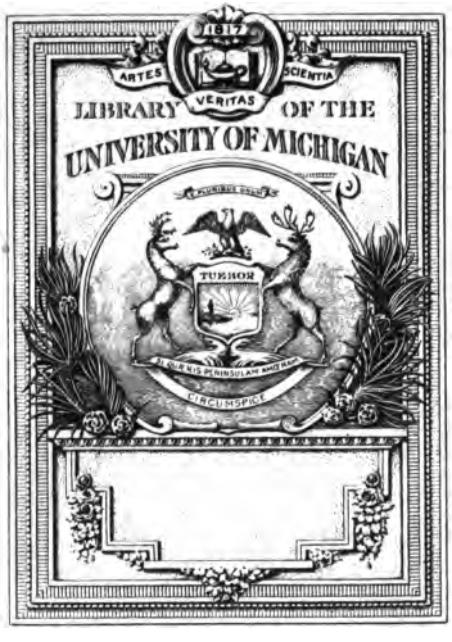
NOTES FROM A LINCOLNSHIRE GARDEN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Notes from a Lincolnshire Garden

Notes from a Lincolnshire Garden

BY

A. L. H. Anderson

"Thou who hast given me eyes to see,
And love this world so fair;
Give me a heart to find out Thee
And seek Thee everywhere."

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET, W.
1903

TO

M. L. A.

TO WHOM I OWE MANY FACTS

ABOUT BIRDS

The Author wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to the following Publishers and Authors :—

To Messrs. Macmillan, for granting her permission to quote from the poetical works of the late Lord Tennyson, the late Miss Rossetti, the late Miss Ingelow, the late Mrs. Craik, and Dr. George Macdonald. To Mr. John Lane, for permission to quote from a poem by Mr. W. Watson. To Miss Harriet Jay, Lady Leighton Warren, and the Rev. Conrad Noel, for permission to quote from the poems of the late Mr. R. Buchanan, the late Lord de Tabley, and the late Hon. Roden Noel; and to Mr. R. Bridges, Mr. A. J. Munley, Mr. A. C. Benson, Professor Dowden, Miss Robinson, and the Executors of the late Miss Blind; all of whom she gratefully thanks for their ready courtesy.

"When thy heart cries, 'Father, pardon!'
Then the Lord is in thy garden!"

G. MACDONALD.

A snowdrop—a primrose:
The birds sing—the brook flows:
Spring comes—and goes!

Summer! Summer stays,
Mellow, long days:
Sweet nights—a maze
Of mystic moon-rays.

Amid the wheat-sheaves
Autumn sits, and weaves
A spell! Pale mist heaves
And falls on fallen leaves.

Darkling, tardy dawns—drear
Wan shrunken suns—he's near:
He knocks—is here.

SPRING

SPRING

There was intoxication in the air;
The wind, keen blowing from across the seas,
O'er leagues of new-ploughed land and heather leas,
Smelt of wild gorse whose gold flamed everywhere.
An undertone of song pulsed far and near,
The soaring larks filled heaven with ecstasies,
And like a living clock among the trees,
The shouting cuckoo struck the time of year.

M. Blind.

O Spring, thou art a subtle thing,
Wiser than we, thou Sybil Spring!
Thy tresses blown across our face
In Life's mid-race,
Remind us of some holier place—
And unawares the dullest find
A new religion
That all their doubts have left behind!

M. Robinson.

The swift is wheeling and gleaming,
The woods are beginning to ring,
Rain from the clouds is streaming,
There, where the bow doth cling,
Summer is smiling afar off, over the shoulder of Spring!

R. Buchanan.

O follow, leaping blood,
The season's lure!
O heart, look down and up,
Serene, secure,
Warm as the crocus cup,
Like snowdrops, pure!

Tennyson.

SPRING

February—March—April

THE world is born afresh every spring—the Resurrection-time of the flowers, as a dear old country-woman friend aptly and poetically called it.

Old people generally love Spring best of all the seasons. The young usually prefer Winter. It is only as age approaches that we learn to reverse the proverb and fondly say, "Better is the beginning than the end thereof!" So—in the "wild March morning"—one looks forth from one's bed-room window and sees, by the light of a waning moon, the promise of Spring appearing all in the tardy dawn; imprinted on the gossamer-webbed freshening lawns; wreathed in light mist-trails among the budding trees; voiced in the strong, sweet rush of the west wind and in the ecstatic singing of a myriad birds.

Now are the woods all pink and purple—like the bloom on a plum—with the rich swollen buds. Yet how gradual is their burst into leafage. Slow, yet sudden—reluctant, yet swift, and well-nigh imperceptible. In a day, an hour—almost while you turn your head aside—the miracle is wrought. It is Winter, and you look away. You glance round—it

is Spring, and the world is green. A shimmering lace-like veil of the tenderest pale yellow-greens, thrown mist-like over hedge-row, tree, and shrub. But the wonder will not be while you watch!

The first Spring flowers are all white and yellow, the colour of snow and sunshine. Later come blue and purple, in the squill, violet, and hepatica. For the pinks and reds we have to wait for Summer. But in the early Spring the world is still virgin-white, cool, and pure. Snowdrops breaking from the cold brown earth, among the dark ivy; black-thorn frothing over the bare bleak hedges. What Swinburne so happily calls "Flowery frost of May."

A beautiful little song of Robert Bridges', bearing on the same subject, is that beginning—

"Spring goeth all in white,
Crowned with milk-white may:
In fleecy flocks of light
O'er heaven the white clouds stray:

"White butterflies in the air;
White daisies prank the ground;
The cherry and hoary pear
Scatter their snow around."

And Katherine Tynan sings also of the sweet delay of Spring:—

"The Spring comes slowly up this way;
Slowly, slowly—
A little nearer every day.

. . . . . .

In kirtle of green and grey;
Slowly, slowly—
The Spring comes slowly up this way!

"She hath delicious things to say,
But will not answer yea or nay,
Nor haste her secrets to display!
. . . . . .
The Spring comes slowly up this way;
Slowly, slowly—
To make the world high holiday."

The scent of all the Spring flowers is more refined and delicate than that of any of the later Summer blooms. No flower on earth has such an exquisite and pure fragrance as the "rathe" primrose. It is subtle, elusive, and evanescent as a dream. The scent of the snowdrop is the same in character, but fainter. Has anyone ever noticed how much stronger is the scent of the double variety? In appearance, no doubt, it is less elegant and graceful, being when doubled, clumsy and heavy-headed; but on the other hand it is dowered with perfume that has been denied to its more refined-looking sister.

It is no longer the fashion to grow double flowers in one's garden—they are considered vulgar. Who ever now sees a double dahlia, and—except in the gardens of the poor—one sees very few also of the good old-fashioned double daffodils. They are not æsthetic enough for the ultra-refined taste of the followers of the High Art craze. Personally I love

the common double daffodil best of all. It is so robust and sturdy, lives for such ages in water, is of such a splendid deep golden-yellow colour, and last but not least, gives itself no lackadaisical, fastidious, weak-backed airs, like some of its high-bred, lankier, slighter-stemmed single sisters.

In the kitchen garden borders we have clumps of the charming Butter-and-eggs, Eggs-and-bacon, and Codlins-and-cream varieties. These do well and are very sweet.

Of our common daffodils, those look best that are growing in masses from the midst of the creeping carpet of ivy, carpeting the ground on each side of a long walk that leads from the house to the church beneath a fine avenue of flowering elms.

Under a sycamore near the house, we look in early April, among the grass for the first spotted leaves and deep pink flowers of our only patch of dog-tooth violets. This clump used to be much larger, but a few years ago some abandoned person in the village dug it up and carried it off. She—for I grieve to say the old gardener strongly suspects the thief to be, as Mrs. Gamp would say, of the female "sect"—imagined she had abstracted the whole of the root, but was, happily for us, mistaken, for though much reduced in size it still flowers, an unmistakable dog-tooth violet.

Primroses flourish here like weeds, I am thankful to say. They look far the best, and are most in their

"proper place"—as the servants say—when growing upon turf. Mrs. Hemans knew this when she wrote—

"The Primrose Stars in the shadowy grass."

I have seen, in more than one "Garden" book, the printed assertion that primroses will not grow under beech-trees; and, indeed, that *nothing*, not even grass, will grow under them! This is a fallacy, as we can prove.

On the lawn here, in front of the house, there is—among several others—a splendid beech, with pendent branches that sweep down to the ground on every side. Beneath it the grass grows thick, is of course never mown, and is besprinkled with dozens of primrose roots, which flower earlier than any others about the place, and which, strange to say, never wander beyond the magic circle formed by the drooping beech boughs.

Primroses overflow our woods, and grow on many of the banks of the deep meadow dykes. In one of these woods (some distance from the present Manor-house), which is composed of oaks, beech, spruce, larch, and some fine ash-trees—a broad dyke runs through the middle and along one side, whose banks are covered with enormous primroses: in the dykes too grow the yellow flag, water violet (*Hottonia palustris*) and the first butter-bumps (local name for marsh marigolds) of the season.

Beneath the ashes here a remarkably fine patch of sweet violets flourish. It is Tennyson, by-the-bye,

Nature's own true poet,—who calls attention, in "In Memoriam," to the hitherto unnoticed fact that violets love to bloom under this particular tree.

> "Now fades the last, long streak of snow,
> Now bourgeons every maze of quick
> About the flowering squares; and thick
> By ashen roots the violets blow."

The wood in question is known as the Armadam —a corruption of Armit, or, more correctly, Hermit-dam—covert: in recognition of the fact that here, in old Norman days, was situated a Monastery, and also the original old manor house of the place. All traces of both have long since been obliterated; except for some indications of the remains of a once deep moat. A fine old gold ring, of chased mediæval workmanship, was ploughed up here by the farmer who leased the land, about sixty years ago.

About twenty years ago an unusually severe autumnal gale devastated the whole upper end of the Armadam wood, which was planted entirely with fine spruces from twelve to fifteen feet in height. These beautiful young trees were *all* blown down, and lay in rows, exactly like overturned ninepins! The space thus laid bare was re-planted again with spruce firs, which are at the present time at about the same stage of growth.

A few years ago, we heard one summer, among these trees, the rare "reel" of a grasshopper warbler. It was impossible to locate the bird, which was in all

probability a chance visitant—as a few days later, on again seeking the spot, we were disappointed to find the anxiously listened for, strange ventriloquial note conspicuous only by its absence.

Nightingales are extremely partial to this wood as a suitable breeding ground and concert hall. I was once fortunate enough to see two of these usually shy birds—their red tails flirting fiercely—fighting determinately, no doubt for the favour of some nesting fair one, in the tangle of blackthorn undergrowth beneath the oaks, which most effectually prevents any satisfactory searching for nests, though here the nightingales may often be heard singing at all hours of the day.

March, last year, was in these parts colder even than usual, and throughout that month cutting east winds blew almost without intermission. Therefore the fact that the lambs were late in making their appearance seemed a merciful dispensation of Providence. About twenty shivering ewes were folded this month on an upland fallow field that lies under the lea of a wood of oak, spruce, and larch, which crowns a rising slope beyond the park.

