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Robinson

A Country Lane:
its Flora and its Fauna

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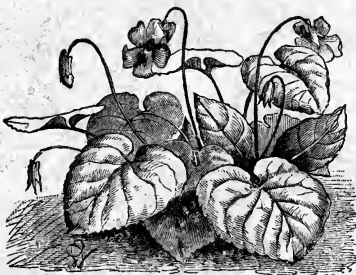
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A Country Lane:

ITS FLORA AND ITS FAUNA.

BY JAMES ROBINSON.

"Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy."—WORDSWORTH.



LONDON: HAMILTON, ADAMS, & Co.
KENDAL: W. F. ROBSON.

*Any profit arising from the sale of this little book will be given to the
"Cartmelfell Parish Church Restoration Fund."*

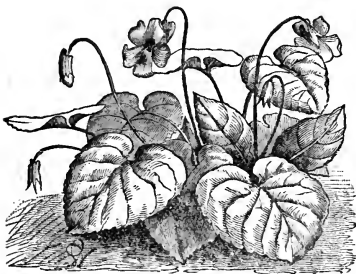


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“It may be deemed unmanly, but the wise
Read nature like the manuscript of heaven,
And call the flowers its poetry. Go out!
Ye spirits of habitual unrest,
And read it when the fever of the world
Hath made your hearts impatient, and, if life
Hath yet one spring unpoisoned, it will be
Like a beguiling music to its flow.”—N. P. WILLIS.

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A COUNTRY LANE.

NE of the pleasures enjoyed by a contemplative resident in the country is a quiet rural lane. Independent of its many attractions, you can pace to and fro in it, whenever you please, unmolested, and without being looked upon as an intruder. This is not always the case when your footsteps stray in other directions. If you happen to take an innocent stroll through the green fields it is not unlikely you may be brought up by a glaring notice-board, nailed on some conspicuous tree, giving you the neighbourly intimation that, if caught, you will be prosecuted "to the utmost rigour of the law." Wishful, perhaps, to evade such dire punishment, you raise your eyes to the breezy uplands, and scaling the

intermediate slope, begin to breathe the pure air of the heathery moorland; but here, where you might think all would be free as the winds, you are met by a gaitered individual, armed with wand of office, in the shape of a double-barrelled gun, carried loosely under his arm, who proclaims by his presence, if not by his words, that you are treading on forbidden ground. But no one arrests your feet, and no legal threatening disturbs your mind, in the leafy lane. You can walk leisurely through it in undisturbed meditation, or calmly study nature on the right hand and on the left. Even a philosopher might find its comparative seclusion and peaceful surroundings favourable for the solution of abstruse problems, and the settlement of disputed points, religious, political, and social.

It has been my good fortune to be located near a quiet lane, which for some years has been my habitual resort. It is a hard, well-formed, level road, of a mile or so in length, trending nearly north and south, and forming a connecting link between two other lanes. Parallel with it, but two fields-breadth distant, runs another road, which, for reasons I need not name, now absorbs nearly the whole traffic of the district, and leaves my lane almost altogether unfrequented by passengers, either riding or afoot. Half-way between the two, flows a willow-fringed river of some size, whose soothing murmurs, like some subdued melody, I often hear in my solitary walks. At no great distance, on every hand, agreeably wooded hills rise to a gentle elevation; while in one direction may be seen the tip of one of the lake mountains, peering over into our happy vale, as if not satisfied with the rich beauties that lie at its own feet. The fields on either side of the lane are cultivated, and

their features change with the changing year. In the spring-time the grateful eye may rest on some, smiling in verdurous freshness, where you may watch groups of sportive lambs, full of exuberant frolic, engaged in mimic fight, or see them racing together run

“Adown the slope, then up the hillock climb,
Where every molehill is a bank of thyme;”

while in others may be seen the plough-boy, with measured precision turning over the green lea in long straight furrows, the sound of his voice, as he cheers his docile team, falling in harmony with all around. In summer come the busy hay-makers, and their merry laugh rings pleasantly in your ears, as you enjoy the sweet fragrance of the new made hay. In autumn, the golden grain undulates to the breeze, or is being cut down by the ruthless reapers. While in winter the frost bespangles the branches in the hedge-rows, and the long grass, where any remains, shines like a silvery spear; or, nature, pitying the condition of the naked landscape, brings from her wardrobe a covering of snow, and throws over the whole scene a gleaming robe of immaculate whiteness.

