Bush Days

Amy·E·Mack
author of
"A Bush Calendar" and
"Bushland Stories"

Xmas 1918

BUSH DAYS

FLANNEL FLOWERS

L.H.

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BY

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(MRS. LAUNCELOT HARRISON)

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With illustrations from photographs by J. Ramsay and L. Harrison

SYDNEY

ANGUS & ROBERTSON LTD.

89 CASTLEREAGH STREET

1911

Printed by W. C. Penfold & Co., 183 Pitt Street, Sydney
for
Angus & Robertson Ltd., Publishers to the University
London : The Australian Book Company, 21 Warwick Lane, E.C

FOREWORD

My mother tells me that when she was a girl she used to gather wild flowers in Woollahra, and to walk across the paddocks from Surry Hills to Ultimo. Sometimes she would go in a rowing boat to Garden Island, where the picnic parties danced upon the grass to the music of a fiddle; or, on gala days, cross by the little sixpenny ferry to the bush-clad banks of North Shore.

I, in my turn, remember many a picnic to Mosman's Bay, where the thick green brush and the little waterfall at the head of the bay made a picture which even the modern Mosman cannot wipe out. Once, on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion, we walked by a bush track to the far-off Military Road, whose very name suggested the boundary of civilisation; and on that walk, where now rows of suburban villas cover the ground, the tea-tree spread its arms on every side of us with a wealth of pink and white blossom that set my childish heart a-throbbing for sheer love of it.

Sometimes, on rare occasions, we went by boat to Manly, that wonderland of childhood, which seemed at the very end of the world. There the most venturesome of us scrambled over the rocks to Fairy Bower, or even as far as Shelly Beach itself; or sometimes we climbed the hill behind the old Kangaroo to look for native roses and flannel flowers in the thick bush beyond. Queenscliff, with its solitary little summer-house and its carpet of wild flowers, was a journey only to be taken when one lived in Manly; and Freshwater—well, the South Pole seems nearer to us now than did Freshwater in those childish days.

And that is barely twenty years ago. But in the last twenty years Sydney has grown so wide, that on every side the bush has had to give way

before bricks and mortar, trams and trains. And every day the city grows quicker, and spreads farther, till it seems as if, in a very little while, there will be no bush left at all.

Those of us who love the trees and flowers and birds, watch with sad eyes the passing of the bush. Sometimes we raise our voice in protest, or lift helpless hands against the onward rush. But it is in vain. The city grows and grows, and the country must give way. While it is still with us I have tried to catch with my pen a picture of some of the spots most dear to me. If, in the pages of this little book, I have been able to keep for others a memory of some greenwood spot, a fragrance of some bushland flower, then I am content.

I give my thanks to the proprietors of the "Sydney Morning Herald" for permission to reprint these articles, which first appeared in the pages of that journal.

A. E. H.

Sydney,
1911.

To

THE MOTHER WHO NEVER GROWS OLD

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BUSH DAYS

Where Time Stands Still

I KNOW a place where the hands of Time have almost stopped. All round and about progress marches with axe and hammer, and civilisation sweeps beauty out of sight; but the invading army has missed my quiet corner, and left it undisturbed. Why, it is impossible to say, for there is everything to tempt the barbarian's hand; there are lovely aged trees, green undergrowth, and all the beauties that civilised man loves to banish. Nor is it too far away for him to reach; indeed, it is within sight and sound of the city clock, and a bird could wing the distance in a few short minutes.

I must not tell you where my beauty haunt is, for if I did you would all rush off to the boat which carries one there—yes, it is as close as that to the beaten track—and my place of peace would soon become as unrestful and disturbed as all the other places. But if you are tired of "improved" pleasure spots, and long so much for a quiet haven, that you will take the trouble to find out for yourselves where my secret garden is, I tell you that your trouble will be more than repaid.

From the moment you step off the slow and half-empty boat on to the little wharf, you will realise that you have entered into a different world. The clear, green water round the weedy piles, the clean, brown rocks at the water's edge, the group of silver gulls on the tiny beach—will all tell you

that here is at least one place unspoiled by improvement committees and holiday trippers. And as you climb up the rocky path and brush beneath green pittosporums and grey wattles, past blossom-laden tea-trees and drooping she-oaks, you will wonder what special providence it was that saved this happy corner from the hands of the iconoclast.

