone down it begins to form in the bottom of the valley and as the cold air sinks to the lower areas it spreads and spreads looking like a rising lake from which the trees stand out as bushy islands. If one walks from the hill top down to the brook on any fine still evening in September the fall in temperature is very apparent. In



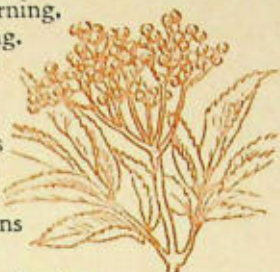
the morning the grass is drenched with moisture and the hedges are decorated with cobwebs picked out in tiny particles of water so that they appear to be frosted. Also a sign of autumn is the "chip-chip" of the ROBIN. Some birds have a much more varied vocabulary than others. The tit's and the robin's is quite extensive, even the jackdaw and rook have a wonderful variety of expression, in fact a study of the language of most birds will prove that it is much more extensive than is generally understood. One of the great joys of bird watching is to know their voices so well that they can be recognised accurately without being seen.

- 11 A halo surrounded the sun this morning; a complete rainbow, a portent of more gain. In the root-fields the crops are hidden deep in a wealth of green tops that to-day is still, but in a wind reminds me of a choppy sea in miniature. One can recognise the mangold fields by the vivid green leafage. The CHAFFINCHES are coming out of their retreat during the time of moulting. I saw a cock bird to-day with such brilliant white wing-bars that at a glance I hardly recognised him, but his "pink-pink" soon settled the matter. There was a great to-do in the house this afternoon. FLYING-ANTS in hundreds were in several of the rooms and most numerous near the empty hearths. A brush and pan were required to sweep them up. It was discovered that they were coming down the chimney. I can only assume that a large swarm was flying above the level of ground but not high enough to miss the chimney tops on which they settled and eventually tumbled down. I remember, too, that a large flock of STARLINGS was hawking for insects of some sort at a similar height from the ground. So maybe the birds found the ants before the household. SWALLOW and MARTIN parties have been passing over, but as the wind is light, only in small numbers and taking the journey very easily.

- 14 There was a huge flock of PEEWITS like a black cloud drifting about the sky very early this morning, breaking up and reforming till it gradually disappeared from my sight. I am not at all sure that their wanderings are as aimless as they seem to be. Later, I watched a very mixed flock of birds pass along the edge of the spinney. Twenty LONG-TAILED-TITS seemed to lead the party. Then followed two TREE-CREEPERS with thin squeaky voices, a couple of MARSH-TITS in their fawn plumage and black caps constantly repeating "chew-chew," some GREAT-TITS sounding the call-note "tink-tink," then three or four WILLOW-WARBLERS, very green and yellow, and lastly a large party of BLUE-TITS. Sometimes the species changed places or became more mixed, but that was the general picture. I have often promised myself that some day I would follow such a party to see how fast they travelled and whether the various species kept together, but that is still a treat in store. The MEADOW-PIPITS are coming south. I could hear their "peeping" over the house before I was out of bed. How regular they are in their arrival. The majority will pass on, but a few stay about all the winter. There is hardly a sign of any LARKS, but if one walks across the stubble, one or two will rise lazily and flutter a few yards. Here again they are moulting and keep well to cover. Soon flocks will form again for the winter and there may be a little song on fine warm days.



- 15 A GREAT-TIT was singing "see-saw, see-saw" this morning, but it had not the clarity or vigour of the spring song. I have observed year after year how this bird always commences to sing again about this time. To-day BLACKBERRIES are at every stage of development. There are flowers and fruit on the same spray, berries green, red and black. There is nothing lovelier than a spray of fully ripened fruit. The ELDERBERRIES have turned black, but this year are by no means abundant.



- 16 MICHAELMAS DAISIES are now quite the best display in the garden and what a range of them there are, not only in colour, but in form and size. The BLACKBIRDS are thieving again. They and the WASPS play havoc with the pears. This morning I watched a blackbird deliberately trying the fruit on one tree to find the most ripe. He went from one to another taking a peck at each and wherever he pecked the wasps will finish what was begun. PERSICARY is rampant in one particular field where I walked to-day, the pink flower-heads making quite a show of colour. If the plant had a tidier habit it would be a handsome thing.



- 18 To-day has been spent in clearing and cleaning up the garden. So soon as there is space I like to get the bonfire going to burn up the rambler, rose and hedge clippings and such-like woody refuse. All the softer growth goes to the compost heap. As is always the case in the winter months, a ROBIN appears from nowhere and sits on the fork or spade handle as though it was quite the usual thing to do, yet he has never been near to my knowledge during the summer. The more one learns of bird behaviour the more one realises how little one knows.

- 20 I think the haws are the brightest thing on the hedges at present, though here and there autumn has already been busy with her paint-brush of vivid colours. In some places WOODY-NIGHTSHADE berries lie across the hedgerow like strings of coral beads, in others the fruit of WHITE BRIONY is equally bright. Leaves of the GUELDER-ROSE are turning carmine and those of the dogwood purple. The spray of guelder-rose berries which was brought into the house last month is only now beginning to look faded. Up to the present there has been little frost but the first sharp nip will change the outlook overnight. In the city the under-nourished trees lining the roads are losing their leaves rapidly. Torn and trampled by the traffic, how different they look from those that soon will flutter into the country lanes to make a carpet of yellow, orange and brown.