One advantage which this lane possesses, is, that you may comfortably walk to and fro in it in nearly all seasons. For a considerable portion of its length it is enclosed by high hedges, which afford a winter's shelter and a summer's shade. Not far from one end is planted my humble dwelling, and near to the other are the ivy-clad ruins of an ancient hall. When I walk through it in one direction, I see these relics of a by-gone age, and when I pass in the other, I have the attractive vision of my own sweet home. Gloomy reflections on the dim past, are followed and

corrected by pleasant thoughts of the clear present, and cheerful anticipations of the future.

“Hope rules a land for ever green.”

By dint of frequent perambulation, at all times of the year and at all hours of the day, I have become familiar with the natural garniture of the lane—its flora and its fauna ; and I venture to think that a short description of some of the things which may be seen and heard in this peaceful by-way (a representative of many more), may possess an interest to those who love to regard nature even in her lowliest aspect, and who, in their quiet walks, can heartily join in the sentiment of Linnæus, and “thank God for the green earth.”

“Better for man,
Were he and nature more familiar friends.”



THE BANKS.

HOUGH the declivitous banks on either side of the lane are attractive at all seasons—and every season has its peculiar attractions—the time of early buds and blossoms is perhaps fraught with the greatest interest and the liveliest pleasure. The first of Flora's forerunners to open its tiny petals to the soft breath of early spring, and the fitful gleams of a February sun, is the Vernal Whitlow Grass (*Draba verna*), which appears on a dry sunny part of the slope. So small is this plant, that but for its growing in patches, it would often remain unobserved, especially in wet or cloudy weather, when its small pearly flowers close up. The scape is about two inches high, and the narrow toothed leaves form a circle at the root. Next to the snowdrop it is perhaps the first flower of spring, and, on this account,

as well as for beauties of its own, has a particular claim on our notice. Closely following in the train of this humble pioneer comes the common Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*),

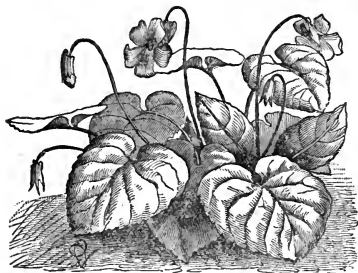


with its wrinkled leaves, the known and loved of all. As its salver-shaped blossoms (which have given their name to a colour) lighten up the grassy slopes of field and lane, bright hopes are awakened in the breasts of old and

young, for they are a token and a pledge that sullen winter is at last vanquished, and that victorious spring—soon to be crowned with garlands—has taken possession of the earth. Worthy companion of the Primrose is the Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), a white star of six rays, with golden stamens and dark-green foliage. This is the Wind Flower of many lands. Profusely mingling with these appears the Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*), with its bright yellow flowers of eight or nine petals, whose praises have been so beautifully sung by Wordsworth. These three alone give a gay appearance to the banks; and, as no school-girl, with shining morning face, passes through the lane, they are permitted to bud and bloom unmolested, and remain for a considerable time to cheer the eye and gladden the heart.

But they do not remain long in sole possession of the banks. Early in April there are other occupants. Then

are found small beds of the fragrant purple Ground Ivy (*Nepeta Glechoma*), whose many virtues made it highly prized by our remote ancestors. And then appears that emblem of constancy the Violet, (*Viola canina*), which in



some places is so abundant as to give its blue lilac tint to a considerable space. A few days later, and the whole bank, in some spots, is ablaze with the purple racemes of the

Wild Hyacinth (*Agraphis nutans*), set off by its green and glossy linear leaves. At the same time is found the pendent bells of the Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), formerly called Wood Sour, from the oxalic acid contained in its bright green triple leaves. This is a much admired vernal visitant, so graceful is its form, and so delicately beautiful its blossoms. It possesses, too, an additional interest in being a peculiarly sensitive plant. The white flowers, streaked with purple, close at the approach of rain, and, at night, petals and leaves alike fold up, and, apparently, the whole plant goes to sleep.

Not a few eminent observers (after carefully noting the way in which the Wood Sorrel, the Scarlet Pimpernel, and others of the solar tribe, expand and contract,) have come to the conclusion that plants are endowed, more or less, with a kind of sensibility. Wordsworth, who in this view

may be taken as a faithful representative of the poets, says,

“And 'tis my faith that every flower,
Enjoys the air it breathes.”

Some, indeed, go still further, and affirm that some plants possess a kind of memory, as is clearly shown by the regularity of their habits. The Goats' Beard opens at three in the morning, and closes before noon; the Wild Succory expands at eight, and closes at four; and the Water Lily also retires at the same early hour. Though these, and similar facts, afford ground for speculation, we may never be able to ascertain, (and it is, perhaps, not to our advantage to know) the kind or degree of feeling which causes the several motions in plants, or the object of their appearing in a particular succession. Their Maker, for some good reason, has appointed them their seasons and their hours.