But you will not wonder long, for it is a place for idle dreaming, not for perplexing problems. You will cease to question "why," and will be content that it is so. The sight of that hillside will fill your heart with peace and thanksgiving; and, if you are the sort of person that I think you must be, to have come so far, you will stretch yourself out on the long, green grass that clothes the hillside, and, half-closing your eyes, will watch with lazy joy the queer shadows of the red gums as they sprawl across the grass, and the shimmer of the sunshine as it turns the bracken silver. Spread out before you will lie the waters of the bay, where idle colliers rest darkly, and further off the white sails of racing yachts will skim the sunny harbour. The outline of the city will come to you, broken by the leaning branches, and will but add to your feeling of isolation and content. The "hoot" of a distant ferry-boat will come like a pleasant dream sound to your ears, which are filled with the sounds close about you. You will hear a whole chorus of bird notes, sweet and soft, shrill and loud, whistling and warbling, calling all together—thrushes, thick-heads, silvereyes, and peewees, all mixed up with honey-eaters,

cuckoos, and a dozen others. And if you lie very still, you will presently hear a running lilt come closer and closer, and a little brown fantail will perch on the branch above your head, and spread her tail coquettishly while she watches to be sure you are admiring her. And if you do not move, she will come still closer, and dart daringly right past your face, before

Spreading her tail coquettishly L.H.

FANTAIL

she flies back to her branch and her flirting. You will want to lose your whole heart to this wee coquette, but I warn you not to fall too ready a victim to her charms, for she will soon desert you, and fly off, with her ripple of joyful song, to inspect some new wonder.

Besides, there is so much else for you to admire. When you have rested for an hour beneath the red gums you will want to find fresh wonders in this happy corner, and if you stroll along the sun-decked slope you will not want in vain. No longer now must your eyelids droop, for there is much to be seen. A brown and golden butterfly will show you the way, and if you follow him he may lead you, as he led me, straight to the foot of a tall peppermint, where on a leaning branch a mother morepork sits cuddling two fluffy big-eyed babies. And if these babies gaze down at you with their great, round, yellow eyes, and open their wide, pink mouths at you, as they did at me, you will see a sight that will set you gurgling with amusement. Or perhaps that butterfly will not show you the morepork's family, but will lead you further on to where a kookaburra has built his house in a knobby ant's nest. And if you wait and watch a little while, you may see—as I did—Mr. Kookaburra fly up to a neighbouring branch, and call "Kook-kook," and then Mrs. Kookaburra put her white face out of the door to ask what he wants. Or you may see her fly out and go off for a spell, while her lord and master takes his turn at the domestic duties.

If you are not lucky enough—as I was—to see either morepork or kookaburra's nest, perhaps that wandering butterfly will lead you to the tree where a crow has just brought out her noisy family. Or perhaps you may miss all three, and find yourself in the creek bed, where the sassafras and pittosporums

With great, round, yellow eyes L. H.

YOUNG MOREPORK

grow, and there you may see the shy red fantail upon her nest, and hear the little scrub wrens whistling noisily amongst the thick undergrowth. And perhaps—

But I think if you see and hear all these things you will have had enough to satisfy any ordinary mortal; and when the evening boat calls to carry you home across the opal-tinted water you will take with you a smiling memory, and a deep content that, in the midst of all the whirl and turmoil of our city, there is still this one sweet spot, where Time has stayed his hand.

The shy red fantail J.R.

SCRUB WREN J.R.

Summer Rain

If it had come drifting up the Kanimbla Valley it would have been called mountain mist; but a gentle south wind drove it in from the sea, and so it was only summer rain. But it floated, soft and white, up the harbour, and drifted in smoky clouds across the craggy headlands, drenching rocks and trees as it went. The big branches stretched out eager arms for its embrace; the poor, scarred trees, which the fire had tortured, lifted their maimed heads for its soothing kiss; and over the blaze-blackened surface of the earth tiny green sprouts shot up joyously to meet it.

The butterflies didn't like it, for it damped their silken dresses of brown and gold, and clogged their flittering wings; so they flew about dejectedly looking for a hole in which to hide from its penetrating wet. The swallows didn't like it either, for it drove all flying insects into shelter, and so robbed them of their breakfast. They sat in gloomy rows on rain-decked telegraph wires, or grumbled to each other on dripping tree-tops. But the Jacky Winters loved it, for it drove the little earth-hiding insects out of their water-logged holes to look for better shelter; and as the tiny creatures crept about

in search of a dry spot, the Jacky Winters' sharp eyes discovered them, and their broad bills quickly snapped up a dainty breakfast.