- 23 In the garden and about the neighbouring fields I have noticed many oak tree seedlings. Perhaps this year has been particularly favourable for them. This is a feature I have observed before: in one year it may be ash, in another, sycamore seedlings, so that I presume the weather conditions in some years are most suitable for the germination of a

particular species. There is a strange dearth of bird-life this evening that is very difficult to account for; but this often happens in the winter months, whereas in spring and summer the population seems to be much more static.

- 25 On a short visit to Shropshire I was fortunate to see fifteen KESTREL-HAWKS in the air together, all attracted by what must have been a plague of grasshoppers in one large field. The insects were large and green and were very numerous for the lateness of the season. The birds hunted them by hovering above until they saw their quarry, then instead of pouncing direct, they dropped to the ground nearby and chased the insect on foot. The weather was moist and heavy and a wood-cutter felling trees nearby described the day as "daggeldy," which seemed very descriptive. His axe was a lovely thing, beautiful in form and balance so that I could not help thinking of its long history from the primitive stone hand-axe to this perfect tool.
- 27 There has been real fog to-day, not the autumn mist that is soon dissipated by the sun, but thick and heavy, so that there has been little daylight from dawn to dusk. It was as though winter had cast a net before him in which to gather his victims. But there will probably be many days of warm sunshine later on when summer will seem to return again, albeit briefly, to her faded garlands and withered finery. The last few days a party of WHITE WAGTAILS have been on the hill. They are very like the pied wagtail, but their plumage is much lighter. These are the first winter visitors I have noted from overseas.

- 29 The weather has cleared again and I have been working in the garden a large part of the day. One WATER-LILY is still in bloom and the GOLDFISH have not yet lost their appetites, as they will when there is any really cold weather. There are dozens of small FROGS, some yellow, some green-brown and others almost pink. I watched several climb the vertical corner of a cement wall and it was most interesting to observe the way they gripped the two sides with their feet and crawled slowly up. The birds seem to have returned to the neighbourhood for there has been a constant coming and going all day. The CHAFFINCH has been "pinking" again so that I am wondering if it is the same that spent last winter in the garden. Swallows have been passing over, but most of the summer visitors have departed. On the small lawn near the rock garden there was a little patch of green and grey feathers, a sure sign that a SPARROW-HAWK has been plucking some luckless greenfinch that he had struck down. MICHAELMAS DAY but no goose and no feasting, which is a pity.



- 30 The harvest has been garnered, many of the stacks are already thatched, ploughing is again in full swing and farmers are talking of the winter sowing. The countryside is bathed in the amber glow of the late summer sun, the orchards are shining rosily with bright fruit and the hedges are splashed with vivid red and gold. There is a feeling in the air of satisfaction in work completed and some measure of rest in store.

OCTOBER

1 For the past week or so I have constantly been picking up the bright brown nuts and their spiky green shells from where they have fallen under the HORSE-CHESTNUT trees. If there is a shell complete then I must needs break it open to disclose its polished treasure, set in the close-fitting white lining. What a lovely thing is a chestnut recently exposed, though it loses its bright colour and polish very quickly. The boys of the village already have their "konkers" threaded on a piece of string and outside the school-house before and after lessons many trials of strength are waged. SPIDERS have been hatching from eggs laid in the summer for to-day in the light breeze and warm sunshine thousands of the tiny creatures are floating in the air on short pieces of web. From a country walk one brings back several on one's clothes, but whether this is a token of luck or ill I do not know. The pageant of flowers is nearly over; the last of that great procession, the ivy, is in bloom. On a sheltered stump or an old wall the small pale-green flowers attract many insects, and to my mind have a definite charm of their own, even though they are insignificant and lack colour. A day or two ago I dug a hole in the garden to receive a water-tub, but the latter is not ready, so that the hole remains empty. This morning I discovered that a hedgehog had fallen in. The creature had made a slight cavity on one side and lay there partly rolled up. It was very amusing to see the way he "jumped" at any slight sound I made: all his muscles stiffened and his spines stood on end. Then after a while he would relax, but I know that he was watching me the whole time through half-closed beady little eyes.

3 Although I rescued the HEDGEHOG from the pit the day before yesterday, there were two there this morning, a large one and a small one, and I am wondering what attracted them. The animals' main sources of food are worms, slugs and snails, mice, rats, lizards and snakes, beside a variety of insects; from which it will be noted that they do a large amount of good in a garden. The fine and sunny weather yesterday was followed by a slight frost last night, which has noticeably changed the colour of the foliage in the spinney; and under the ASH TREES at the gate the leaves lie thickly scattered. The hedges in some places defy description in the richness of their autumn colouring, especially where the FIELD MAPLE predominates. The HEDGE-SPARROW, which is not really a sparrow



but more nearly related to the robins and wrens, is usually a very unobtrusive bird, but just now it is continuously squeaking about the garden. I have a suspicion that pairing must take place about this time because the birds are nearly always seen in two's and three's, and frequently fighting. I came back from the spinney to-day with my clothes again covered with burdock burrs and the small clinging seed-capsules of the goosegrass. Rabbits and other small animals must play a large part in the distribution of the seed of both these plants; and sheep to a lesser degree, as they are not inclined to enter undergrowth.