“The green-robed children of the spring
Will mark the periods as they pass,
Mingle with leaves time's feathered wing,
And bind with flowers his silent glass.”

In April, too, may be found by the wayside, (but they require looking for), tufts of that meek but interesting plant, the Tuberous Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatelina*) The foliage is pale green, the leaves being ternate, and the flowers, which are yellowish green, grow in terminal heads, forming five sides of a cube, a blossom on each side, and one on the top. These, however, are not all exactly alike. Those on the sides have five petals and ten stamens each, while that on the top has only four petals and eight stamens. One of the names of this unassuming and delicate little flower is Musk Crowfoot, which has been given it on account of its pleasant odour, which, like that of many

others, is most perceptible in the evening. If we take the Moschatel as a type of many similar vegetable productions, the mind becomes naturally impressed with the notion that there is, possibly, a law of compensation running through the whole vegetable world, and, perhaps too, through the whole compass of natural existence. We know that amongst ourselves the loud and the showy, the self-asserting and unduly prominent, are, as a rule, not the wisest or the best of men. The gorgeous Peacock is not musical, nor is it a bird of much utility. The Dog Violet makes a great display, in conspicuous places, but the Sweet Violet is to be sought for, hiding amongst the green herbage. Handle the garish Poppy or the Dandelion, and you will find them disagreeable, but press the unobtrusive Moschatel, and you have a delightful fragrance.*

A conspicuous object at this season, nestling close to the hedge-row, is the Cuckoo-pint or Arum (*Arum maculatum*). It is a stemless plant, with halberd-shaped glossy leaves, dotted with dark spots. The spathe is also spotted, and the well-known spadix is found in varying shades of green, yellow, or violet. The ovaries, at the root of the spadix, become in autumn a cluster of bright scarlet berries, which remain long after the leaves have decayed. They are said to be very poisonous. The old herbalist, Gerarde, tells us that the tuberous roots of the Arum make a "most pure and white starch." Gerarde flourished in the time of good Queen Bess, when starch was in much request, the roots of the Arum and Wild Hyacinth being used in its manufacture.

* "Yet the Moschatel is no plebeian among plants, being cousin-german of the Honeysuckle and Guelder Rose, and even claiming a distant relationship through the aristocratic Ivy with the queenly Vine."

Magnificent ruffs, a yard wide, were in vogue in those days, so that the quantity required for the laundry would be something prodigious.

Early in May the lane produces the pearly star-like blossoms of the Greater Stitchwort (*Stellaria Holostea*), its long narrow leaves for some time previously having given notice of its coming. It is a very pretty flower of five petals, each cleft to the middle, with golden anthers, and a stem twelve or fifteen inches high. The Smaller Stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*), makes its appearance about a month later. In May, too, we have that favourite the Germander Speedwell (*Veronica Chamædryis*), with its brilliant blue flowers, veined with a darker shade, and its egg-shaped wrinkled leaves. Long before the Chinese leaf found its way into our land, our ancestors drank Speedwell tea. The infusion was said to strengthen and refresh the frame. It is by no means an unpalatable beverage, though it might not now be approved of as a daily drink, by a committee of lady connoisseurs. We also find at this time scattered here and there, solitary specimens of the Cuckoo-flower (*Cardamine pratensis*), with its pale lilac or pinky flowers.

In June, the Red Campion (*Lychnis diurna*), appears in great force, bearing loose panicles of blossoms, varying slightly in tint, according to situation and age; while its relative the White Campion (*Lychnis vespertina*), is in less abundance and solitary. The last emits a pleasant odour as the evening dews fall on its petals. Several of the Crane's-bills may be mentioned here:—Herb Robert (*Geranium Robertianum*); Dove's-foot Crane's-bill, (*Geranium mollè*); Meadow Crane's-bill (*Geranium*

pratense); Shining Crane's-bill (*Geranium lucidum*); and Jagged Leaved Crane's-bill (*Geranium dissectum*), a numerous family, varying, perhaps, more in foliage than in flower. At intervals, towering above all these to the height of three or four feet, rises the Purple Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*). The pale purple flowers are spotted within, and hang in spiky clusters ten or twelve inches long. But the whole plant is so well known as to need no description. It is said to have received its proper name from its resemblance to a thimble (*digitabulum*). Very appropriate are most of the names of our common wayside flowers; although some which have been christened by our remote ancestors, whose language has fallen somewhat into desuetude, are not always understood. If any change, however, should be thought of, I humbly protest against permitting scientific botanists having any part or share in bringing it about. The matter should be left entirely to a conclave of poets, who would prove most efficient botanical nomenclators. As a proof of their appreciative qualities, take as an example what old Cowley says of the *Digitalis* :—

“The foxglove on fair Flora's hand is worn,
Lest, while she gather flowers, she meet a thorn.”