NEST OF LINEATED TIT L.H.

The ants didn't like it very much, or at least they did not venture into it, but stayed at home where they could keep dry. Even the big white blossoms of the dwarf apple did not tempt

them out. The spiders seemed to enjoy it, for it turned their round webs into chains and chains of glistening pearls, which attracted more admiration than the spider usually knows. The honey-eaters did not seem to notice it, and, as long as it did not spoil the honey in the big bottle-brushes, where they were greedily feeding, they did not care whether it rained or not. The little tits enjoyed it as they hopped about in the diamond-dewed sheoaks, and shook the fine drops on to their yellow breasts. The wattles, heavily laden with tiny, tiny buds, loved it, too, for they knew it meant the promise of a golden, gorgeous harvest in the months to come.

And I—I loved it most of all. With the brim of my hat turned well back from my face, the collar of my coat well up round my ears, and my hands in my pockets, I walked along the soppy track across the uplands, and felt the soft mist soak into my very being. Sweet and cool and full of health it was, as it curled in my hair and kissed my face. The poor burned trees were not more glad of its gentle healing than was I, as it folded me in its embrace, washed the tiredness from my brain, and filled my soul with that peace and contentment, which only Mother Nature can give to her children.

The Birthday Party

YESTERDAY I had a birthday—and a birthday party. Perhaps none of my visitors are on your calling list, and I don't think you will find any description of their dresses in the society column; but all the same they are well worth knowing, and no fine lady in the land is more elegantly gowned. The first visitor came before I was up—I'm afraid these friends of mine are not very fashionable—for while I was lying half awake on my verandah bed I heard a cheery voice at my ear, and there was Jacky Winter sitting on the rail, dressed in his very neatest grey coat and white vest.

"You're rather early," said I, "and the party hasn't begun yet."

He wasn't the least disconcerted, but just flicked his white-edged tail, cocked his head on one side, and called in his friendliest voice, "Get-up, get-up, get-up."

"No, it's too early, and the grass is all wet, and the ground is cold, and the breakfast won't be ready for ever so long, and I'm very cosy and comfy here, thank you, and here I'm going to stay for another half-hour," said I; and straightway turned my back on him and hugged the blankets closer.

He wasn't in the least offended, but called again, "Get-up, get-up, get-up," and there was something in his tone that seemed to suggest that he had been up for hours, and that so

had all right-minded beings. And then, as if to support him, just at that moment the second visitor arrived, a spine-bill who came flying into the garden in hot haste, calling, "Hurry-up, hurry-up, quick, quick, quick!" He, too, seemed to think it was quite late to be beginning a party, and was more insistent even than the Jacky that I should hurry up.

"There's evidently to be no peace for me this morning," said I to myself—but loud enough for them to hear me—and so I took their advice, and got up.

Apparently the two gossips went round and spread the news that I was really up, for when I came out on the verandah again there was quite a crowd of visitors to wish me "many happy returns." A wagtail greeted me straight away with the embarrassing remark that I was a "sweet, pretty creature," and a pee-wee shouted loudly his opinion, "You-are, you-are."

"Dear me," said I, "this is quite overwhelming"; and I ran inside to breakfast, leaving them all behind. Incidentally I looked in the glass as I passed, and—but never mind that.

Although I had treated them with such scant ceremony my visitors were not in the least offended; while I ate my eggs and toast they enjoyed a second breakfast among the bouvardias and in the gum leaves. And when after breakfast I took my book and cushion out on to the grass which pretends it's a lawn—I never do any work on my birthday—the reception really began.

All the morning I sat out in the warm sun, and welcomed

my visitors as they came and went. The gum saplings near the fence were really the reception room, for here most of them came and called their good wishes to me. Amongst the earliest arrivals were the chick-ups, and though they were very hearty in their greetings I didn't think it quite good taste for them to call so loudly, "She's-up, she's-up, she's-up," as if it were something quite unusual. The little tits, too, were not very polite, for they kept on flying in and out, expressing their surprise, with a fussy "Tsz-tsz!" like a great-aunt who has just heard something amazing.