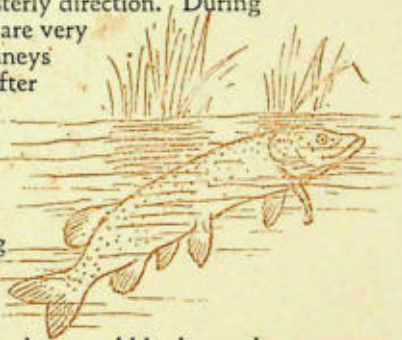
- 4 Although the water in the BROOK is down to its summer level the bed of the stream presents a very different appearance. The heavy rain last month cleared it of weed so that the water in the shallower parts is running clear over shining gravel. A brook is an endless source of delight; from day to day it is never the same and a diary written round one would be a most fascinating record. Its under-water life is probably the most interesting, for one has only to move a stone in the stream bed to find a multitude of strange and wonderful creatures. I find that birds are nearly always more numerous round about a brook and those species which make it their home have the added attraction of their specialised life. WATERHENS are abundant and easy to observe. The various methods they adopt to escape from an intruder are worthy of study. Sometimes they fly away along the surface of the water making a great splash as they go; at other times they dive silently, swimming under water to re-appear at some distance with only the tip of a red beak showing above the surface; or again, they may disappear silently into the cover of surrounding herbage. Large flocks of STARLINGS are about just now, mostly on the move across country, but if they pause at all to feed, one or two will nearly always commence to sing their wheezy song interspersed with the call-notes of other birds, for they are great mimics. They frequently associate with peewits so that the latter's call is often included in their repertoire. Therefore if you hear what sounds like a peewit calling from the chimney, do not be misled.



- 6 Another HEDGEHOG was in the pit this morning. I wonder if it is one of the same animals which I found there before. It is becoming quite a routine to visit the pit. Hedgehogs hibernate during the colder months so that soon they will be gathering leaves together to make a bed in the hedge-bottom. A heavy fog early this morning, but later it cleared and the day was warm and sunny. Large flocks of WOODPIGEONS are in the district, no doubt many of them visitors from the Continent. The woodpigeon has increased in numbers very considerably during the last few years and much enquiry is being made to find the reason for this. ROOKS were mobbing a SPARROW-HAWK over the house to-day and the evasive movements of the latter were most fascinating to watch. Eventually it sought seclusion in a tree, where it was left in peace. A rook would not normally be attacked by a sparrow-hawk, so that it is difficult to understand the reason for the latter's unpopularity. In the hedge-bottoms and ditches where the undergrowth has withered and fallen away there are thousands of tiny green

seedlings growing from seed scattered in the early summer. Many of these, such as the foxgloves, will survive the winter and provide herbage and flowers next season. Autumn, despite its characteristics of fulfilment and completion, is also a time of preparation, as these tiny seedlings demonstrate. In confirmation of this I was struck by the beauty of a small SALLOW bush to-day, still in full leafage, but at the base of each leaf was a bright red bud, some already broken to expose the pale grey catkin inside. It is the same with many trees if they are carefully examined, the new buds are there before the old leaves are shed, so that phoenix-like the new leafage emerges from the autumn-fire of the old.

- 9 A HEDGE-SPARROW was in full song in the garden to-day. The ROBIN, WREN and HEDGE-SPARROW have the largest song periods of all British birds and the wren is the least silent of the three. SKYLARKS, too, were singing over the fields, but somewhat desultorily. REDWINGS are back again from the north. I noticed several small flocks flying from alder to alder along the brook, moving in a south-westerly direction. During the earlier part of their visit to this country they are very shy and keep much to the cover of dense spinneys and hedgerows, feeding on the haws, but after Christmas they come more into the open to find their food on the fields. The water in the quiet corners of the brook is now covered with floating leaves which as they become water-logged sink to the bottom until winter storms wash them away, and the mass of herbage along the margin is sinking back rapidly as it withers, thus exposing the bright water more and more. To-day a PIKE was lying close to the bank looking like a half-drowned stick, so still was he, but a pebble dropped near sent him off like an arrow from a bow, leaving only a little flurry of stirred-up mud in his wake.



- 11 A sharper frost last night has covered the gravel with the yellowed leaves of the ASH so that the two trees at the gate are looking very bare and bleak. With the leaves last to come and first to go, the ash seems to have the shortest leaf-bearing period of any of our common trees. In the valley the grass was covered with hoar-frost as I drove into business but later in the day the sunshine made the air quite warm again. It takes some time for the cold to quite overcome the summer warmth that the earth has stored up. Little parties of SWALLOWS passed over at midday. Surely these will be among the last we shall see this year. A collection of SEED-PODS from the common trees makes an interesting comparison. Their great variety is evident at once and is typified by the following picked up this evening: the hazel nut, the acorn, beechnut, ash-keys, the auto-gyro of the sycamore and cone of the alder. Each has its own particular means of distribution, whether it be wind or bird or casual chance. I have seen a rook drop an acorn a quarter of a mile from where it was plucked. This evening a BLACKBIRD was singing in the twilight.