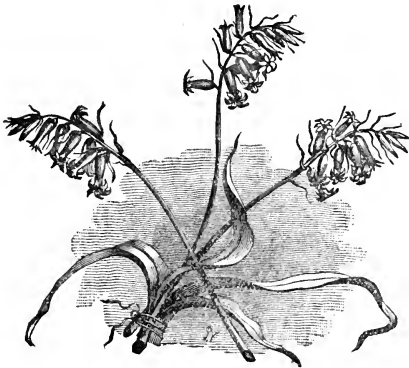
As the summer advances, some rough stony places produce the Yellow Toad Flax (*Linaria vulgaris*), which, next to the Foxglove, is perhaps the most imposing plant in the lane. The pale yellow spurred flowers are in dense spikes; and its narrow, grass-like leaves, are pale green. This, as well as the Foxglove, still finds a place in our Pharmacopœias, but great care should be exercised in the use of it. Then we have the Silver Weed (*Potentilla*

anserina), growing on the edge of the hard road, with yellow flowers and beautiful downy leaves; the Wood Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), with interrupted spike of bright purple flowers; the White Dead Nettle (*Lamium album*); and the Hedge Woundwort (*Stachys sylvatica*). The two last are pretty and tempting objects, but it is better not to give them a place in your gathered bouquet, as they do not improve on a closer acquaintance.

One more plant, plentiful in the lane, demands a short notice, as well for its great beauty, as for its historical associations. This is the Perforated St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*). It has a wreath of golden flowers, growing on a branched stem, the petals being dotted with black. The leaves, which are of delicate green, are full of transparent spots, caused by an essential oil, which is also found to pervade the whole plant. Its virtues are well known to medical botanists. It was dedicated by the old monks to St. John the Baptist and they probably gave it its ancient name of *Fuga Dæmonum*, because its possession was considered a sure defence against evil spirits, phantoms, and ghosts. On the vigil of St. John's Day (Midsummer Eve) it appears to have been specially used for this purpose, among the other curious ceremonies of old observed at that time. Then, too, we are told, young girls gathered sprigs of the plant, and suspended them on the walls of their chamber. If they remained on the following morning fresh it foretold a prosperous marriage; if they drooped and withered, a state of single blessedness. In Scotland, formerly, many were in the habit of carrying it about their persons to protect them from witchcraft and the evil eye, and from the designs of bad spirits.

I have mentioned the chief, but by no means all, of the plants that adorn the banks of the lane. They make a constant and varied succession, from early spring to late autumn, and afford a never-failing source of interest. Things of beauty are they all, from the largest to the smallest; perfect in their colour, form, and adaptation; the minutest detail of the least bearing the signet-mark of its Maker. I have dwelt little on their utility; but they all possess some good property. The meanest of earth's products has its objects and its uses. Of the simplest weed it has been said :

“That even this to please receives
From Him who made it power;
I've seen an insect on its leaves,
A bee upon its flower.”



“ Here unmolested, from whatever sign
The sun proceeds, I wander. Neither mist
Nor freezing sky, nor sultry, checking me,
Nor stranger intermeddling with my joy.”—COWPER.



THE HEDGES.

WITH the changing year comes a perceptible change in the foliage and fruitage of the fences of the lane, which as well as the banks, attract our notice, by a beauty peculiar to themselves. Even in the depth of winter, the various kinds of mosses which cover the trunks and roots of some ancient trees and parts of a decrepit wall; the grey-hued lichens which cling to wood and stone; the various shaped and different coloured fungi; and (in sheltered spots) the still green

fronds of the Polypody and Male Fern, afford a pleasing study to the lover of nature, so wonderfully are they adapted to the places they occupy, and so full of modest beauty. Simple as mosses and lichens

may appear to the ordinary looker-on, they, nevertheless, sustain an important part in the economy of nature. Geologists tell us they were the first forms of vegetation that covered the earth. And now they are to be found everywhere. They are the first to spring up on inorganic matter, appearing mysteriously on the newly-quarried stone, and by their decay produce a vegetable fertilizing matter, thus forming a primary link in the chain of nature, by means of which the whole earth becomes clothed with a robe of vegetation. To a cursory glance they may appear but patches of green or grey, but a minute and close investigation reveals great variety of foliage, and diversity of form, and wonderful fitness of parts—so much so that the cryptogamic student can fully endorse the expression of Pliny, that “Nature is nowhere greater than in her smallest works.” Beautiful indeed are those soft mossy cushions placed here and there ’neath the hedge-row, reminding one of the description given by Wordsworth in his poem of “The Thorn.”