The field is bounded on the south by a belt of trees, alongside which runs a turfed path. Here, one afternoon last March, I noticed a striking effect of light. The day had been cloudy, with occasional vivid gleams of sun. As I passed along the path, the ewes, that were feeding on the brown crest of the

field beyond, stopped, as their custom is, to gaze at the intruder. At the same moment bright arrows of sunshine broke in all directions from the curtain of violet cloud behind them. Darkest iron-grey against the light, each sheep was instantly surrounded and outlined by a ring of living fire; the half-eaten turnips that bestrewed the ground glowed like gigantic topazes, and the ground, dull-chocolate-coloured ordinarily, shone with crimson light.

So much for the transforming power of sunshine!

Few people are aware what a high order of intelligence among domestic animals sheep possess. I recall an instance with which I was greatly struck at the time.

Walking one day in early Spring along a field path which led to the hill-top wood mentioned above, I was surprised to see a number of ewes issue alone from the open gate of this wood, and march down the path two and two, in regular formation like a squad of soldiers. Not even a dog followed, and field and wood alike appeared lonely and deserted. The farm, perched on the crest of the adjacent meadow, though in sight, was fully a hundred yards away. I picked up a little dog I had with me, and stood aside to let them pass. But before it reached me the procession turned in at an open side gate leading to the farm; and calmly, without hurry, and still keeping the same order, passed on up the path towards the house.

In amusement not unmixed with amazement,

I went on also to the wood whence the flock had issued; where, under the thick trees just within the open gateway, stood a group consisting of the blue-coated, apple-cheeked shepherd, his boy and dog, mounting guard over a new-born lamb and its mother. The mystery was at once explained, and I did not need to be told that being unable to spare either of his assistants, the old man had simply told his sheep to go home, and—they had gone!

One of the first signs of Spring here, as elsewhere in Britain, is the note of the chiffchaff. It is usually the first migrant to return, and its small monotonous song—if song that can be called that consists but of two notes—is hailed with delight as the true herald of sun and flowers.

> "A little helpless innocent bird,
> That has but one plain passage of few notes,
> Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
> For all an April morning."

Down on the flat, spongy, water meadows—here called marshes—that stretch broad and blank for half a mile down to the wide swiftly-flowing, but muddy tidal river that divides this from the next county—the lapwings have paired by the end of March, and set about laying their olive, brown-splashed eggs in small scooped-out depressions—rather than holes—upon the shorter grass of the pastures. A little later the redshanks arrive in pairs, and fly, piping somewhat dolefully, back and forth over the wide marshes; lifting

their pointed wings high together above their heads, so as to display fully the white lining as they settle; stand perfectly motionless a few moments; or run hurriedly, with little mincing, tripping steps, to and fro upon the short turf. Redshanks' eggs are very like those of the green plover, but they are rather more pointed than the peewits' eggs and less broad at the top. Also the former breed as a rule rather later, laying their eggs in the midst of a tussock of rougher and longer grass, with a certain attempt at concealment; as do the snipe.

During the whole of Spring and early part of Summer, when the hen bird is sitting, the cock snipe may be often heard drumming, in the hot still air above our marshes. I have frequently stood beneath a drumming snipe, watching and listening. I have seldom heard it except on a fairly still, calm day, but it often drums when there is no actual sunshine, and when the sky, though more or less cloudless, is dull and grey.

A drumming snipe describes an arc in the air that is extensive and frequently very high, but beyond the area of which he seldom flies. Occasionally he mounts so high, that the watchful gazer cannot follow him with the naked eye. It is only when *descending* that he produces the drumming noise which is heard at intervals; when he may be observed to *drop* suddenly and sharply in the air, for the space of a yard or so, directing his course obliquely towards the earth and instantly soaring again, to repeat the downward

curve and rattling noise a few moments later. I have also heard a drumming snipe make a noise like "Chit, chit"—repeated rapidly many times—when much agitated and when ascending. We were looking for his nest at the time, and opined from this note we must have been near it—but our careful search was, nevertheless, vain. The "drum" is most peculiar, and extraordinarily distinct and clear, as it can be plainly heard when the form of the bird himself is only just discernible. It has been called also the "bleating" of the snipe, as it greatly resembles the bleat of a sheep or goat heard at a distance. I have lately seen it noted by an ornithologist that the hen is supposed to make the drumming noise also. As to this, it is impossible to say with certainty. All that can be determined is, that snipes "drum" only during the short nesting season. Some observers are of opinion that the sound is produced by the long bill of the bird sharply opening and shutting: but most are now agreed in thinking that it is caused by the rapid quivering of the long and strong wing feathers, and is doubtless a nuptial sound akin to that of the turkey-cock as he spreads his great pinions, and scrapes them in solemn courtship before his mate, upon the bare ground, or the rattling quivering of the spread tail feathers of the peacock. Only the snipe scrapes his wings, not when standing upon the ground, but in flight, and upon the bland and yielding air! The marvel is not only that so loud a noise, but that any at all should be

produced. Corncrakes and skylarks also breed upon these marshes,—and along the inner side of the broad and deep dykes dividing and intersecting them, the shy wild duck and humble moor-hen nest.

Early last March four or five unlined wrens' nests were found in the garden. These are commonly called "cock" nests," and why the birds make and, having made, immediately desert them, is not known. They are invariably the earliest, and are rarely lined and used. The proper nests, made after, are always provided with an elaborate feather lining. Some observers think that the "cock" nests are used eventually as sleeping places for the grown-up and overgrown families, and in some exceptional cases one has been known to be lined and occupied later.

In the latter part of the Spring of 1896 we had the extreme gratification of finding the nest of that comparatively rare bird, the larger black and white spotted woodpecker. The nest was in a hole about half way up the trunk of an old crab tree near the centre ride of the wood upon the hill. It was of an oval shape, neatly cut, as if with an instrument, and we owed our discovery to the fact that quite a heap of saw-dust lay at the foot of the tree, showing that the hole was of recent construction. The male bird had been noticed several times feeding among the young oaks close by, and clinging to the bark; his bright red head and pied plumage very conspicuous and remarkable. Tapping with a stick on the trunk below the hole,

we were rewarded by the instantaneous appearance of the red cap and long bill of Mrs. Woodpecker, who, with the motions of a Jack-in-the-Box, put out and drew in her head like a flash!

Crab or apple trees would seem to be favourite nesting-places of this variety of woodpecker, as a pair of the smaller spotted ones deigned, some seasons ago, to nest in an old apple-stump left as a support to a fine honeysuckle at the side of one of the garden-walks. These lovely little birds, that are still rarer than the larger kind, made a small symmetrically-round hole near the top of the stump, and reared herein a numerous family, successfully. They took very little notice of passers by. After the young were hatched, the labours of the parents were incessant; one or other flew backwards and forwards with food every three or four minutes all day long, and the quantity they must have thus provided was inconceivable, and passes ordinary human calculation.

On the opposite side of this same walk stands an ancient laburnum tree, the trunk of which, at about two feet from the ground, divides and forks into several branches. Here there is a deep natural hole, wherein for more successive Springs than I can remember a starling has laid her eggs and reared a couple of broods. She is a confiding bird, and minds not a whit the "calls" of occasional visitors. Her confidence is not misplaced. She has made her home there for years, and will continue so to do for many more to come, we trust.

The exquisite little dome-shaped nests, made of grey lichen, of the long-tailed tit (feather-poke, as he is called here), may be found every Spring as surely as the leaves return, in one or other of the holly or quickset hedges in the garden.

As to cuckoos, their name is legion. They call all day, and half through the night. Indeed, it is during the hours of dusk and dawn that these curious birds are most loquacious. The hen does not cry cuckoo, but makes a low bubbling noise like water poured gurgling from a bottle. This is her sole note, and used to attract the male.

Upon the front of the creeper-covered tool-shed in the kitchen garden, F., our old gardener, placed many years ago a small bird-house. To his bitter disappointment, it remained unoccupied for one or two successive Springs. At length, however, to his great joy, a starling took possession of it and reared a family therein. This would appear to have broken the charm, as the bird-house has seldom since been without an occupant, and this in face of the fact that the tenement, though placed high up beneath the roof, and wedged in among the jessamine stems, is in an exposed situation, in front of the shed and immediately over the doorway through which the gardeners are continually passing in and out.

In April, '97, a pied wagtail appropriated it. Being small with an extremely narrow door, it would appear only suitable to slim birds such as robins and

wagtails, and even for the starling who took it one year we calculated it must have been a tight fit.

We naturally let the wagtail alone while she was sitting; but one day when I concluded the young birds had flown, I ventured to put an investigating finger in at the doorway. To my consternation it received a sharp and vicious tweak. Fetching a flower-pot, climbing thereon, and looking in, my eyes met the fierce yet sulky gaze of a sinister young cuckoo! He looked what he is, a veritable fiend in bird shape, filling up the whole tiny interior with dark fluffed-out feathers, gaping with his huge, greedy, yellow-lined beak, and with sharp white bristles standing up like needles all over his flat iron-grey head! He was then very nearly full-fledged, and to my intense amazement, was gone a day or two after. How he ever succeeded in leaving that little prison of a bird-house without leaving some of his ugly personality sticking to its walls is, and will ever remain, a mystery! The struggle, both for him and for his small wagtail foster-parents, must have been terrific!

Perhaps, however, his own mother helped him out, and after her cunning nature, brought mind to bear upon matter in the operation. In my innocence, I had imagined we should have had to take the whole side of the bird-house away in order to release him; but after his sudden disappearance, F., with a chuckle, informed me that he had noticed a cuckoo hanging about the spot for days, and he had little doubt it had

helped the prisoner to escape. If true, this conclusion would seem to supply an affirmative to the vexed question as to whether the hen cuckoo, after depositing her egg, ever displays any further interest therein. In this instance it seems evident she did.

A litter of young foxes was found in the garden this same Spring. The vixen had made her earth in the yew and laurel-covered mound below a piece of ruined tower that crowns the western bank of the sunk flower-garden. She was caught in a rabbit-trap, and seen afterwards in one of the woods with the trap on her leg. Two of the cubs were found dead, but two others were caught alive, were put in a hutch in the chicken-yard, and fed on bread-and-milk, with the addition of an occasional rabbit. They throve well, but only the little dog-fox became at all tame—the vixen remained wild till they were full-grown, when they were turned out "to seek their meat from God," and eventually no doubt to fall a prey to the fox-hunter. They were beautiful little creatures, with tiny pointed noses and eternally sharply-pricked ears. I often went to look at them, and they both invariably retreated to the extreme back of their cage, pressing and contracting their small bodies into the smallest possible space against the wall, and gazing at me with the wildest eyes I ever saw; half terrified, half fascinated; and filled with a strange, savage glitter.

In the wood upon the hill, I once met a fox face to face! He was "loping" along upon the grass

beneath the oaks, looking downwards and sideways. What little wind there was blew from him to me, and we came within a couple of yards of each other before our eyes met. That moment must have given him a most unpleasant shock: instantly he turned aside into the tall green bracken, and vanished without the slightest sound, as if he had never been.