13 High wind to-day is completing what Jack-Frost did the day before yesterday and the golden brown leaves are eddying through the garden in an endless dancing procession. A small party of GULLS were resting in the field next to the garden in a little huddle of white against the dull green of the faded grass. The wind was from the east and keen, so that I pitied two HOUSE-MARTINS that were flying wearily into its very teeth, and how very out of place they looked. If one remembers that the house-martin has a completely white breast and a white back, they are easily distinguished from swallows. SAND-MARTINS are smaller and distinctly browner.

16 WOOD-MICE are looking for somewhere warm and dry in which to spend the winter and the house seems to them to offer such hospitality. We think otherwise, so that there is war between us and the traps are busy. The wood-mouse, or as it is called in some district, the long-tailed field-mouse, may be distinguished from the house-mouse by its browner fur, whitish underparts and large eyes. It is much less cunning than its cousin and more easily trapped. To-day I observe that catkins are forming on the HAZEL twigs before the nuts have fallen, so that here again new life emerges before the old is dead and gone. A flock of ROOKS has descended upon the oaks in the spinney and are feasting on the acorns there, while on the south side, where the hedge is red with haws, there is a flock of MISTLE-THRUSHES and many BLACKBIRDS. The latter during the winter months seem to collect in chosen spots, not on account of the food, but for some communal interest, though what it may be I cannot say.



19 This morning a THRUSH was singing very softly in a holly bush in the garden. He was quite hidden and very difficult to find and his song was thin and reedy, and as if he was practising, though this cannot be the explanation. This sub-song is quite extensively used by many birds at certain times and is usually sung in seclusion, but its function is not easy to understand. The HOLLY berries are ripening and already shine vividly amongst the dark foliage. Only the female tree bears fruit, so that a tree which flowers freely but fails to produce berries should be taken to be of the male sex. The old name of the tree was holm and it is often seen as part of a place name, but it must not be confused with the similar old Norse word meaning a rocky island. The BRACKEN which grows sparsely on the hill has turned gold, but the most colourful foliage in the countryside to-day is the FIELD-MAPLE, whose leaves may be any tint from pale yellow to deep red. I am very fond of the dog-oak as we used to call it, for in early spring the young growth is a wonderfully vivid red.



20 To-day summer seems to have returned and the dwarf asters edging the paths in the little sunk garden are a mass of blossom, about which an every-changing swarm of late summer BUTTERFLIES is in constant agitation. In this sheltered spot the approaching winter seems very far away, but I know that this evening when the sun has gone down the picture will be very changed. The THRUSH that was "practising"

yesterday (I am sure it is the same bird because so few are about) was singing loudly in the larch. He will probably return to his sub-song again during inclement weather in the autumn, but once he has really commenced to sing his spring song, it is rarely if ever heard.

- 22 A PHEASANT was crowing this morning in the spinney near the brook. Crowing and wing-flapping, rather like a cockerel's, is the bird's usual display. It is more often seen and heard in spring, but as the pheasant is uncommon in this district I wonder if on this occasion the bird was trying to attract the attention of others of its kind.

In this country the pheasant, like the bandoor fowl, is polygamous, but in its native haunt I believe it is monogamous. Down at the brook the flash of blue that is a KINGFISHER flying past is more often seen now that there is less cover and LITTLE GREBES that in winter come down from the artificial lake further upstream may be observed diving in the deeper pools if you approach warily. Once you are seen, however, they disappear, for they are past-masters in the art of hiding, even when there is nothing to hide behind. I gathered a large bunch of WATERCRESS to-day from a bed that stretched almost across the stream at one point and very fresh and green it looked among the otherwise faded vegetation.



- 25 SEA-GULLS are over the river again in some numbers and a small party of the black-headed family were following a plough. The sea birds and the abrupt skyline caused by steeply rising ground brought the momentary sensation of being at the sea. The weather



has turned very cold with bitter wind. Leaves are scattering everywhere and the autumn colour is fading from the landscape. The dahlias have been lifted to store during the winter and I have commenced to dig the borders. A small covey of PARTRIDGES was in the garden this evening and quite a number of MALLARD were at the brook. These may have been visitors from overseas, for the local reservoirs are already becoming lively again with MALLARD, TEAL, WIDGEON, POCHARD and TUFTED DUCK that have arrived during the last few days and must have come over the North Sea.

- 27 BULLFINCHES were back in the garden again to-day, but there were actually very few birds about except for flocks of STARLINGS flying north-west into the cold wind. They came past in little ragged parties, one following another in a long procession, all flying on a dead-straight course as though they were travelling far.