“A fresh and lovely sight,
 A beauteous heap, a hill of moss,
 Just half a foot in height.
 ‘All lovely colours there you see,
 All colours that were ever seen ;
 And mossy network too is there
 As if by hand of lady fair
 The work had woven been ;
 And cups, the darlings of the eye,
 So deep is their vermillion dye.
 Ah me ! what lovely tints are there
 Of olive green and scarlet bright,
 In spikes, in branches, and in stars,
 Green, red, and pearly white.”

It is at this season, too, when the wintry winds have scattered the leaves of other trees and shrubs, that the glossy verdure of the clinging Ivy appears to such advantage. Its clusters of yellowish-green flowers are seen in November and December, followed by those brown juicy berries, the food of some of our common birds when other fruits are rare. Equally ornamental and attractive is the dark shining prickly-leaved Holly, with its clusters of bright red berries—still used as of yore for the Christmas decoration of churches and homely dwellings.

As the harsh winds of winter give place to soft vernal breezes it is interesting to note the changes which the hedges gradually undergo. Among the first “to welcome the time of buds, the infant year,” appear the snowy blossoms of the Sloe or Blackthorn, (*Prunus spinosa*),

“ Whose early flowers anticipate the leaf,”

the bare black branches affording a striking contrast to the beautiful white flowers which they carry. Earlier, however, than the Sloe, and sometimes before the pale green catkins of male flowers open, the initiated look for those crimson stigmas of the hazel which give promise of the brown nuts of autumn. Most people know the hazel tree, with its roundish leaves of sober green, and many can remember some glorious day or days devoted to a nutting expedition ; but it is not every one who knows that the forked branch of this tree has been used from time immemorial, and is still used, as a divining rod ! By means of it, it is said, certain persons who possess the gift, can discover springs and minerals, lying hidden in the bosom of the earth. In Cornwall about one in forty is

accredited with this power. It is recorded that Lady Noel, the mother of Lord Byron, acted in this capacity, and was a successful diviner or douser.*

In May the blossoms of the Sloe are succeeded by those of the Hawthorn (*Cratægus Oxyacantha*), so universally known and admired. Its corymbs of white flowers studded with pink stamens, please alike the sense of sight and smell. In olden times they were much used in the May Day customs then observed, religious and festive, and the tree has been celebrated by our poets from Chaucer downwards. Beautiful as the hawthorn blossoms are in my lane, they somewhat pale before those of the Bird Cherry (*Prunus padus*), with which at this time the hedges are adorned. The white flowers of this pretty shrub hang in drooping clusters, and, like those of its rival, yield a pleasant odour. Bright and cheerful indeed is the lane at this season, and sweet the combined fragrance from flowers of bank and hedge, while the different shapes and variety of tints of the leaves are objects which the grateful eye delights to rest upon.

In this month, too, may be found, climbing amongst the bushes, the whorled-leaves and the small wax-like flowers of the Sweet Woodruff (*Asperula odorata*). The leaves, when

*The following is the correct mode of procedure: A hazel twig is cut just below where it forks; it is stripped of its leaves, and then each branch is cut to about a foot in length, leaving a stump about three inches long. The fork thus prepared is to be held by the branches, one in each hand, the stump or point projecting forward. The arms of the douser hang by his side, but the elbows being bent at a right angle, the forearms are advanced horizontally. The hands are held eight or ten inches apart, the knuckles down, and the thumbs outwards; the ends of the branches appear between the roots of the thumbs and the forefingers. Thus ARMED, the operator walks over the ground, fully expecting when he passes over a vein of metal, or a hidden spring, that the fork will begin to move spontaneously in his hands.

dried, emit an agreeable perfume, like new hay, and will preserve this aroma for years. The name of this plant seems to have been, according to the old orthography, Woodderowffe, as we gather from the ancient rhyme handed down to the present day.

“Double U double O double D E
R O double U double F E.”

But it is perhaps in June that the hedges are decked with the greatest grace and beauty. Then appear the red and yellow blooms of the Honeysuckle (*Lonicera Periclymenum*), which shed their delicious fragrance all around. The leaves appear some months earlier; it is indeed,

“The first of wilding race that weaves
In Nature’s loom its downy leaves,”

which present themselves in February or March. The Honeysuckle is a persevering climber, embracing and twining with tightening coil, round tree and shrub, thus well meriting its old name of Woodbine or Woodbind.

“In spiral rings it mounts the trunk and lays
Its golden tassels on the leafy sprays.”

In thus winding round the stem, like the *Convolvulus* and other climbers, it follows the course of the sun from east to west.