The silvereyes were much nicer; they simply sang the sweetest song without words, and I could fit any meaning I liked to it. And the blue wrens were dears, too; they didn't stay in the saplings, but hopped right across the grass to me with a real gush of welcome. Then a shrike-tit came, dressed in his party clothes, and, though he didn't say much, his bright yellow vest and black and white-striped head lent quite an air to the scene. The thrushes and the butcher birds came up from the valley, and stayed a little while in the saplings to sing a birthday song; and a razor-grinder stopped a few minutes on the fence, and, instead of his usual harsh scold, uttered a few, soft tender notes. He couldn't scold me on my birthday, for no one must be cross then.

As I sat lazily enjoying my party and the dancing sunbeams and the little white clouds sailing over the blue sky, it seemed more like summer than mid-winter. I was just think-

ing so, when by flitted a tiny black butterfly, the white edges in his wings gleaming vividly in the sun. I sat quite still and watched him, and he came close to my face, and then settled for a moment on the cushion at my cheek. Just for a second he stayed, as if to say, "See! here I have waited till the summer is past to wish you joy"; then off he went across the grass, beyond the fence, and away.

Very soon afterwards came another tiny visitor to my party. A bee flew from the next-door garden, straight across the lawn, and settled himself on my skirt. There doesn't seem to be much sweetness in a blue serge skirt, but this bee seemed to like it, for there he stayed ever so long, washing his face and smoothing his hair, and generally enjoying himself, and it was only when at last I moved that he flew off lazily. I was sorry to disturb him, but I turned to look at two ravens flying overhead. They were too shy to come to the party, but they passed very slowly, and I could hear the "swish, swish, swish" of their wings quite plainly, as they went across the sky. They were almost out of sight before they greeted me with "more, more," and I knew that was their awkward way of wishing me many more happy days.

A big grey moth, which had been resting for ever so long on the trunk of a gum tree, where he could scarcely be seen against the grey wood, now flew lazily away, as if he were too shy to stay by himself; and just when I thought no more guests were coming, up flew a kookaburra and settled himself

GREY MOTH J.R

down on the post outside the fence. He looked at me very solemnly for a while, and flicked his absurd little tail; then suddenly he burst out laughing. "Ha, ha, ha!" he said, "birthdays are great fun, aren't they? But wait till you've had as many as I have; then you may not enjoy them so much Ha, ha, ha!"

"Horrid old cynic," said I, "of course I'll always enjoy them, as long as there are birds and bees and butterflies to come and see me."

But all the same his sarcastic remarks had rather spoilt the party, and I was not very sorry that at that moment the lunch bell rang—and the reception was over.

The Well-Beloved

HE Christmas bells are here again in their ruddy beauty. Out on the uplands, amongst the grey rocks and dry sand, they rear their grey clusters at the end of slender stalks. In marshy places, where the tall red gums spread shady branches casting the earth beneath them into a soft gloom, the bells, trying to reach the sun, lift their heads on stems quite four feet long, which wave and sway above the bead fern and the harsh green cutty grass. But those whose red is deepest, and whose gold is purest, grow in the dry sand amongst the rocks. The short suckers of the grey gums, with their broad purple and silver leaves, are their only shelter; all around them are burnt and blackened branches of stunted banksias and dwarf apple, which leave dirty marks upon your hands and clothes as you stoop amongst them. From a little way off, the scene looks as dingy and unpromising as any piece of bush could be; the great grey spiders, which have spun

their thick webs from branch to branch, seem to be the only living things in that blackened scene—unless perchance there is a snake or two hiding amongst the grass-trees. And yet it is here, amongst these arid rocks and burnt-out bushes, that the brightest and biggest of the bells are to be found.

From earliest morning the pickers have been arriving. The little station, which throughout the year never sees more than half a dozen passengers a day, now receives a crowd from every train. All sorts and conditions leave the carriages —first and second-class passengers, elderly gentlemen, school-girls, and little ragamuffins. From all the countryside they congregate—for this is the spot far-famed throughout the land for the Christmas bells. Other places there are in plenty where the bells grow freely, but nowhere are they so fine and so plentiful as in this one gully. And so, every year, for a week or more before Christmas Day, the bush is thronged with hundreds of seekers after the precious flowers.

People who never go into the bush from one year's end to another come out at this time in quest of the bells; young men, who would scorn to spend their time picking any other flowers, come in sulkies and on bicycles to carry home the dearly-prized blossoms; pretty girls brave sunburn, sandflies, and torn dresses to gather the bells; and even the small boys neglect their cricket and their caddying to go in search of the red beauties. The bush, usually so silent, re-echoes with the sound of laughter and voices, calling now and then to know

the whereabouts of a companion. Down the hillsides the pickers are scattered, each one intent on massing as big a bunch as he, or she, can possibly hold. Sometimes one of a party will come across a tree of Christmas bush all red in its summer glory, and then indeed is the bunch a thing of joy and beauty. Some of the gatherers add the flannel flowers to their bunches, making a glorious contrast of red, white and yellow. But the majority are out after bells, and nothing but Christmas bush will divert them from their quest.