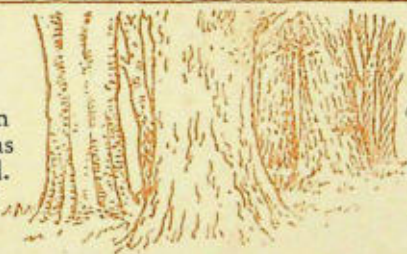
- 29 Although it was mostly sleet and only in odd showers, the first snow of winter has fallen this morning. FIELDFARES were chuckling in the very tops of the tallest trees at the south side of the spinney. They seemed very nervous and did not rest anywhere for very long, but hunger drove them to the haws on the tall hedge below, though the meal was a scrappy affair, snatched at odd intervals. The hedges are becoming bare, the leafless twigs looking very black against the tawny undergrowth and last summer's nests are now so obvious that one wonders why they were not discovered before.

- 31 The month has gone to-day in a flurry of flying leaves. Those remaining on the trees have been tossed and torn until most of them could no longer withstand the buffeting and were swept away; those already fallen have been scurried along hedgerow and lane into deep russet drifts at the more sheltered corners and now many leafless branches stand out bare and forlorn against the background of flying grey cloud. Only the HOLLY and the YEW survive and their bright berries glow against a sombre background. This and a fitful gleam of pale sun that turned the trunk of the SILVER BIRCH at the corner of the spinney into polished metal have been the only relief in a day that has brought winter back to the countryside. It is HALLOWEEN and the gale whistling through bare branches in the darkness outside conjures to the imagination the witches that are supposed to ride their broomsticks through the murk and fury of this wild autumn night.



NOVEMBER

- 1 ALL SAINTS' DAY. The gale has blown itself out and everywhere out of doors has the appearance of having been scrubbed. This morning the rough and rugged boles of the ELMS were shining with moisture in the early sunshine and there was a film of green on the bark where the moss has sprung to new life after lying dormant during the dry summer months. The tracery of twigs against the sky is once more disclosed, but about the elm tree tops is a nebulous golden glow where the faded fragments of summer's wealth still cling. It is a new experience to walk through the spinney, for there is a lightness and airiness that has been absent all the summer. Contours are changed and the outlook has a strange newness. I have been digging all the afternoon. The soil is just as it should be, despite the recent rain, and there is an unbounded pleasure in driving the sharp blade into the earth, turning over the spit and watching the area of freshly dug soil grow. I obtain a tremendous satisfaction from this nearness to the earth. To work and cultivate it, to watch its fulness grow under my hand, by the sweat of my body and the energy of my mind, is to me an ultimate reward that is beyond the material blessing of bountiful crops. My neighbour the robin has been with me the whole time except during short intervals when he felt impelled to proclaim his local lordship by singing, or to make a short tour of his realm. Mostly he was up and down on the newly-turned ground, picking up a morsel here and there that was beyond my ability to see. On one occasion a wren joined me, but



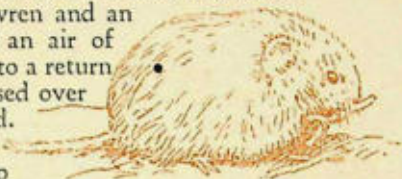
only in passing. I heard his song growing nearer and louder, then he appeared in the low hedge, stayed a while, and next his song had passed on down the garden until it out-distanced my hearing. My last visitor was a young BLACKBIRD, one that was reared in the garden I suspect by his familiarity, for he spends much of his time by the back-kitchen door.

- 3 To-day has been warm and bright, but the bare trees and hedges and the keen air prevent any return of a semblance of summer. Nevertheless, LARKS were singing over the fields and the THRUSH likewise in the garden, so that with the robins, the wren and an occasional hedge-sparrow there was quite an air of spring gaiety about. The nearest approach to a return

of summer was a single SWALLOW that passed over the garden flying S.S.E. into the light wind. It would be interesting to know why the bird was so late. While I was breaking up the humus heap to spread over the garden before digging it in, I disturbed several FIELD-VOLES that had made themselves a winter shelter there. The vole differs from the mouse in that it has a blunt nose, small ears, a very short tail and reddish brown fur. The field-vole is about four inches long and the bank-vole, which is much rarer, is smaller and more brightly coloured. Mice and voles can do a lot of harm in a garden if they become too numerous, but the other family of small rodents, the shrews, are very largely insectivorous and therefore may be very helpful to the gardener.

- 5 To-day of tragic yet popular notoriety there was brought into the bar at the local inn a single perfect specimen of a WILD ROSE. The bearer had plucked it as a full-grown bud from a nearby hedge and the warmth of the room had encouraged it to unfold its silken petals. How infinitely frail it appeared to be, and I could swear that there was a look of startled fear in its wide-open eye. The reservoir, when I passed, was alive with duck: parties were coming and going every few minutes amid a constant quacking and splashing. It was as if they had nothing else to do but amuse themselves and I was envious, for I wished I had time to stay and watch them.

- 9 While we were at breakfast two hen PHEASANTS strutted on to the lawn near the dining-room window. The cock bird has been about the neighbourhood much of late, so that he may have attracted them. The winter sown WHEAT is already showing as a delicate green film on the sown fields, while the hum of machinery threshing last summer's grain sounds from the nearby farm. WOOD-PIGEONS are very abundant, despite the efforts made to reduce their number, and to-day I saw what looked like a grey-blue pool in one field. It was a flock of the birds resting close together; there were hundreds



of them, but they were not asleep, for they went up with a mighty clatter of wings when I was at least two hundred yards away. The wood-pigeon has become a pest and he seems to know it.