For two successive seasons a gold-crest wren built on the under side of one of the lower boughs of a fine silver fir on the lawn. The lovely little mossy nest was cradle-shaped, and slung in the neatest fashion beneath the branch, so that it rocked exactly like a cradle when the wind swayed the boughs. Surely a gold-crest's nest must, in the good old days of long ago, have inspired the unknown author of

> "Hushaby baby, on the tree-top,
> When the wind blows, the cradle will rock."

I used sometimes to peep at the small family after they were hatched. Such a number of tiny heads all stuffed into one peculiarly small house! The sight inevitably recalled another nursery rhyme, that of "the old woman who lived in a shoe, and had so many children she didn't know what to do." One unlucky day, when they were nearly full-fledged, I went too near the nest, and lo!—a tragedy!—instantly the whole ten or twelve tiny creatures fluttered out and away into the bushes on all sides.

I searched in repentant consternation, but not one could I see or trace again anywhere. They had

and all among the ivy along the sides of the church-walk the crocus "breaks like fire."

In our largest wood the wild anemones spread their white sheets beneath the grey-green oak trunks, and all day long, from dawn to dusk, the ring-doves coo, and the stock-doves croon an eternal monotonous duet in the bare grey-green boughs above.

Every day, every hour and minute, there is a fresh revelation of beauty, youth, and sweetness. The trees, the fields, the lawns—

> "They all look fresh, as if Our Lord
> But yesterday had finished them."

Was there ever a green so pure pale and translucent, or a texture so satin-like, as the delicate shining hue of tender young beech-leaves? In the meadows, on the stillest April day, there seems always a faint whisper.

> "O the fluttering and the pattering of the green things growing!
> How they talk each to each when none of us are knowing:
> In the wonderful white of the weird moonlight,
> Or the dim dreamy dawn when the cocks are crowing!"

How delightful it is now to see the dear blue-backed swallows hawking again above our lawns and fields, as if they had never been away a single day!

The pied wagtails, too, in their pretty conventual nun-like garb of black and white, trip hither and thither about the daisy-enamelled sward, jerking their tails and catching flies incessantly.

Yes! it is April; childlike, changeable—ever charming—with all her fitful, swift-varying moods of alternate gloom and gleam.

"Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees some morning unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!"

In April the evenings seem to lengthen miraculously, and it is so novel as to be delightful to be wakened at five in the morning by a sunbeam striking through the unshuttered window, straight across one's bed, and to listen in sleepy rapture to the confused, delicious, incessant warbling of innumerable birds.

"There is no time like Spring,
Like Spring that passes by;
There is no life like Spring life born to die,
Piercing the sod,
Clothing the uncouth clod,
Hatched in the nest,
Fledged on the windy bough,
There is no time like Spring that passes by,
Now newly born, and now
Hastening to die.'

SUMMER

SUMMER.

"Earth lies still in hopeless bliss;
She has and seeks no more;
Forgets that days come after this,
Forgets the days before."

G. Macdonald.

"Summer eternal, born
From year to year, as morn
Is born from day to day—reviving glows:
Her breath the scented gale,
Her voice the nightingale,
Her form incarnate in the queenly rose."

Lord de Tabley.

"The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees."

Tennyson.

"There is a singing in the summer air,
The blue and brown moths flutter o'er the grass,
The stubble bird is creaking in the wheat,
And, perch'd upon the honeysuckle hedge,
Pipes the green linnet. Oh! the golden world,
The stir of life on every blade of grass,
The motion and the joy on every bough,
The glad feast everywhere for things that love
The sunshine, and for things that love the shade!"

R. Buchanan.

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SUMMER.

May—June—July.

Of all the fair "daughters of the year," May is surely the fairest. Yet, here in England, alas, she is often the most treacherous and variable—with a reprehensible habit of veiling her fair face in sleet, and wrapping her young form in a garment of black and shuddering North-East wind that freezes the blood quite as effectually as, and more unpleasantly than, the keenest frosts of January or February. But May at her best and sweetest stands easily at the head of all the beauteous sisterhood.

May! the happy month when Spring and Summer meet—and mingle. When the young Earth keeps her honeymoon in a foamy froth of flowers, a dew-sparkling lustre of sunshine, and an unsullied freshness of tender verdure; which are the simple incarnation of youth and the climax of the whole lovely year.

In May the earth decks and embowers herself in bridal splendour from head to foot.

Sheets of anemones! Pillars of snowy hawthorn! Serried ranks of lilac and laburnum arrayed, like the

Assyrian cohorts of old, in gleaming "purple and gold." The lawns are fair green seas, silvered o'er with the foam of daisies. The meadows are literally "fields of the cloth of gold!"

> "And O, the buttercups! that field
> O' the cloth of gold, where pennons swam
> And France set up his lilied shield,
> His oriflamb;
>
> And Henry's lion standard rolled:
> What was it to their matchless sheen,
> Their million, million drops of gold
> Among the green!"

"Sheen" is just the right word; it recalls exactly the metallic lustre in the noonday sun of a meadow full of buttercups.

But May's crowning glory is that she, and she alone, is the chosen month of the nightingale. He is the true monarch of May, and throughout her sweet, short thirty-one nights, he hymns her praises.

That first soft, pure, long drawn-out note of the nightingale! Is there any music on earth to be compared to it? Shakspeare has said doubtless, "The nightingale, if she should sing by day, when every goose is cackling, would be thought no better a musician than the wren." But surely he is mistaken? The nightingale *does* often sing by day, and amid all the confused and confusing lesser bird voices, his voice floats forth alone; distinct from and immeasurably superior to all others—supreme in charm and sweetness!

Once heard, the song of the nightingale ought never to be forgotten or mistaken, even by the veriest tyro, for that of any other bird.

In it alone, of all bird-voices, there is a spark of the divine fire, that creates an atmosphere of enchantment, even when heard in broad daylight. But when, in the serene silence of a beautiful May midnight, those first low, pleading notes steal limpidly forth upon the breathless air, how the heart of the listener thrills! It breathes the very secret of dreams—echoes the lost music of the Garden of Paradise!

"Wild bird, whose warble liquid sweet
Rings Eden through the budded quicks!"

"Eternal Passion!
Eternal Pain!"

"But I fulfilled of my heart's desire,
Shedding my song upon height and hollow,
From tawny body and sweet small mouth,
Feed the heart of the night with fire."

"The sunrise wakes the lark to sing,
The moonrise wakes the nightingale.
Come darkness, moonrise, everything
That is so silent, sweet and pale,
Come, so ye wake the nightingale!"

Our garden has been blest for many successive springs by the nesting and singing therein of several pairs of nightingales. Doubtless the extra warmth and dryness of these later English summers have lured them hither.

Two years ago we rejoiced in the presence of at least three, and for many years running one has sung on the lawn so as to be plainly heard from the house.

It is curious how the song varies in individual birds—*i.e.*, in duration and arrangement of the phrases—for the song (though it may continue for hours) is made up of short phrases, with a distinct, and sometimes rather long, pause between. In its general character it is however always the same. The distinctive note is not, I should be inclined to think, so much the "jug, jug"—or "ju, ju," as it might be more correctly written—as the soft wailing, moaning note—melancholy, pleading, mysterious;—almost painfully soul-stirring. In some birds, this phrase, which beginning on a major gradually descends to the minor key, is much shorter and less frequently recurring than in others; but it is never entirely absent, constituting as aforesaid the distinctive peculiarity of the nightingale's song.

They began to sing early last May, and I sat out at nine o'clock listening to three at once: one in the park close by, one in the paddock behind the garden, and the last some little distance off, at the top of the church walk, audible only as a faint echo of the other two.

I was alone; the rest of the party having wandered away up the path in quest they declared of "ghosts!" for they would fain believe this dear old garden to be "haunted." As they flitted—the girls in

their trailing white dresses—in the tree-shadowed semi-obscurity of the moon-washed walk (not unlike the "spooks" they were in search of), the echo of their fresh young laughter floated back to me musically, and I thought how far removed was that mirth—innocent, spontaneous—from that which the Psalmist tells us is but "as the crackling of thorns." Such fresh young voices harmonised well enough with the sweet May night. Their tones had scarcely died away, before the bird-song began. Installed on a comfortable garden seat beneath a yew tree, I hugged myself in a thick cloak—for despite its beauty and stillness, the night air was distinctly frigid—and listened and looked. And it was good both to hear and see!

In front stretched the pallid moon-washed park, and all about it towered the large newly-clothed trees, motionless and shadowy, each with a gigantic shadow blacker than itself, lying like a pool of ink spilt upon the bleached grass. In the cloudless indigo sky low glittered the round yellow moon, like a huge shaddock or Forbidden Fruit as in our youth we called it. No breath of wind rustled the thin young leaves, and the air with its hint of keenness was yet soft, sweet with the breath of lilacs and hawthorn; seeming to throb, as the stars throbbed, in unison with the song of the nightingales.

Suddenly the divine music was rudely and prosaicly interrupted by the ringing of the servants' supper-bell! A moment after, nine struck in mellow

tones on the church clock. There are two curious local traditions connected with this old clock. The first runs, that for church clock and house bell to strike and ring simultaneously, presages ill-luck to the reigning family. This is firmly believed in the village; wherefore the careful domestics give themselves infinite trouble to evade the mysterious doom by always ringing the bell before the clock has struck.

The other is a more painful one, and consists in the notion that the church clock lingers unnaturally in its striking before a death either in the village or of some one connected with it. The oldest inhabitant, an ancient dame of ninety, takes shuddering heed of the clock's ways in this respect.

Some years ago my attention was first unpleasantly called by her to the fact that the church clock was striking slow, or "dowley," as she calls it.

"Eh! Dear," she remarked in genuine anxiety, "I doubt *soom* on us'll be taken—there's church clock striking dowley!"

"Nonsense!" was the stout reply. "It only wants winding." No doubt it did, but it was not wound till nearly a week later, and in the interim the wife of the village blacksmith was taken suddenly ill with pneumonia and—died.

The origin of both superstitions is lost in the mists of antiquity.

It has lately become the fashion to exalt the numerous new and sweet-scented herbaceous peonies

at the expense of the good old dark red one. One sees it written that this hardy old-fashioned peony is of a bad "tone" of red, and ought not to be allowed in the gardens of those who make any pretensions to artistic taste.

With this autocratic dictum I venture to disagree, and would simply say to such ultra-fastidious objectors: Come and see our terrace border when the old red peonies are out at the end of May, and be converted.

A row of these flowers stretches along the whole bed, with a thick border of common white pinks in front. Each fine clump of peonies will bear as many as fifteen to twenty strong, round flower-heads, of every shade of red, ranging from deepest crimson, through every gradation of carmine, to the most exquisite delicate shell-pink; for it is a peculiarity of this peony that as the flowers open and develop, they soften in tint in the most beautiful and becoming manner. And how plump, hardy, and robust it is; and how delightful to find the first strong bronze shoots of it pushing from the powdery earth among the earliest of the herbaceous plants in Spring. I wish I could also stick up for its smell! That however is unpleasant. I do not, of course, wish to depreciate the hosts of new peonies—most of them are lovely, many are sweet-scented, and some quite hardy.