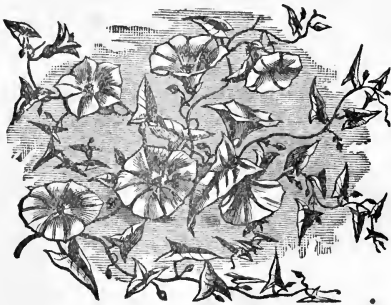
Equally beautiful, and as sweetly odorous, are the delicate pink and white blossoms of the Wild Rose, which at this time brighten, at intervals, the whole length of the lane. In some variety or other this has been the favourite

of all times and of all countries where it flourishes. It is the floral badge of England, as the Thistle is of Scotland, and the Shamrock of Ireland. In its cultivated state it embellishes the bower of the palace, and the walls of the peasant's lowly cot; and is emblematic alike of love, anger, joy, and grief. Sparsely mingled with the Wild Rose are found the white blossoms of the Common Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*); while the Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) perseveringly asserts its claim to a favourable notice in this competitive flower show of the hedges.

In July the Bitter Sweet or Woody Nightshade (*Solanum Dulcamara*), makes its appearance in a moist part of the hedge-row. The flowers, which are in clusters, are of a dull purple hue, relieved by two green spots at the base of each segment, while the yellow anthers meet in a point at the top. The egg-shaped leaves are a dull green. Altogether it is a peculiar looking plant, and is said to be poisonous in every part of it. In some places it is called Felon-wood.

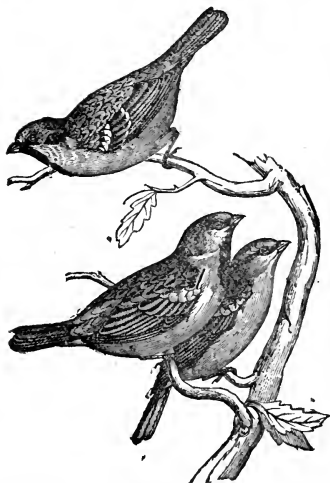
As the summer advances the floral display of the hedges begins to wane; and, gradually, the leaves turn brown, or yellow and sere; and unmistakable signs of decay begin to manifest themselves. These losses are partly compensated for by the varied mellow-tinted foliage, and by the store of rich fruits which present a tempting feast to the wayfarer. Even as early as the end of July we can gather the dainty Strawberry; in August enjoy the delicious Wild Raspberry; in September and October we have an abundant supply of the glossy berries of the Bramble, and these months too bring to perfection the brown clusters of the Hazel, and the black fruit of the Bird Cherry and the Sloe. Thus

supplied, the haws of the Whitethorn, the scarlet hips of the Wild Rose, the crimson berries of the Mountain Ash, and the ruby clusters of the Guelder Rose, we can afford to leave to our feathered friends, while we avoid the bright red berries of the Bitter Sweet as dangerous.



THE FAUNA.

“Not rural sights alone, but rural sounds
Exhilarate the spirits, and restore
The tone of languid Nature.
Ten thousand warblers cheer the day,
Whose notes
Nice fingered art must emulate in vain.”—COWPER.



CONSIDERING the privacy and shelter of the lane, it is somewhat remarkable that it is not frequented by more of our common birds. The Redbreast, the Dunnock, the Chaffinch, and the Wren, are frequently met with, but, for the rest, they seem to prefer the larger trees by the side of the river, the near proximity of a human dwelling, or even

the dusty highway. Their supply of food, has, no doubt,

something to do with this. But though the feathered tribe do not frequent the lane in numbers they are sufficiently near for me to have the full benefit of their harmony. In the spring and summer the fields on each side abound with Larks, and their songs are an almost unfailing source of pleasure. One never tires of watching them ascend and descend, their aerial journey occupying sometimes ten minutes, or even more. In commencing its upward flight the Lark turns its head to the wind. At first its course seems to be somewhat irregular and fluttering, then with tremulous wings it cleaves the air rapidly, sometimes upward, sometimes slantingly or in circles, till, (as occurs, perhaps, oftenest in the summer), it reaches a height scarcely discernible to the naked eye—although its wings, when expanded, are fourteen or fifteen inches across. The descent is a little more rapid, the motions then being exceedingly graceful, till it approaches the earth, when, with closed wings, it drops like a stone on the greensward. During the whole of this time its song has never ceased. It is indescribably delicious and varied. You are fixed to the spot, listening with all your ears, from the first clear notes at starting, to the fainter music which reaches you from its highest altitude, and again to the gently-increasing melody of its descent, the strain closing in the sweetest cadence just as it drops to its earthly treasures. In the plumage of the Lark we have another illustration of that law of compensation I alluded to in speaking of the Tuberous Moschatel. Among the winged creation, as a rule, the sweetest singers wear the plainest garb, as is shown by the dusky hue of this aerial warbler. Sober, too, is the dress of the melodious Thrush, whose rich

tenor notes, sometimes harmoniously mingled with the Blackbird's baritone, in the spring months, salute me, morning and evening, from the tall trees by the neighbouring river. A pair of the latter annually honour the lane by building their nest in the thick hedge. The eggs are four or five in number of a dull blue with brownish spots.