- 11 People talk of a Saint Martin's Summer and to-day is of such a character. It is as though summer had returned, thrusting winter aside. The countryside is glowing in the amber light, the fields are laid as with a golden veil and trees and hedgerows that had seemed so bare have sprung to life again in brilliant patches here and there of yellow and of red. The garden is splashed with colour in such gentle tints that they remind one of youth and growing things. Another spring is in the minds of birds and in their new found joy they sing. Summer, as it were, is looking back, and seems to sigh for her children now grown old. The air is still and distant sounds come closely; cattle homing early to be milked, a far-off railway train, a gun discharged that crashes to oblivion some life the sportsman cannot make anew, and children's voices in the lane loud in a freedom lately gained from school. Everywhere there is a quality of richness that is more than earthiness and this is MARTINMAS.

- 13 Round about here at present REDWINGS are the commonest birds of the countryside. To-day they seemed to fly up from every hedgerow where they were gorging on the haws. The weather is still mild and the sun warm. There has been quite an appreciable amount of bird song; even the canary was singing, and one or two butterflies flitted across the garden, though in a somewhat aimless manner. Small bunches of green berries are forming on the IVY, soon they will begin to colour. AUBRETIA and ARABIS in the rock-garden have odd flowers dotted here and there upon their green cushions.



- 16 To-day I watched a FOX for some time at less than thirty yards. When I first caught sight of him in a small disused railway cutting he was lazily scratching himself in a rather bored sort of a way, but every now and again he would put his nose into the air and sniff, then look round, and having satisfied himself, proceed with his occupation. After some minutes I whistled and in an instant he stiffened and was all alert. He saw me but did not move at once—merely flattened out a little so that in the long grass there was less of him to be seen, then having summed up the situation to his satisfaction he turned and disappeared through the hedgerow in a loping trot. SPARROW flocks are large and numerous. The birds seem to assemble in chosen places, often in the vicinity of farms, sometimes near corn stacks, but usually in a thick hedgerow, and these assembly points remain in use all the winter. Birds in general have been looking brighter during the past weeks, the moult is over and their new plumage gives them the neat and fresh appearance that comes with new clothes. There are many roses in bloom in the garden, beautiful but in a somewhat dowdy way for they lack the setting of the bright green foliage, and the outer edges of their petals have been scared with frost.

19 The bright mild weather still holds and I have been busy in the garden. There is much to do and encouragement to do it. The time will soon be here when it will be too wet or there will be frost and snow, so that I am grateful for this opportunity. The bitter sweet smell of the bonfire has hung about the quiet heavy air and sometimes when I have burned clippings of the more odorous shrubs the scent has remained about the garden all day. This morning a dish of fresh RASPBERRIES for breakfast was surely the *plat de jour*. Only needing a little more sugar, they were quite as good as those of July and appreciated even more. The THRUSH has been singing on the larch every day for over a week, but last night the owls were very noisy and I fear the weather is changing.



22 The owls spoke truly. Rain, rain and more rain, and now the valley is flooded from side to side, the course of the brook marked by the winding line of alders and a swirl of brown water flecked with white foam. The PEEWIT flocks drift up and down the valley, settling here and there on the waterlogged fields only to be attracted elsewhere in a few minutes. There have been odd snow showers that slid across the countryside like slowly moving curtains of pale grey hiding the distant landscape. The finch flocks have sought shelter in the lee of the hedgerows, but a party of gulls fought their way into the face of the rain and snow, rising and falling in the eddies of the storm until they passed out of sight.



24 The wind and storm have died away, but everywhere is sodden and the damp is rising in a clinging mist that takes all the colour out of the landscape. As I drove into town a male SPARROW-HAWK in slate-blue livery rose from the grass verge but dropped again almost instantly. He did so again and again until I imagined he must be injured and stopped the car to investigate. Actually he was trying to carry in his talons a rat that was much too heavy for him to lift. He would not give it up, however, and finally disappeared in flying leaps into a small spinney. So the SPARROW-HAWK, despite his bad reputation, does good occasionally.

26 There was a quarter of an inch of ice on the pond this morning, but in the sunshine the GOLDFISH were clearly visible swimming near the surface. I shall put a covering of branches and brushwood at one end as soon as possible to protect them a little by keeping the water open. Where a month or two ago the LILIES were blooming there is now a blackened mass slowly sinking to the bottom and unless there is plenty of rain at this time the water becomes very foul and the fish will die.

28 Now that the ALDERS along the brook are quite leafless the small cones which were last year's seed-pods and are now black and hard are easily seen, but what attracts the eye to-day are the thousands of small pink catkins already forming. In the sunshine they are bright with warm colour. In the more sheltered lanes hazel catkins have already formed and hang like stubby tails from the long twigs. The rambling and twining vines of the HONEYSUCKLE that have remained unnoticed, except for the flower heads, during the summer now show themselves to advantage along the hedges with soft green foliage emerging in clusters of buds along the dry stems.

30 November steals away to his place among the shades of the past in a thick fog. There is an eerie silence except for small sounds that come from very near. One hears the drip of moisture from the trees, earthworms working and a twig that snaps from some light footfall, but the bulk of Nature seems to be waiting a call and the time for it is not yet.