Among the new wall-flowers, the purple-toned ones seem to me very agreeable, because original if

somewhat fantastic in colour. Their only drawback is that they do not "mix" well with the old-fashioned brown-red one—the "Bloody Warrior" of old country-folk. Of the new-coloured ones, Sutton's Purple Queen, looks well in a bed edged with his Eastern Queen (a pale cream-coloured variety).

Early in June we bed our sunk flower-garden. From time immemorial the same plan has been followed in this operation. Two of the larger beds are filled entirely with scented geranium—Oak-leaved and Pheasant's Foot; and in the two alternate large beds heliotrope is planted. In the midst of each is a Balm of Gilead. This dear old-fashioned plant is seldom seen in modern gardens: yet it is well worth cultivating, not only for its scent (which is strong, aromatic, and uncommon), but for its graceful form and habit, its rapid growth, and perfect hardiness.

Several of the beds we fill with white petunias, both double and single. We seldom have coloured ones, as the heavy red purple is difficult to arrange comfortably, where space is limited, so as not to "kill" or "swear with" other flowers. Various coloured verbenas, pink, white, scarlet and purple, make a lovely bed; but alas! the tiresome rabbits love them as much as we do, and *eat* them—down to the quick! Rabbits are a terrible "cross" to gardeners. Here their name is legion and no amount of wire netting can keep them out of the garden. In the two oblong beds under the laurel banks we plant the flowers in

rows, with the tall-growing things at the back. Thus a line of *nicotiana affinis* has beyond it and close against the shining dark-green background, a row of the taller *nicotiana sylvestris*. I wonder if any flower is sweeter than the smaller tobacco (*affinis*), or more lovely in the gathering dusk, when all its fair silver stars open wide, and shine as purely, if less brightly than the stars above. White is the prevailing hue in this sheltered and secluded spot, and experience shows it to be the best. When the coloured flowers disappear and are lost in the twilight, the white flowers shine out as if endowed with real radiance. Pale yellow is the only colour that shows at night. Of these the large yellow *œnothera* is a good instance; opening only at dusk, when it stands like a beauteous candelabra with all its many golden lamps alight and uplifted to the shining moon.

Why are all white varieties of flowers so much the sweetest? White sweet sultan, for instance, has twice the fragrance of the coloured sorts. So have white rocket, candytuft, and white verbena.

A small and very insignificant little flower, that is nevertheless worth growing for its extra-powerful and delicious perfume, is the night-scented stock. Its flowers are of a dingy white and lilac colour, it is of an untidy and straggling habit of growth, and the tiny star-shaped blossoms do not open or give forth the faintest scent till long after the sun has set, and the shades of evening have gathered strongly. All

day it droops and appears half dead; but at the approach of night it uplifts itself, revives, becomes strong and beautiful, and pours forth upon the night air a flood of fragrance which for power and potency is simply marvellous in so feeble a plant. I should much like to know what special moths the odour attracts. For this alone it is worth growing near the windows of the house.

Early in May the "bat" season thoroughly begins here. Hosts of the tiny, uncanny creatures appear at twilight and flit around the house. Even so early in the year as March one or two may sometimes be seen at mid-day, flying about in brilliant sunshine.

Out of doors, which is their proper place, I have no objection to them. But I do draw the line at a bat in one's room. I cannot imagine anything more gruesome or terrifying. Doubtless it is because I hold them in such special abhorrence that they haunt me especially in this manner.

They come in, always at the *bed-room* windows (and why? because there is no light there to attract them, and the downstairs casements stand wide also?), and when one retires for the night, the bed-room candle discloses, to one's horror, a flittering dark form, that darts backwards and forwards, always just above one's head, and never by any chance near the open window by which it has entered. Then ensues a scene of excitement and confusion that beggars de-

scription. The devoted maid, with kilted petticoats and apron tied securely over her head, calls in (invariably) the footman to her aid (the owner of the room having previously evacuated the citadel), and the two valiant domestics, armed with towels and dusters, "flap" these weapons wildly at the enemy, till, in the course of time, they manage somehow to flap him out of the window.

This is all very well when the bat is discovered and routed *before* the occupant of the bed-room has retired to rest. But the little demon has a fiendish habit of entering the upper chambers in the daytime, creeping behind or upon some article of furniture (a heavy wardrobe or big four-poster, for instance), and hanging there asleep till midnight, or thereabouts, when, just as the luxurious reader-in-bed is meditating extinguishing his candle, and going to sleep, out creeps the impish creature, and suddenly begins his appalling flickering flight, up and down, up and down incessantly. This dread experience has been my wretched fate more than once. Far rather would I receive the separate, or collective, visits of a dozen ghosts—or have a mouse run over my face in bed, which once did actually happen to me. I am always in such mortal terror of the bat getting entangled in my hair—when, according to accepted tradition, the hair (if not the head) would have to be removed before the bat could be—that under such circumstances I simply plunge my entire cranium incontinently be-

neath the bed-clothes, and remain quaking and slowly suffocating, till at length the bat departs, or at any rate ceases to flicker about the room.

Flitter-mouse is one of its old-fashioned names, and is highly appropriate and descriptive. It is a mistake however to suppose that the flight of a bat is noiseless. Just you get one in your room at the dead of night, and the sound of its erratic flight will thunder in your shrinking ears like the roar of an express train!

A curious fact about a bat in a room is that it never "loses its head," as a bird invariably does in the same situation, nor does it knock up against the furniture. It never bangs blindly upon the window, when chased; but alights now and again neatly on different projections, and copies the bird only by its persistent ignoring of the casement by which it entered, and to which its assailants endeavour vainly to direct its course.*

Early in May we may generally rely on hearing the comfortable, slumbrous "purr" of the turtle-doves about the garden. No created sound is so entirely in harmony with summer and all its rising tide of leaves and flowers. Twenty years ago "the voice of the turtle" was never heard here; but of late years these birds have largely increased, both in this and the adjoining county. This fact was pointed out by the

* Since writing this, I have been told and proved the efficacy of the following simple and sure mode of ejecting a bat, *i.e.*, place a lighted candle on the sill, and the bat will instantly fly towards it, and out at the open window.

late Mr. Cordeaux, in a note in the *Zoologist* about six years ago. Turtle-doves are unusually shy birds, and though often heard quite near the house, can seldom or never be seen, except when sitting. I once found and visited a hen turtle sitting closely on her nest, in the top of a small fir-tree in the park.

At the end of May the place overflows, so to speak, with young thrushes; absurd tailless creatures that are unable to fly, and stand about hunched and hopeless, the easy prey of every cat that prowls! They hop clumsily under the bushes, and shout aloud for their parents; but they are obviously quite stupid and defenceless, and one wonders why so many young thrushes leave the nest in this sadly callow condition, not fully fledged, and totally unable to fly. Are they shoved out by the stronger nestlings when the nest gets uncomfortably crowded, as so often appears to be the case with a family of growing birds?

If turtle-doves have increased, owls, alas! have decreased here of late. Ten or fifteen years ago, a barn owl flitting across the park, silent and pale, like a winged ghost, was no uncommon sight from the front windows of the house, as the shades of evening began to fall. Their wild, unmusical shrieks might often be heard at night. Now we never hear, and it is the exception to see, an owl about the place. What can be the reason? The keepers are not allowed to kill them, and I do not believe they do. For the increase in the number of our turtles I believe the

greatly superior dryness of our English summers may account. Can it also be a cause of the decrease in owls?

Brown owls breed in our woods, and are occasionally mistaken and shot for woodcocks—which bird they resemble in flight and appearance to the casual sporting eye, in a wood on a dull November afternoon.

It is the brown owl that hoots; the barn owl shrieks only. The note of the wood owl is soft, melodious, and rather melancholy. It is a wild, oft-repeated "Hoo-hoo— Hoohoo-oo-oo-oo!" with a tremble in the latter part. There is no hint of "whit" in the sound. Therefore the conventional and poetic rendering of the owl's cry as "Tu-whit-tu-whoo" is merely poetical. For, as Phil Robinson has in more than one of his books pointed out, the poets are by no means bound by stern fact; and Shakespeare himself, and even Tennyson (who makes fewer flagrant mistakes than any other poet when writing of Nature) give the reins to their fancy when writing of the owl. Shakespeare, for instance, makes the owl hoot most in winter—which he certainly does not—in that otherwise inimitable song, beginning—

"When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail;
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail;
When blood is nipt and ways be foul,

Then nightly sings the staring owl
Tu-whoo!
Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot!"

Tennyson, however, "outwits" (so to speak) Shakespeare even, in his owl song, thus—

"I would mock thy chaunt anew,
But I cannot mimic it!
Not a whit of thy Tu-whoo,
Thee to woo, to thy Tu-whit!
Thee to woo to thy Tu-whit!
With a lengthened loud halloo,
Tu-whoo, Tu-whit, Tu-whit, Tu-whoo-oo!"

This is whimsical enough, and the tremble at the end is not unlike the owl's cry; but for an ordinary being —one who is not a poet—nothing is easier than to mimic the hoot of the brown owl. Every schoolboy can do it. By breathing in a certain way into the tightly clasped and slightly hollowed hands, it can be copied exactly.

About the middle of May the wild lilies of the valley come into bloom in our largest wood, which is chiefly composed of oaks and spruces. At the upper end, beneath a tract of oaks with an undergrowth of hazels, the ground is covered thick with lilies. "Myriads blow together." The flowers are smaller but also sweeter than the cultivated garden ones. Twenty years ago, the gamekeeper, whose pretty cottage stands in the middle of the wood, used to

gather and send them up to the house in clothes-baskets-full. Now the mile-off market-town has so increased in size, that its less law-abiding inhabitants levy a heavy toll on our lilies directly they appear, and in spite of the most careful watching on their part, they cannot be coped with by the keepers.

Early in May the upper part of this wood, where the undergrowth has been cleared away, is like a vision of fairyland. Among the straight, stiff, grey-green trunks of the oaks, stand here and there the bending, curved, red-brown stems of wild cherry trees, wreathed in garlands and a mist of foaming snowy blossom!

> "In pale blue evening
> Ah, the cherry seems to sing
> With a fairy bridal dower!
> Pure white chalices of flower
> Pendent in a pale blue sky
> Shadowy blossoms with soft eye."

Beneath such a canopy, upon such a carpet of snow-white anemones, it is easy to imagine Titania herself flitting and dancing amid her attendant elves; one almost expects to meet Mustardseed or Peaseblossom, and Bottom may any day be encountered in the person of a sturdy, stolid woodman!

All through May the corncrakes call through the calm dewy evenings, and half through the sweet, light, short nights, from the long hay-grass in the marshes. There is something anxious and apprehen-

sive about the strange ventriloquial "creak" of the wandering, hidden meadowcrake. Sir Lewis Morris, in one of his shorter poems, says of it—

"Only the rustling landrail's note *complains*."