That very handsome bird the Chaffinch or Spink, with its cheery "tweet, tweet," or "pink, pink," enlivens the lane during the spring and summer. A pair build their nest in the forked branch of a crooked Crab Tree. It is a model of neatness and beauty, and so skilfully placed and made, in its exterior, so like the bark of the tree itself, that even the piercing eyes of a prowling school-boy would have some difficulty in detecting it. It generally contains four or five eggs of a dullish blue, or green, with a slight admixture of red. The nest of the Dunnock, (which, though very compact, is not to be compared in architectural beauty or skilful concealment with that of the Spink) is still lower, in the thick of the hedge; while that of the Redbreast is cleverly concealed in the grassy bank. The plaintive Yellow-hammer utters his "chit chit churr," during the spring, and no doubt builds somewhere in the vicinity.

Amongst the occasional visitors to the lane must be mentioned the Blue Tit, with its brilliant plumage; the Cole Tit; the Tom Tit; and the pretty long-tailed Tit—the last of which comes in flocks of about a dozen (probably a family), and restlessly flits from tree to tree. The Whitethroats arrive late in the spring, and leave again during the summer. The Redbreast and the Wren appear

to remain in the lane all the year through. I have seen them there very early in the morning, and late in the evening, and suspect that of all small birds they are the first to rise and the last to retire. A bold and valorous bird is the Wren. To some of his deeds of daring I have been a witness. Often is he seen perched on the highest twig in the hedge, with bill extended to the utmost, pouring out his shrill treble. That such a volume of sound should proceed from such a tiny object is wonderful. Undisturbed by noisy traffic or juvenile foes the birds in my lane are comparatively tame, and apparently take little heed of my presence. One feathered visitor, however, seems to have a decided objection to my intrusion. The crested lapwings, which in spring and summer take possession of the fields, on each side, continually cross and recross the road, and utter unceasingly their querulous "peewits."

But few quadrupeds are to be found in the lane. Occasionally a Squirrel is seen, perhaps frightened from the Larch Planting not far off, or it may be on a foraging expedition. When disturbed, it runs along the hedge with such surprising agility that it is difficult to get a good sight of it. If less hunted and persecuted these innocent and beautiful creatures would, no doubt, become much tamer, and impart great pleasure in exhibiting their rapid and graceful motions.

Sometimes, on a summer's evening, a solitary traveller may be met with in the shape of a Hedgehog. On such occasions he is generally trotting along at the apparent rate of four or five miles an hour—it may be on a visit to a friendly neighbour, or on the way from his day's sleeping quarters to his night's feeding ground. The food of the

hedgehog is said to consist principally of worms, slugs, snails, and frogs, and some kinds of grass and roots for procuring which his nose is well adapted. He is said too to have a *penchant* for hen's eggs, when the nest happens to be within his reach—an unfortunate partiality, which not unfrequently brings on the purloiner immediate execution, and is probably the only cause of a bad name being given to the whole family. When met with on the road he usually stops and fixes his glassy eyes upon you, but if not rudely interfered with does not change his position. It is only when his instinct tells him that he has to do with deadly foes—human or canine—that he turns in his crested snout, and, rolling himself up, presents to his assailant a round ball of acuminated spikes.

Passing down the lane on an early autumn morning on almost every bush may be seen the radiated circle of the Geometric Spider; while on the grass below, glittering in the dew, hangs in profusion the silken webs of the Gossamer. The latter, it is said, has the art of weaving a balloon with threads from its own body, by aid of which it can sail through the air. In this way are to be accounted for the slender lines we often meet with, stretched from hedge to hedge, or tree to tree.

In summer months the lane is rich in insects of different shapes and colours, a description of which is not within the compass of my feeble pen. It is interesting to watch their eccentric movements, from the rapid flight of the gorgeous Dragon-fly down to the mazy dance of the smallest Gnat. In the day Butterflies of various hues

are flitting fitfully about, and in the evening delicately tinted moths hover over the grass. During the sunny hours of the day the Honey-bee, on its way to flowery pastures or purple heaths, alights on the clover or the vetch; the Humble-bee hides itself in the foxglove's bell; and the yellow ground Wasp gathers sweets wherever it can find them. The nest of the first, and the vespiaries of the last-named insect-architects, are in the sloping bank, where, undisturbed, they lay up a winter store, or prepare cells for their eggs and larvæ. Often very different is the fate of those who have planted their colonies in the banks by the side of the more public highway. No sooner are they discovered than an immediate process of assault and battery is commenced. A troop of merciless boys, armed with match, brown paper, and leafy boughs, endeavour to smoke them out, destroy them as they issue, and (in the case of the Humble-bees) rifle their homes of their treasured hoards. If they know it, not an insect will be left living. Melancholy sight for those workers, who, with tired wings, return from their distant labour, heavy-laden with riches for their cherished commonwealth!