DECEMBER

1 The STOCK-DOVES at the quarry have added largely to their numbers about the local fields by flocks presumably from overseas, but still one may see odd pairs consorting together, which makes

me think the local birds must pair for life. Before the field next to the garden was ploughed it was the constant rendezvous of the PLOVER flocks during the winter months and to watch them wheeling and tumbling over it in a gale was a source of great pleasure which could be enjoyed from the comfort of an easy chair in the sitting-room. Now, however, they rarely come. I cannot say why, but they are very much missed. The potatoes have long been gathered safe into their frost-proof "camps" and the root crops have followed in their turn, the mangolds in mid-October and turnips in November and later. On a cold wet morning the topping is cruel work and must be done by hand. Now the long, low mounds have been formed, protected by the covering of straw and earth. The kale still very green is being cut into as required for winter feeding.

2 Sharp frost this morning had dried the road and there was crackly ice where puddles had been. A charm of GOLDFINCHES was busy in the lane moving from hedgerow to verge with flashes of golden wings and the constant tinkle of call-notes. At the brook I watched a WATER-RAIL picking among the tangled herbage along the margin and was most interested to see it swim across the deeper parts several times. The bird's relationship lies between the



corncrake and waterhen. It is never far from water but is not often seen actually swimming, though it appears to be quite as capable in this respect as the water-hen. The bobbing white underside of its tail and its long red beak are its chief characteristics. Where the water ran brokenly over a long gravel bar several large trout were rolling and splashing. It is the spawning season, and they were quite obviously making the redds in which the female deposits her eggs. I was quite spellbound watching the large fish on such an intimate occasion, at such close quarters

4 My notes these days are mostly concerned with the movements of the BIRD FLOCKS. One day a particular species will impress itself upon the mind either by its numbers or some peculiarity of habit and on another a different species will predominate. So the days go by, becoming shorter and shorter as they draw towards the lowest ebb and with them the countryside seems to sink into itself. The colour, too, drains away, leaving a drabness that is itself often partly hidden in grey mist, so that an odd flower or bright berry shines like a jewel.

6 BLACKBIRDS were flirting on the lawn this morning and "pinking" about the garden. The cock birds look very sleek again with jet black plumage and orange bills. In the rock-garden the spikes of the early flowering BULBS are very green and the *primula wanda* have tiny red rosettes of new leaves where the fresh growth is forming.



11 Following a number of dismally dark days there were odd snow showers last night, so that the ground when I first looked out was a patchwork of black and white. Since dawn there has seemed to be a struggle for supremacy between day and night, which ended in the early afternoon, when it was a pleasure to draw the blinds and finally shut out the cold and cheerless prospect. The lamp-light and fire seemed to provide both mind and body with all that it could desire. Yet outside small animals were curling up tighter within a covering of leaves, birds were fluffing feathers and seeking some sheltered hedge-row perch and insects crouched dormant in the fold of a piece of bark, while the wind soughed through the naked branches and rattled dead leaves against the cold, shrivelled twigs.



13 Last evening a late return home meant a journey through what seemed to be an endless tunnel in which the car headlights failed to pierce the utter blackness. It was as though night was able to cast a shadow across the brightest light that human ingenuity could devise. The rain blurring the windscreen added to the isolation until one seemed to pass beyond all the comprehensible things of life into some strange nightmare existence of the primitive and elemental water and darkness. As I opened the door at home the light and warmth streaming from it was a most happy experience and yet even as I crossed the threshold I could not forget all those intimate things of the countryside which I know and love so well and was shutting away to the outer darkness.

- 16 This morning the weather had improved; it was bright and sunny, so that after the dismal outlook of the last few days it was as if life had returned to the countryside. When I walked round the garden the slanting sunlight was climbing over the hill and turning the drops of moisture on the hedges into a thousand sparkling gems. The THRUSH was singing, and emerging from the dark green foliage deep in the protecting boxes I found the first of the CHRISTMAS ROSES. What a blessing are flowers at this time of the year, and to find them growing in one's own garden during these dark days is an unbounded delight. The farmers have turned their attention from the immediate working of the land to clearing and tidying up. Almost everywhere hedging and ditching is in progress. I never tire of watching a hedger at work. The task before he starts, the tangle of briar, bramble and thorn seems to be so utterly beyond his ability to carry through; but when complete, the orderly array of vertical cut stakes driven into the ground and horizontally intertwined living branches is perfect in its simple symmetry. Hedging is a craft that I shall always regret never having learned.



- 19 Almost before it was light this morning I heard BLUE-TITS chattering near the window. Why they should be so noisy I do not know, unless a prowling cat was the cause. For some time several of them have been using the nest boxes to roost in, arriving just about sundown and settling in at once. There is a bowl of ROSES in the sitting-room that were plucked from the garden this morning. They look very lovely but will not last very long. During the last few years there has often been a bowl of them to bring a strangely unreal atmosphere of summer to the Christmas festivities. The orange-yellow buds on the drooping sprays of the JASMINE need but a little encouragement to bring them into flower. A number have been cut and put into water in a cool room, so that we may have some spring sunshine in the house before many days have passed.