Early in June the rhododendrons in the wood on the hill are in their glory. The old-fashioned lilac-coloured ones are the first to flower; then the reds and crimsons—the paler pinks and whites flowering last. In the midst of this wood there is a boggy, peaty tract of ground, where a grove of silver-stemmed birches grow, with lady-fern and marsh-violets at their feet. Beyond and around them, and encircling a small piece of ornamental water, rhododendrons of every kind and colour have been planted in bold masses. When in flower, and during their brief prime, no sight can be more beautiful. It is a perfect riot of colour—every shade of pink, purple, and red.

A pair of kestrels has bred in this wood for several successive years, and the old birds can be seen circling above the trees, and the young heard whining like new-born puppies, of a fine evening any time in early summer.

In June the beautiful rose-coloured heads of the flowering rush (*B. umbellatus*) uplift themselves from the dykes that intersect the marshes. Herein, too, flower the arrow-head (*S. sagittifolia*), with its pointed leaves and three-petalled white purple-eyed blossoms, the water plantain (*A. plantago*), the branched bur-

reed (*S. ramosum*), frogbit (*H. morus ranae*), water fig-wort (*S. aquatica*), and, lying like thick foam upon the water, large tracts of large and small water crowfoot. Blue forget-me-not, pink ragged-robin, magenta loose-strife, and the cream-coloured heads of meadow-sweet and meadow-rue, decorate the steep banks of the dykes, while becca-bunga and water-cress grow in a thick thatch upon the water. The latter we dare not eat, as—though no drainage is supposed to be allowed to penetrate from any part of the village into the dykes—water-cress is not considered wholesome human food when growing in any district frequented by sheep.

The plovers' eggs are now mostly hatched, as the wanderer in the water-meadows may easily tell by the behaviour of the lapwings. They fly low, and close to the intruder, endeavouring by their cries and attentions to lure him away from their young. But even with this parental anxiety to guide you, it is by no means easy to find the cunning little pee-wits. They are charming little creatures when you are so lucky as to come across them; bright-eyed, brown balls of fluff, which, though they cannot use their tiny wings, can and do, almost as soon as hatched, run with incredible swiftness and absolute noiselessness through the grass from place to place, in obedience to the warning cries of the old birds.

The Great Marsh—a broad perfectly flat meadow of two hundred and fifty acres in extent, stretching

down to the river—is let out to the various tenant farmers in portions. Here they graze their stock in autumn and grow hay in summer. The grass is peculiarly fine and good, and the winter floods (which may be generally counted upon to a greater or less extent and at their highest cover the whole pastures, reaching from the river nearly up to the high road, a distance of half-a-mile and more) are of great value in covering the ground with the fine river mud—or "warp," as it is called here—which forms the very best manure for hay grass that is known. When the water retreats it leaves behind it all over the meadows a deposit of warp, which is of inestimable benefit to the land and greatly improves the chances of the next hay crop.

This river is famous for its great tidal wave—here called ægir. It is akin to that known as "bore" on the Severn, and at certain seasons, notably at spring and autumn, comes up the river in a fine rushing, white-crested billow, with a muffled roar which can be heard a good distance off. Jean Ingelow wrote a fine description of the ægir—or eagre, as she prefers to spell it—in her dramatic and pathetic poem, "The Bells of Enderby."

Many different kinds of clover, and the tall dark red-seeded burnet, grow among the fine herbage of the marshes. The hay grass is full of flowers—the big blue meadow cranesbill, common yellow rattle, and several different kinds of vetch.

Sweet it is to linger on the Great Marsh when the hay is being cut and carried of a summer evening. Hundreds of larks are all around, high up—"an unseen song"—and fluttering close at hand.

"The lark could scarce get out his notes for joy,
But shook his song together as he neared
His happy home the ground."

O the skylark's song! What does it not tell and teach? Happy are those mortals who listen to it with their heart and soul, as with their ears.

"Two worlds hast thou to dwell in, sweet—
The virginal untroubled sky,
And this vext region at my feet.
Alas, but one have I!

"My heart is dashed with grief and fears;
My song comes fluttering, and is gone.
O, high above the home of tears,
Eternal Joy, sing on!"

What a rippling, ecstatic melody; and how it seems to fill the whole world! The open sky is pure and cloudless; one strip of long, waving, silvery grass is yet uncut near the river, and the mowing-machine with a comfortable chirring sound is at work upon it.

Here and there a scarlet burnet moth flickers by, like a floating poppy petal blown by the evening breeze, which, soft and sweet yet fresh, rises a little when the sun sets, round, red, and flushing the calm West around into lakes of amber and rose. The

shadows of the cool grey-green haycocks lengthen and narrow, and stretch over the lemon-yellow-coloured fresh-shorn grass, in tint a bright Prussian blue.

Corncrakes venture tentatively forth into the open, and strut timorously about on the short turf, flirting their tails and stretching out their necks exactly as water-hens do.

I think it is William Black who, in one of his charming "Nature novels," compares a corncrake's cry to the noise made by a fisherman's line escaping from the reel. It is also like the winding-up of an old eight-day clock.

On such a summer evening, in such a spot, how gradually do the colours fade from sky and earth! The pink melts imperceptibly into lilac, grey, dark blue,—till one by one the trembling stars steal out; the glittering moon arises; and with her enchanted, mysterious light discloses a new world, all black and white—ghostly, mystical—clear, yet unrevealed fully—luminous, yet dark—silent, yet interpenetrated with a faint, wondrous, perpetual murmur of sound!

O, the magic of night! Emily Brontë knew it. Her great sad, sympathetic soul was pierced and penetrated by its mystery and sweetness, and, in the few short poems she wrote before the envious grave claimed her, she hymns its praises in vigorous yet simple verse. Her poems are so little known, that I venture to quote at length from that entitled "Stars."

" Why did the morning dawn to break
So great, so pure, a spell;
And scorch with fire the tranquil cheek,
Where your cool radiance fell?

" Blood-red he rose, and arrow-straight
His fierce beams struck my brow;
The soul of nature sprang elate,
But *mine* sank sad and low!

" My lids closed down, yet through their veil
I saw him blazing still,
And steep in gold the misty dale,
And flash upon the hill.

" I turned me to the pillow then,
To call back night, and see
Your worlds of solemn light, again,
Throb with my heart, and me!

" It would not do; the pillow glowed,
And glowed both roof and floor;
And birds sang loudly in the wood,
And fresh winds shook the door;

" The curtains waved, the wakened flies
Were murmuring round my room,
Imprisoned there till I should rise,
And give them leave to roam,

" Oh, stars, and dreams, and gentle night;
Oh, night and stars, return!
And hide me from the hostile light
That does not warm, but burn;

"That drains the blood of suffering men,
Drinks tears instead of dew;
Let me sleep through his blinding reign
And only wake with you!"

Simple as this is, it breathes the very spirit of night, and its strength lies in its straightforward simplicity, as in all that wonderful girl ever wrote. Shelley himself does not bring Night more vividly before us in his famous poem beginning

"Swiftly walk over the western wave,
Spirit of night!"

The nightingales that nest here will often, after ceasing to sing early in June, begin again for a brief period about the end of that month. About six years ago one, nesting in the wood beyond the lawn, invariably began to sing every night immediately after the distant roar of the eleven o'clock express to London had been heard; never before, but always directly after. We concluded that the distant rumble served him as a reveillée!

In the old stone wall that supports the sunk fence between lawn and park, many blue-tits make their nests, in the convenient holes between the rough slabs of stone. Blue-tits are particularly plucky birds, with the maternal instinct very keenly developed. You may go and gaze at a blue-tit, as near and as often as you like, while she is sitting on eggs, and she will never leave her nest. She will be in a royal rage, as she will

show by fluffing out all her feathers and spitting and fuffing at you like an angry cat, but she will not exhibit the smallest fear or attempt to fly away, even should you venture to stroke her little quivering back—quivering with *anger* only be it understood—with a daring and sacrilegious finger!

One summer a partridge made her nest beneath a clump of pink and yellow pyrethrums in the kitchen garden flower border. It was a poetical and picturesque site, but the artistic bird had not the courage of her convictions. "Advanced" as she doubtless was, she had not the nerve to stand the dogs sniffing round her home two or three times a day. Human beings she was prepared to put up with, but the damp investigating noses of puppy-dogs was more than the most enlightened bird could be expected to stand. So one fine day she deserted, and we took the eleven smooth olive-tinted eggs and put them under a hen, the result being that six lovely little partridges were hatched alive; and with the greatest care, numerous ants' eggs, and wood-lice, we reared three, the other three being trodden on and killed by the hen, who was too big for the job, though a most careful mother in intention. For the first week or so we fed them on eggs chopped very small, finely-shredded lettuce, and bread-crumbs passed through a sieve, and on this diet they throve.

A few hawfinches generally build in or near the garden. One June a hawfinch's nest was found in an old hawthorn tree in the park. The young were

nearly full-fledged, but had tumbled out of the nest, and were on the ground beneath the tree. They were put in a cage and hung up against the trunk for the old birds to come and feed, which they doubtless did for some time; but eventually the young ones died, and general local opinion considered the parents had poisoned them, as bullfinches are popularly supposed to do under the same conditions! Very absurd these two young hawfinches looked, sitting side by side in the cage, perfectly calm and composed, and taking no notice whatever of visitors. They were fully fledged, with the addition of two tufts of marabout-down sticking up at each side of their heads, which, combined with their big broad beaks and exaggeratedly solemn demeanour, gave them a very funny and clownish aspect.

The midges are very bad here in June, and bite almost like mosquitos. They swarm particularly under a wych elm on the lawn, and make it almost impossible to sit beneath its otherwise grateful shade. Wych elms are peculiarly ornamental garden trees, and we have many here.

> "Witch elms that counterchange the floor
> Of this flat lawn with dark and bright."

It is a tree of an uncommonly symmetrical and bowery form of growth, and the small tufts of light green seeds that cover the whole tree thickly, long before the leaves appear, are one of its most engaging features.

Considering the large space of our garden that is devoted to the culture of flowers, we have not so many butterflies or moths as one would expect and wish to see. Of the former, the first to appear are invariably the sulphur-yellow or brimstone. Later, the small flower garden has generally two or three Red Admirals, Tortoiseshells, and an occasional Peacock butterfly flitting about, and settling specially upon the heliotrope beds. Of the more well-known moths, the Ermine and Tiger moth are to be seen occasionally, also the Death's Head rarely; and once I have seen a beautiful Elephant Hawk moth—an exquisite creature, all pink terry-velvet, with trimmings of olive green and pale fawn-coloured plush—poking its long proboscis in and out of the trumpet throats of the honeysuckle blossoms, while he hovered, faintly humming, in front of them, just like a tiny humming-bird.

By the middle of June the elder is in full bloom. How it scents the soft air with its rich spicy fragrance! Not even the blossoming of the rose is so distinctive of the season. When I see the elder spread forth its flat discs of spicy cream-coloured flowers, in innumerable quantities, among its thick, dark green leaves, I know that Autumn is nigh, Midsummer is here—is passing; and the strong scent of the elder is a sign of the time that makes one sigh involuntarily.

We have an old family receipt for elder-flower wine. It is light-coloured, rather sweet, and of course

highly scented. Some that has been in bottle in these cellars for many years has been praised by connoisseurs, and likened to Tokay.