The wilful cruelty of boys towards innocent animals, birds, and insects, is a fact not pleasant to dwell upon. It seems to be an inherent disposition, and much too prevalent to be gainsaid. The one who shows his unerring aim by killing a harmless sparrow, or can manage to toss a stone into a thrush's nest, (built with great care and patient industry high in the fork of a tall tree), has something to boast of, and can strut amongst his fellows a hero for that day. A few lessons on common humanity, taught at school among the rest of their elementary training, might perhaps be

serviceable. Some good might be done if every boy only learned by heart the two lines of Wordsworth which tell us

“Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.”

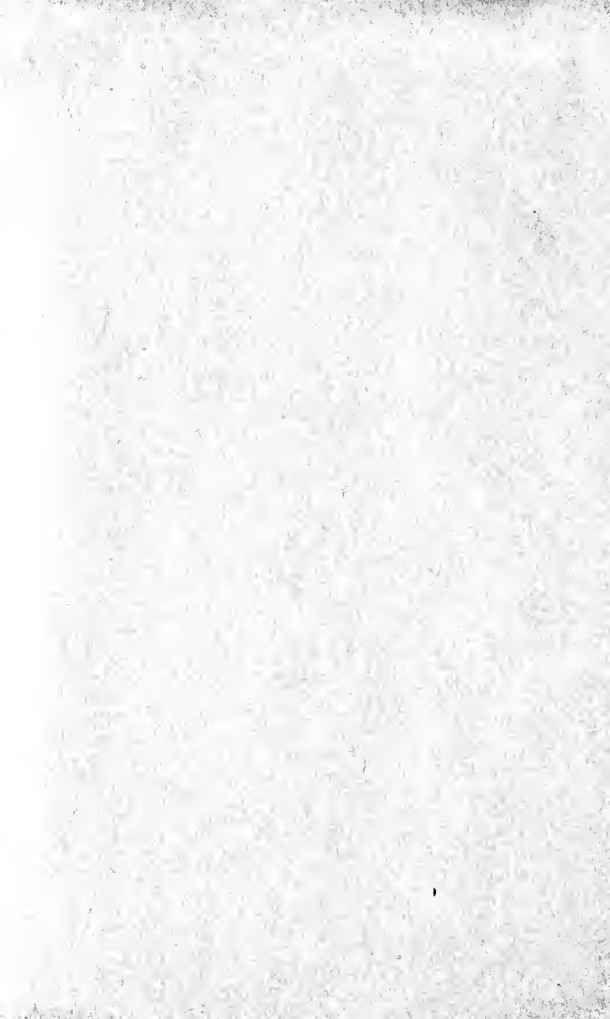
The reader will have seen that my lane has its attractions in all seasons of the year, and it offers an agreeable walk at all hours of the day. It is pleasant to pass through it when the early morning brings the dew-drops on its dusky wings, and the tremulous stars give place to the rising sun; when the flowers begin to unfold their delicate petals to his warm embrace, and, led by the lark, the feathered choir unite in a harmonious welcome. Pleasant, too, to walk through it at the hour of noon, under the protecting shade of its leafy hedge. Then nature reposes; the birds are silent; the meek-eyed oxen lie under the trees by the river's side; and all is still, save the droning of some industrious bee, as it passes from flower to flower. But pleasantest hour of all

“When comes still evening on, and twilight grey
Hath in her sober livery all things clad.”

It is a time for pure and tender emotions. Then the lovely flowers close their petals and droop their heads in meek obeisance; and the grateful warblers' last evensong falls on the ear with peculiar sweetness. And then a hallowed stillness reigns. Nature is at her devotions. Dim and dimmer becomes the spire of the village church. The ruins of the baronial hall, gloomy at all times, now assume

a gloomier aspect still ; and the ancient Oak by the three road ends, worn by the weight of years to an almost branchless stump, becomes invested with unearthly import. Later still, and as you pass through the dark shadows of night, your footsteps are guided by the mellow light of the Glowworm's lovelit lamp ; and you hear the distant harsh "jar-r jar-r" of the Night Hawk, and the "toowhit, toowhoo" of the wakeful Owl.





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