- 22 There is plenty of pruning to be done and I enjoy it. To find the fruit buds, to see in them the promise of next spring and to give to them care and encouragement is, I find, a most satisfying employment. Perhaps I am lazy, but I have never made a fetish of my garden and therefore because I am not its slave it always has a novelty and attraction that a more assiduous attention might banish. Working in such easy manner, my eyes and ears have time for things about me so that I am able to enjoy the company of a host of intimate relationships in the bright eyes, flashing wings and cheerful song all around me.

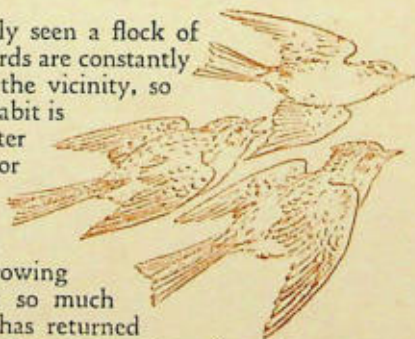
24 The town to-day was filled with the tinselly atmosphere of Christmas, but I was glad to escape the crowds and return home early. I have been for a walk, one that passed from the last dying colour of a tawny sunset to the early starlight of the short winter day. As I was coming home a single bright star seemed to hang above the dim outline of a small farm and as I drew nearer I could see lantern-light coming from the open barn on one side of the yard and there was a sound of voices. It was only milking time, for some reason a little late. But remember I had seen a star and there was the vision of a byre whose wooden beams and rough walls were picked out in the amber lantern-light, there were cattle standing patiently and muffled figures moving in and out. Children's voices singing carols sounded high and clear down the lane, for it was Christmas Eve. I returned home with a great uplift of heart, for the reality of the first Christmas had come very near to me.



25 CHRISTMAS DAY. To-day has been bright and mild, so that I spent the morning working in the garden to gain an appetite that would do justice to the Christmas feast, and in the afternoon I walked so that the meal would not deal unfairly with me. On the hill there was a cock RING-OUZEL. The bird is generally considered to be a summer migrant, but some few remain for the winter in the southern counties. It is very like a black-bird except for the white ring about its neck and is never found in the shelter of a hedge, preferring an exposed place on the topmost twigs. In summer its home is the high moorland. The REDWINGS are as plentiful as ever; I would call this a redwing winter. There were Christmas roses and summer roses in the sitting-room and sprays of jasmine to bring sunshine into the holly-decorated hall.



27 For the last week or so I have frequently seen a flock of LARKS on the same stubble-fields. The birds are constantly on the wing, but never appear to leave the vicinity, so that I am wondering if this conservative habit is characteristic of the bird during the winter months and whether these are local birds or visitors from the north that may have replaced the former. The fields of WINTER-WHEAT are very bright and the thin lines of green shoots are lost in the growing mass. The young blackbird that spent so much time in the garden during the autumn has returned after a short absence and is about the kitchen door again. Sometimes he even ventures into the wash-house. We know him by a fleck of white on his flank. To-day my farmer friend showed me a TROUT that had been found dead in the brook. It was twenty-two inches long and weighed four and a half pounds; quite a museum-piece for this district, packed with pale green eggs a quarter of an inch in diameter, it was a lovely fish with green, gold and pink flanks. Some



years ago the brook was stocked with rainbow trout and this must have been one of them. By its injuries, which were in the stomach, I suspect a pike.

- 29 There was a sharp frost last night and a little powdery snow this morning that the cold wind blew into thin drifts. The birds were all fluffed-up, looking twice their normal size and keeping to the hedge-bottoms. BLACK-BIRDS were scratching about among the leaves, turning them over to disclose the unfrozen ground beneath. A MISTLE-THRUSH was singing on the hill, its song sounding loud and clear in the sharp air. The garden was filled with the voices and movement of TITS systematically inspecting every tree and bush in their search for food. From time to time a blue-tit could be heard singing "chee-chee-chee." While there remains the smallest scrap of the lump of suet we hang on the tree near the dining-room window, there is an endless procession of tits visiting it, sometimes two or three at a time. More snow fell later in the day, but the temperature rose and it became dark very early. Although December the twenty-first is the shortest day, there are many days immediately after Christmas that seem shorter and it is not until the end of January that there is any appreciable extension of daylight.



- 31 NEW YEAR'S EVE. To-day is the last of the old year. It is cold and raw and there has been no inducement to spend time out of doors, so I am inclined to look over the notes I have made during the past twelve months to revive my memory of those happy occasions when time spent outside was never long enough. Reading them through, I realise how much there was that I missed and many opportunities come to my mind that I have let slip when I failed to take advantage of all that was there for the seeking. So I am in the mood for good resolutions and the making of plans for the New Year. To-morrow I shall commence a new note-book and already I am looking forward to filling its pages with happy adventures among the fields and woods I love so well. Now my thoughts come back to the last few minutes that are left of this old year. In my mind's eye I see it as an old man wending his way slowly down the road into the darkness of the night and my heart goes out towards him for the happiness and pleasure I have had in his company, but as I wish him "godspeed" the bells are chiming and he is gone.





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