Of all possible aids to memory, surely none are so potent as the faint, elusive scents of flowers.

A word, a look, a sound may recall, in its pristine brightness and entirety, a bygone scene less vividly than the fleeting intangible perfume of a rose. A sprig of lemon verbena, a spray of sweet geranium, the subtle rich fragrance of the common white jessamine borne on the evening breeze, transports one with a magical swiftness into the land of long ago; bringing back, from the dim caves of remembrance, a day, a moment, a face—passed away for evermore from this earth, but, while memory lasts, alive for ever in her.

How strangely varied are the scents of flowers! for though many have a strong family likeness, yet they can always be told apart—by smell—even with the eyes shut. It is otherwise with the perfumes men distil from them. Most of these smell disappointingly pretty much alike—with the exceptions of our old friends Eau de Cologne and Lavender water. Even such humble blossoms as the daisy and dandelion have a distinctive scent, faint it is true, and in the latter flower not entirely pleasing, but peculiar to themselves alone.

Some flowers have an almost miraculous power of flinging their odour upon the air for yards—I had nearly said miles—around!

"The scent of bean-flowers wafted up a dell"—how penetrating and far-reaching it is. "Beans! I smell beans: there is a bean-field near!" Yet often it is not in sight, but one gratefully inhales the delicious perfume with which the summer air is loaded.

Again, I have found myself marvelling, when sitting on the lawn, at the potent sweetness of the July breeze. Whence comes it? There are no flowers near—but some yards away stands a noble lime, covered from head to foot with tiny saffron-hued blossoms, in and out of which hundreds of working bees hum incessantly; and that is the splendid censer from which rises and floats that divine incense. In Summer each month has its own scent. May smells of lilac, June of hay—(Oh, the smell of new-mown grass! The smell the sun draws forth from it—the hot, healing sweetness . . . how good, pure, and satisfying it is!). July smells of elder: the hedges, lanes, woods—the whole country is pervaded with the strong spicy scent, which tells so surely of the approach of Autumn.

From lack of scent, too, how unsatisfactory are many of the new roses—Baroness Rothschild, for instance, which, lovely as it is, I would not have in my garden at a gift. William Allen Richardson is another that has so little smell as to be practically a scentless rose. And a rose without fragrance is simply an anomaly—almost a monstrosity! The Crimson Rambler errs, unhappily, in the same grave fashion. It is admirable, in its profuse bloom, free

and peculiarly graceful habit (it is a true "Garland" rose), and adorable robustness; but one has no wish to pick it to put in water in the room, or to stick it in one's waistband. How different with some of the dear old-fashioned roses!—the exquisitely fragrant Cabbage, or the true otto-scented La France. Some of the paler loosely-petalled tea roses really have a smell that recalls the aromatic fragrance of some teas. The climbing Niphetos, our good old friend Maréchal Niel, and Isabella Sprunt—an excellent pillar rose—smell thus. Some plants have strongly-scented flowers that are pleasant enough in the open air, but become—to me—disagreeable when gathered and brought into the house. Of these are syringa and hawthorn. The latter has a pronounced fishy smell, that is most unpleasant in a room. Some people cannot bear the strong heady scents of certain hot-house flowers. These are mostly of the "fleshy" kind, with rich heavy fragrance—such as gardenias, stephanotis, tuberose, daphnes, and even hyacinths. The scents of these flowers in any number is so rich and powerful as to make delicately constituted persons feel faint. Fortunately, I am not so framed. I cannot have too many of such flowers about, and inhale their perfume with thankful delight. It is intensely "clean," and has no nasty undertone about it.

But perhaps the purest, freshest smell of all, in a room, is that of lilac. Even violets (freshly gathered) do not impart such a delightful fragrance to my lady's

chamber as does a bowl of newly-opened, newly-picked, dewy lilac!

Violets have a *thicker* scent, with something distinctly *mealy* about it! Auriculas and—in a lesser degree—polyanthus and pansies, are in this respect like them. Carnations, of course, stand at the head of all the spicy-scented flowers, and never yet have I known a chrysanthemum that did not smell of camphor!

Some flower scents recall the oddest things! The large yellow œnothera for instance—which, opening only at dusk, is truly and happily called evening primrose—smells exactly like new mackintosh. Grape hyacinths smell like little babies. Some tea roses, of tobacco. Crown Imperials, as has been often remarked, have a strong foxy smell, and most phloxes smell of curry powder! Chimonanthus Fragrans smells of bear's grease, like "thine incomparable oil Macassar"—and consequently always reminds me of that inimitable John Leech picture, wherein a smug British tradesman is depicted driving his wife along a country lane in summer:—

She. "How beautiful those beans do smell, Adolphus!"

He. "They do indeed, my love. They remind one of the most delicious hair oil!"

Surely that worthy barber was wrong? Few scents in Nature are more exquisite than that of a bean-field—pure and powerful—for it saturates and

surcharges the air for yards around; as I have remarked before; it is indescribably delicate and fresh, and in fact like nothing on earth for sweetness but itself.

Had the good man compared his chief ware to Chimonanthus—or Calycanthus, as some people call it—I should have entirely agreed with him. The scent of this is simple essence of bear's grease—the Atkinson variety! Boronia Megastigma—that strange insignificant-looking greenhouse plant, with its cup-shaped, tiny chocolate-coloured blossoms, recalls, to my nose, the same article of commerce.

Do any of my readers know which, among the old-fashioned roses, is the "musk rose"? Henry Bright, in his *Lancashire Garden*, asks the same question. He had never been able to identify it. Keats writes with enthusiasm of the charms of the "musk rose," which he calls "mid-May's eldest child." But this gives us even less information than did Mrs. Gibson's famous reply, in *Wives and Daughters*, to Osborne Hamley, when he asked her when the dog roses bloomed. "Not know, and you a poet! Surely you remember 'It was the time of roses, we plucked them as we passed'"!

Personally, I should be inclined to fancy it may be a poetical name for the dear, very sweet cabbage rose; but this does not flower till later. Indeed, none of our roses come into bloom before June. The earliest are some tiny, shell-pink briar roses that grow

on straggling bushes in among a clump of rhododendrons on the lawn. These blossom about the end of May. They are very sweet, with a strong "otto" scent.

In our herbaceous terrace border are many old-fashioned roses, trees of the small yellow Austrian briar, bushes of the striped red and white York and Lancaster rose, pink and white moss rose, cabbage, maiden's blush, and a precious plant of the little old red Portland rose, the best and only rose, some people say, to make pot-pourri of.

The summer is practically over with the close of July. The yews have long ceased "smoking"—in May one could not brush past a group of yew bushes without sending the pollen flying from them, in a cloud of thick grey smoke!—and the scarlet berries have formed. A family of oxeye tits, nine in all, that were hatched and reared in an old disused pump in the shrubbery, and whose heads, seen from above, used to look like nine smooth onyx pebbles set in a ring of moss, have all flown.

So has a family of four sweet little swallows, that were born and reared under the roof of the tool-shed. For some time they all four sat in a row on the beam (beneath which stuck their nest) all day long, waiting to be fed. We used to watch the good, patient, trustful old birds flying in and out incessantly, with their bills full of flies, which they distributed in turn to the voracious youngsters. How charming they

were—those dear little swallows—sitting shoulder to shoulder, so neat and cosy looking, with such low broad foreheads, such amiable wide beaks, such beautiful, unsullied cream-white pinafores, and such ducks of red bibs just beginning to show. They did not care two pins how much we stared at them, but stared back in return out of the brightest of bright eyes—rather contemptuously and disparagingly we thought. And we loved and reverenced them so. We would so gladly have cherished and fed them ourselves, and kept them with us for ever. But now they are flown, and we miss them sorely. The ricketty old toolshed was so enhanced by their dear and gracious presence, that it seems desolate without them. As Mrs. Ewing says, in one of her charming stories, "The dear birds have every virtue, except that of knowing how we long to kiss and caress them!"

Yes, July is gone, the "reign of the roses" is over, the birds are silent, and autumn is at hand.

"All things earthy, of the earth, do tell
This earth's perpetual story; we belong
Unto another country, and our song
Shall be no mortal knell;
Though all the year's tale, as *our* years run fast,
Mourns 'Summer's past!'"

AUTUMN

AUTUMN

"Long autumn rain,
White mists which choke the vale, and blot the sides
Of the bewildered hills; in all the plain
No field agleam where the gold pageant was,
And silent o'er a tangle of drenched grass
The blackbird glides.

"In the heart,—fire,
Fire and clear air, and cries of water-springs,
And large, pure winds; all April's quick desire,
All June's possession; a most fearless Earth
Drinking great ardours; and the rapturous birth
Of wingéd things."

E. Dowden.

"The spirit which mild Autumn makes her own:
Which comes like distant peal or muffled psalm,
When hearts are still and leaves are floating down—
Its name? Its name is Calm."

A. J. Munby.

"Far away on hilly slopes,
Where fleet rivulets run,
Miles and miles of tangled fern,
Burnished by the sun,
Glow a copper dun.
For the year that's on the wane,
Gathering all its fire,
Flares up through the kindling world
As ere they expire
Flames leap high, and higher."

M. Blind.

"Mark how Autumn's prophet finger
Burns to hues of Spring."

G. Macdonald.

AUTUMN

August—September—October

AUTUMN—that "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," which a later poet has most aptly called "Autumn, the faithful widow of the year!"—may surely be said to begin the latter end of August. For, as in May Spring merges imperceptibly into Summer, so in August Summer glides, gradually but certainly, into Autumn.

August in the daytime is a crudely coloured month. It recalls a cheap and gaudy chromo-lithograph, with its dark, heavy greens, violent reds, flaming yellows, and sombre, deep shadows. It is a month of extremes. Fierce suns; blinding, thick, suffocating dust; theatrical thunderstorms!

On a fine day in August I have sat at noon in a harvest field, endeavouring to paint the scene before me, and have been amazed at the depth, richness, and size of the shadows. Those cast by the nearest corn-stooks lay, at their bases, like pools of clear peat-hued water. I painted them in pure brown-madder, and they certainly were not too strong in colour.

Nevertheless, our small flower garden is perhaps at its best and brightest in August. The sweet gera-

nium beds stand thick and high, like small forests, and those of heliotrope are a luxuriant tangle of pale and deep purple blossom. The rabbit-eaten verbenas, too, begin to recover themselves, being let alone at last by those persistent pests, who now find plenty of congenial nutriment outside the garden pales—mercifully! So the verbenas flower profusely after all. Out of a soft grey carpet of hoary cerastium rise, tall and stiff, the straight claret-coloured stems of the *lobelia cardinalis*, enriched with the lovely bright-red-velvet flowers, set like scarlet flies along the upper part of the stalks. In the centre stone vase a pink ivy-leaved geranium flings a wealth of flower heads and graceful leaves and tendrils over the smooth dark-green table of clipped box. In the corner beds the white petunias lie like sweet, warm snow.

When twilight falls, the pinks and scarlets fade and disappear, but the numberless flowers of the nicotine open wide in the luminous dusk, and uplift their silver stars to the diamond stars that come starting and twinkling forth in the soft purple-velvet sky.

A milky way of petunias! A galaxy of nicotine! Heaven on earth reaches upwards, humbly, innocently, sweetly. Heaven above stoops down in serene and silent splendour—condescending, strangely near—natural—utterly unlike itself and its daytime remoteness!

So hidden and secluded is this cup-like garden, that to enter it in the August gloaming gives a sense

of enchantment, and is like stepping down suddenly into a Fairy Tale!

Tall, dark hedges loom above banks of dim but shimmering laurel. Clusters of white roses shine out softly, mysteriously. Spires of white hollyhock gleam against the sombre yew; and in the clear sapphire sky the planets sparkle and the pale moon glitters.

All the world is dark-blue and silver: dim, and shining and still!

What are the flowers and the stars all listening for in that mysterious and breathless summer-night hush? I think it is for the advancing footstep of Autumn.

In the upper flower garden the asters bloom thickly, in prim quilled rows, of every shade of pink, purple, and white; and the stocks and zinnias. True flowers of Autumn are these last, splendid and brilliant in all their varied tones of flaming orange, yellow, and red; but to my taste rather gaudy, garish, and stiff in their growth. The Red Admiral butterfly loves them, and disports himself thereon at all hours of the day.

Beloved, too, of butterflies is a certain humble plant that flowers now in the kitchen garden borders. It is the *sedum spectabile;* and sunning themselves and feeding upon its flat trusses of dusky reddish bloom, I have counted as many as eight Red Admirals, four Tortoiseshells, and two Peacocks upon a single plant.

Against the holly hedge, the giants of the garden —the hollyhocks and sunflowers—stand towering and dignified. The rose-pink and scarlet spears of gladioli are ranged in bristling ranks of splendour; and in the middle garden walk, spires of turquoise and sapphire-blue delphinium alternate and form a background to a seething foam of Shirley poppies and pale pink mallow.

Sweet-peas are in their glory now, and no flower that blooms is dearer to me than the sweet sweet-pea. Keats, poet of the flowers as he was, doubtless felt the same, when he described them more truly and beautifully than ever one before or since in those exquisite lines:

> "Here are sweet peas on tiptoe for a flight!
> With wings of tender flush o'er delicate white.
> And taper fingers catching at all things,
> To bind them all about with tiny rings."

The various new Eckford sweet-peas are so innumerable as to be quite bewildering. Some of the striped and flaked varieties are particularly engaging; and pleasing too is the modern fashion of growing them in groups of one colour only. We follow this plan in some of the flower borders, but nothing would make us give up the dear old-fashioned hedge of mixed sweet-peas in the kitchen garden. We have two of these—one on each side of the middle walk, at the back of the flower border. The first, sown in September, comes into flower in June: the other is sown

and flowers a couple of months later; and the groups we sow in Spring for Autumn flowering.

The water-lilies on the pond and in the tubs are now in flower, and the water hawthorn (*aponogeton*). The latter is a curious-looking blossom, not unlike a coarse cockscomb—white, with velvety black splashes at the base of the petals. It is strongly scented.

At the back of some of the flower borders we set tall, rough fir poles, and sow convolvulus major of all colours below them. The effect in August is quite lovely. The sticks are entirely covered with a wealth of fine pointed green leaves and tendrils, and with quantities of deep pink, deep blue, striped pink and white, and blue and white bells.

The American name for this flower—"morning glory"—is so very pretty and appropriate. No flower opens so fully and confidingly to the sun. I was told the other day that in America they now have "evening glories" too—convolvuli that open only at dusk! I can believe it. Everything is possible in America.

We confess to being not altogether believers in the vaunted and greatly-advertised charms of the numerous Penzance hybrid sweetbriars. We have tried many of these and—found them wanting. Several were planted by the pergola, and their flowers are very little larger, not much more profuse, and the leaves no sweeter than are those of the dear old original sweetbriar of one's youth.

We have bushes and hedges of this in various parts of the garden, and special plots, of course, devoted to the culture of lavender and rosemary. How delightful is the latter, with its hardy iron-grey evergreen shoots, which furnish us all through the Winter with cut greenery for the vases. In Summer it is also lovely, when the whole bush is covered with hundreds of small lavender-coloured fly-shaped blossoms—a very Puritan among shrubs.

> "O rosemary, sad rosemary,
> O herb of sharpest memory,
> Of penitence and purity,
> Thy serious scent, thy pungent spray,
> Can penetrate and wave away
> The sickliest threatenings of decay."

In the borders of the cross-way kitchen garden walk we plant a thick row of mixed Sweet Williams, with Canterbury bells (*calycanthema*) at the back. The pale colours—pink, blue, and white—of these throw up the deep velvety reds and crimsons of the Sweet Williams, are most effective, and a veritable feast of colour. If the fading campanula bells are picked off as they die, the plants will go on flowering nearly a month longer than usual.

Few garden pictures are more satisfying than a big bed of Shirley poppies. This flower ought always to be sown in masses. Anything more exquisite, tender, and pure than the various tones and gradations of pinks in a bed of mixed Shirley poppies I never

saw. They are truly like what *Elisabeth in her German Garden* calls a "perpetual imprisoned sunset."

A mass of variegated giant poppies also makes a splendid bed. They are almost "artificial" looking—like great feather "pompoms" (as milliners call the ostrich tufts they put in hats)—of every imaginable shade of pink, purple, scarlet, maroon, creamy-white, and fawn; and in shape are rosettes—quilled, ruffled, gophered and creased in the most wonderful and intricate manner.

"More crumpled than a poppy from its sheath"

was Tennyson's unlucky prince, after his forcible ejection from the presence of his princess at the hands of those eight mighty daughters of the plough. And when one watches a poppy bursting gradually from its rough grey-green calyx, that splits lengthwise to deliver it, one marvels how it was possible for anything to be *more* crumpled!

About this time the beds of *gypsophila* are in full flower. Both kinds—*gypsophila elegans* and *paniculata*—mix well in vases with Shirley poppies; especially the former which comes into flower a good deal the earliest of the two. The pink, blue, and white cornflowers also look well put together with *gypsophila* in a vase.

Again another flower that is best planted in a mass is antirrhinum. A mixed bed of this ought always to be found room for in every garden. Also

one of mixed pentstemons, salpiglossis, and sweet scabious. One of the most picturesque and artistically-arranged gardens I ever saw had its stable wall a waving mass of variegated snapdragon. We have no garden or stable wall here whereon we can grow flowers, but we scatter antirrhinum seed on the top of a mound of rough sods kept for various purposes by the gardeners near the tool shed, and which becomes quite ornamental when decorated by a grove of shaded snapdragons! The sides of this mound have been utilised by the gardener as a receptacle for mushroom spawn, and the results were most encouraging, as we had many a dish of mushrooms from it.

We may now expect our second blow of roses; and, indeed, the Gloire de Dijons (of which we have a number planted against a railing, hedge-wise) go on flowering all through the Autumn, almost into the Winter.

The tea roses, too, give a good supply of blooms. Of these the most beautiful of all is the half tea, half China (it is always put down as a China in rose catalogues) Laurette Messimy, with its charming loose-petalled blossoms, of a pure deep rose, suffused with orange.

In September we look for the flowering of our belladonna lilies. Six bulbs were planted about six years ago, in a narrow strip of border under the south wall of the small greenhouse. Of these only the two end ones have as yet, ever flowered. But they are a

host in themselves, these two magnificent flower heads with four to six delicate shell-pink trumpets, borne erect on the strong succulent chocolate-red leafless stems.

The bank beneath the south wall of our one vinery is always a fragrant thicket of mignonette. How far abroad the vigorous scent of mignonette can be flung! And how the bees love it! Our candytuft, too, is always humming with bees, and has a strong *honey* scent, I am of opinion one cannot have too much mignonette in the garden. We sow it thickly on the rose-beds—nothing else, as deeper rooting things are said to exhaust the soil too much—and we sow patches here and there in all the flower borders at different times, so as to have a succession, for cutting, of the sweet, sweet stuff—the most deliciously fragrant of all cut flowers to put in water about one's rooms. At the same time, no flower that blooms makes the water so noisome. This should be frequently changed; and a good plan is to strip off most, if not all, the leaves of each separate spray, before putting them in a vase. It is, too, a flower that always looks better by itself, or with roses only.

Some people mix carnations and mignonette together; and, if any other flower at all is allowable with carnations, I think it is mignonette; but carnations and pinks are flowers which, more than any others, look best by themselves, and with only their own spiky, silver-grey foliage as a contrast. All

flowers, as a rule, look best arranged with their own leaves in water.

At the end of September my three partridges, who had become very tame, and were a great delight, took their departure for good and all. They would run up to be fed, when one went out, and dust themselves in the sun upon the gravel in front of the house. Their tails were a bright rufous brown, and the horseshoe mark was beginning faintly to appear on their breasts. Once or twice, before they disappeared eventually, they had stayed out all night, instead of coming to be fed the last thing and going back into the coop with their old foster-mother hen; but they had always turned up again for their breakfasts the following morning. I was distressed at their departure, and could think of nothing but partridge-shooting.

We sometimes find wood-pigeons sitting on eggs this month.

The herbaceous phloxes, of which we have a fair variety, are now over. The chrysanthemums in the outdoor garden have taken their place. We have a great many clumps of the old cottage pink, which is especially hardy, always flowers profusely, and stands frost and cold the best of any. A very great virtue in all chrysanthemums is that they last so long in water, and never make it smell bad.

The dahlias are now in flower. We only have the cactus kind and the pompons. I find that the

single dahlias fall so quickly when picked; the cactus ones are far the best for decoration. In the kitchen garden borders, the many different kinds of Michaelmas daisies are now very pretty, and of all shades of mauve. The violet-beds are also a mass of bloom. The marigolds (*calendula*) and the French and African varieties, flame up all over the garden. Earlier in the year they are over-awed by the more aristocratic denizens of the parterres. Hardy and robust, they were merely waiting their time, and now, when their more refined and delicate sisters have drooped and died, the fiery-hearted marigolds "flourish and abide."

October, if fine and free from frost, is by no means, with us, denuded of flowers. The tobacco lasts well, and still puts forth its constellations of stars as the darkness falls; and the scented geranium and balm of Gilead grow daily finer. The first sharp frost, however, always kills the heliotrope—it seldom lasts beyond October. That and the dahlias are the first to go. They become a black, scorched-looking ruin. It is odd how frost kills "so as by fire."

On the house, the Virginian creeper gradually flushes into a mantle of crimson, and the *ampelopsis Veitchii* wreathes the whole easternmost gable and the tower in a robe of scarlet flame.

On the lawn, too, a couple of old cherry trees are magnificent, glowing and burning like a furnace amid the sombre yews that surround them.

Towards the end of October the weather often

becomes foggy here. The yellowing elms and the reddening beeches loom out fantastically through the mist, and the sun, in the smoke-grey sky, looks small and pinched, like a common white kitchen plate!

Decaying vegetation scents the heavy air, and though we may go eagerly off a-nutting and a-blackberrying in our woods, and a-mushrooming in the marshes and meadows, we cannot "quite re-capture the first fine careless rapture" of the happy time when we went a-maying!

"A spirit haunts the year's last hours,
Dwelling amid these yellowing bowers.
To himself he talks;
For at eventide, listening earnestly,
At his work you may hear him sob and sigh
In the walks;
Earthward he boweth the heavy stalks
Of the mouldering flowers.
Heavily hangs the broad sunflower
Over its grave i' the earth so chilly;
Heavily hangs the hollyhock;
Heavily hangs the tiger-lily."

WINTER

WINTER

"The sun is hanging in a purple globe,
'Mid yellow mists that stir with silver breath;
The quiet lanskip slumbers, white as death
Amid its naked fields and woody wolds,
Wearing the Winter as a stainless robe
Low trailing in a fall of fleecy folds.
By pasture-gates the mottled cattle swarm,
Thick'ning the misty air, with piteous eyes
Fixed ever on the tempest-breeding skies,
And watch the lingering traces of the storm.
A feeble sunbeam kisses and illumes
Yon whitened spire that hints a hidden town,
And flickering for a space it darkens down
Above the silence of forgotten tombs.

R. Buchanan.

"When the fieldfare's flight is slow
And a rosy vapour rim,
Now the sun is small and low
Belts along the region dim.

"When the ice crack flies and flaws
Shore to shore with thunder shock,
Deeper than the evening daws,
Clearer than the village clock.

"When the rusty blackbird strips
Bunch by bunch the coral thorn,
And the pale day-crescent dips
New to heaven, a slender horn."

Lord de Tabley.

"Best friends, to say 'tis cold and part
Is to let in the cold;
We'll make a summer of the heart
And laugh at winter old."

G. Macdonald.

WINTER.

November—December—January.

A CHARMING poet of our own times has said—

"Winter is the mother-nurse of Spring."

Certainly it is so, for in November, if fine, a portion of the half-hesitating charm of by-gone Spring-tide seems to return to the failing earth, to greet—as it were—the approach of Winter. As one often sees a strange and wonderful rejuvenescence, a bubbling forth of past mirth and brightness, flame up in a beloved old face, that, in middle age, had lost all claim to, and every trace of, sweetness and youth.

"Red o'er the forest peers the setting sun,
The line of yellow light dies fast away
That crowned the Eastern copse, and chill and dun
Falls on the moor the brief November day."

Brief truly! yet so constituted is human nature, and mercifully so adaptable to altered circumstances, that since one cannot have the lengthening days, one perforce luxuriates in the cosy lengthening evenings in an arm-chair by the fireside.

There is no shilly-shallying about November.

Winter has begun in grim earnest, and one is no longer ashamed to have daily and regular fires. The happy time has come when they are *de régle* everywhere, and one cannot now be considered *coddling* to have one if it is cold, even in one's bedroom.

November is a thoroughly picturesque and artistic month. If it is, as often, free from sharp frost, still and calm, the "turning" leaves will remain on the trees during its whole length. And how gorgeous they are! Every splendid shade of royal scarlet and orange.

O, the ambers of the elms—the pale golds and saffrons of the horsechesnuts—the fire-red of the beeches—and the russet-reds of the oaks! The hawthorns are clad in purple and plum-colour, blotched with canary-yellow—the maple-leaves flush a dull crimson, and the trembling birches faint into pale straw and primrose-yellow shades. In the hedgerow hips and haws gleam like jewels, and the shining, dark prickly foliage of the hollies is all studded with clusters of varnished coral beads.

In the garden-borders now, "the careful robins eye the delver's toil" with a boldness begotten of the season; sing early and late amid the yellowing beech boughs, and hop upon the carpet of rustling, russet leaves beneath them. The misty air is redolent of their "moist, rich smell," and breathes resignation and renunciation to the soul, as the cheerful and cheering strain of the robin teaches Hope and Thanksgiving.

Our old gardener has an anecdote of a robin which sounds, at least, "*ben trovato*"; but for the truth of which he vouches. He relates that one winter some years ago, a robin attached itself to him, and would follow him everywhere he went about the garden: attending on him, not only for the sake of worms and grubs when he dug in the borders, but for pleasure in his companionship. On one occasion this sociable and confiding redbreast actually perched on the garden rôller as he and a subordinate were rolling a walk, and kept its place thereon moving its little legs like an acrobat as the men rolled!

He also has a "rook" story, which is, at any rate, more credible. We have no actual rookery in garden or village, but large flocks of these birds roost in the winter in a big wood about half a mile off. One foggy November evening the gardener's attention was attracted by seeing about twenty rooks, out of large numbers that were flying over the garden in the direction of their sleeping quarters, stop and settle in the top of a tall bare tree in the park—where they remained with their heads all turned in the direction whence they had come, and cawing loudly. In a few moments a party of about a dozen more flew heavily up; whereupon those in the tree joined them and all took flight together for home. The gardener has no doubt in his mind that the rooks in the tree were experienced old birds, placed there to act as scouts and signposts to the inexperienced and belated

stragglers, who otherwise might have lost their way in the fog!

In November the cock-pheasants crow loud and long "as the short day closes." During this month I once saw, as it was growing dusk, a sparrow-hawk fly heavily across the field behind the terrace with quite a large bird in its claws. We have many kestrels, but few sparrow-hawks hereabouts. I followed the bird, which was flying low and slowly, through being so heavily burdened, in the hope of making it relinquish its prey. It alighted on the grass some yards in front of me, but before I reached it, it rose again and flew laboriously off, still clutching its booty. This manœuvre it twice repeated, watching me as I approached, and standing upright on the body of its victim; but the third time I tired it out. I got too near, and the hawk rose in the air and flew off into a neighbouring tree, leaving its prey, a starling, with the whole of the skin of its head torn off, but still alive, upon the ground.

November is of course the month of stars. One may, or may not, be so fortunate as to see showers of meteors; but if fine, the quantity of stars that nightly bestrew the heavens appears to the ordinary observer to be double or treble that which one sees at other times of the year.

A clear November midnight sky is truly

> "Like some dark, beauteous bird, whose wing
> Is spangled with unnumbered eyes."

Multitudes of silvery powdery points may be seen, even with the naked eye, beyond and behind the millions of larger stars; and the milky way, broad and tangible, may be traced stretching, like a white gauze scarf, among and beyond all. Earth dwindles—Creation in all its vast majesty grows, and travels into infinite space. So one closes dazzled eyes and steadies oneself with the flashing thought, "He made the stars also."

In open weather during this month I have frequently found as many as forty different kinds of flowers still in bloom in the garden.

On the night, or rather early morning, of December 17th, 1897, we were awaked at half-past five o'clock by the shock of an earthquake. The bed shook, and the whole room trembled. It was of course quite dark at that hour. I knew at once what had happened, as I had once before experienced an earthquake shock, in the night, in Scotland. That was in October, and I remember our sensations then were as if a heavy cart full of stones had rumbled below the bedroom. Those who slept in the next room came in to ask what was the matter, as they had also been waked by the shaking of the house and rattling furniture. There was no further shock; but it froze sharp in the night, and there was a shower of snow at 8·30 next morning. We were then told that many in the village had felt the earthquake. Two old, almost stone-deaf, women in the almshouses had

been woke and quite frightened by it: they described it as a prolonged rumbling.

The sun set next day at half-past three o'clock, like a huge blood-orange. The newspapers were full of the earthquake, which appeared to have been felt all over England and Wales. It was specially severe in Lancashire and near Liverpool, accompanied by thunder and hail. The longest time mentioned of the shock lasting was thirty seconds, taken at Warwick Castle by Lord Warwick. At three o'clock on the afternoon of the eighteenth, the sun, which was then just about to set, was quite small, and looked, in the smoke-grey sky, exactly like a scarlet wafer stuck upon a slate. At the same hour the moon, then nearly at the full, was high in the east, and silver-bright by four o'clock, though it was then still fairly light.

In 1897, December was so mild and open that early in that month the yellow jessamine *(j. nudiflorum)* on the house was a mass of golden blossom, and towards the end of it the chimonanthus on the west wall of the greenhouse was also covered with flowers. During all the early part of the winter we had hardly any frost, and the weather was extraordinarily soft and "mulchy," as the natives say. Hunting proceeded with regularity, and without the atmospheric interruptions so abominable to the British sportsman. Even in January, when there was occasional slight frost in the night, it thawed during the day, and was never so hard as to prevent hounds going out.

Few country sights are prettier or more thoroughly national than that of a pack of hounds galloping across a park, when the ground is powdered lightly with hoar-frost, and the whitened trees sparkle like diamonds. How handsome the hounds look, streaming past, with heads and sterns up, giving tongue to a rousing scent, while, through the slightly misty air, the myrmidons of the hunt, clad all in "pink," loom picturesquely.

Early in January we gather catkins in our woods. How pretty these are, and how they vary! Christina Rossetti says of them

> "The catkins drop down
> Curly, caterpillar like,
> Curious green and brown."

Erratic thrushes suddenly began to sing fitfully in the fine evenings, and on still grey days the rooks may often be noticed, sailing, as it were, for long distances in the upper sky, without flapping their wings as some hawks do. The river is usually extra full this month, and if we have much rain there are floods of greater or less extent.

These winter floods are best of all for the grass, and the farmers are never sorry to see the marshes covered with a uniform vast sheet of water, out of which only the sparsely scattered hedgerow trees show their tops, the hedges themselves being frequently totally submerged.

If sharp weather sets in and these level plains

freeze, no skating can be better than that obtained on the flooded marshes. For miles around the coal-black ice is smooth as glass; and here, without danger or impediment, the tyro can innocently and safely disport himself, or the practised skater fly before the wind in any and every direction, or indulge in the most graceful figures and evolutions in absolute freedom and almost boundless space. In open weather this water swarms with duck—pochard, teal, widgeon, and sheldrake—and if frost comes, so sometimes do wild geese and swans. In sharp weather it is no very uncommon sight to see a skein of geese fly over the garden towards the river, and more than once I have myself flushed a woodcock in the garden, while snow was thick on the ground, and during a prolonged frost.

Even as early as January the fifteenth I have heard the strange chirring sound the black-and-white woodpecker makes by tapping its beak rapidly on a bare branch. It is like a sharp, faint rattle, and is his love-call to his mate.

On lawn and in shrubberies the sturdy little aconites push up now their round gold heads, and here and there a celandine peeps shyly forth in the hedge banks and grassy borders of the woods. In the garden borders the Christmas roses bloom; the grey-green tips of the snowdrop leaves push up through the cracking dry earth, and the thin hair-like points of the *iris reticulata*, and the blunt snub noses of the hyacinth bulbs.

Everywhere there is a stirring and a wakening, and it does not need the flushing, swelling, rose-pink buds of the wych-elm, the demure reappearance of the tripping slim form upon our freshening lawns of the pied wagtail, the laugh of the green woodpecker, or the loud and reiterated cooing of the ring-dove, to tell us that though it is only the end of January, yet "Winter is over and gone; flowers appear on the earth; and the time of the singing of birds has come!"

"Let everything that hath and hath not breath,
Let days, and endless days, let Life and Death,
Praise God, praise God, praise God, His creature saith."