For of all the flowers that grow there are none so dear to the heart of the Sydney-sider as the Christmas flowers. Even the waratah and the rocklily, prized as they are, must give way before these flaming beauties. But it is not merely their

GRASS-TREE L.H.

beauty that draws staid elderly men and little children out to the bush in search of them. It is something that goes deeper than mere artistic appreciation; it is sentiment, pure and simple. For Christmas bells and Christmas bush are to the Australian what holly and mistletoe are to the Englishman; they are emblems of the season of happiness, and stand for the brightness and good-fellowship of Christmas-time.

And as the flower-seekers scour the gully and the hillside in their eager quest, the summer breeze creeps softly down the hill, and bends the clusters before it. To and fro they sway, swinging out to the sunshine their gentle peal. It is the music which they have rung, year in year out, through all the ages—the music of love and peace and Christmas-time.

The Song of the Silvereye

"THERE'S a canary up that tree," said a small boy, pointing to a large Moreton Bay fig, fifty yards along the path.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I heard him. Listen, and you'll hear him too."

I listened, and on the air there came the song of a bird, gentle, sweet and soft, but increasing in volume as I neared the fig tree.

There was something very familiar in the tones, and yet it was not quite the song of a canary. It was sweeter, and softer, and less embodied. For a moment I was puzzled as to what it could be, then a sad little sigh broke the twitter of the song, and I exclaimed, "Why, it's a silvereye!"

The small boy looked at me in scorn. "A sivie!" he said, with a world of derision in his tones, "A sivie couldn't sing like that. It's a canary."

A fuller gush of music came from the tree, making me incline to his opinion; but I was not quite satisfied. One sight of the singer would have settled all doubts, but that sight was hard to get. The thick leaves of the fig made an excellent cover for the bird, and though I and the small boy both craned our necks, not a glimpse could we get of it.

It does not take long to collect a crowd. In a few minutes

two men came along, stopped, and looked curiously up into the fig.

"It's a canary," said one.

"Yes, and a fine singer," said the other.

The small boy looked at me in triumph; "Er-r," he sneered. "I told you so."

But I was not yet convinced.

"Can you see it?" I asked the men; but though they too were gazing into the branches with penetrating eyes, they could not get a glimpse of the singer.

Just then we were joined by a youth, who, after staring at us for a time, addressed me—

"Lost your canary, Miss?"

"I'm looking to see if it *is* a canary," said I, all the stubbornness in me aroused to the settling of this question.

"What else could it be?" asked one of the men.

"I think it's a silvereye."

"A silvereye!" exclaimed all three in astonishment, and their subsequent silence left me in doubt as to whether they thought me a lunatic, or merely an ignoramus. That they did not agree with me was more than evident, and the small boy sniggered at my expense.

But my triumph was at hand. A movement in the leaves above caught my eye and at last I was able to locate the singer.

There, seated on a small grey twig, was a small olive-grey bird, whose size alone proclaimed him no canary, even if the

silver ring round his eye had left any doubt as to his identity.

He was sitting in a rather hunched position, the only movement being in his throat, which swelled and throbbed as he poured forth his song of joy to the blue sky.

In triumph I pointed him out to the others. There could be no possible doubt about him. Even the small boy was convinced, and admitted in an almost awe-stricken voice—"It *is* a sivie."

"I had no idea that silvereyes could sing at all," said one of the men, still gazing up into the branches.

I laughed. "It is a case of the prophet in his own country."

"Evidently," agreed the man. "I must listen for them in future. It's a good thing to know that we have birds that can sing."

"It is," I assented, "the pity is that more people don't know it."

Then we all went on our ways, leaving the small singer alone. And he, regardless of his audience, and heedless of their ignorance, still sat amongst the glossy leaves, pouring forth his song of joy and thanksgiving unto the world beautiful.

BEETLES ON TEA-TREE

The Passing of the Gully

YOU know my gully, don't you? That gully where the big red gums stretch protecting arms over the sweet grass, where the she-oaks and turpentines bend towards the creek-bed, where the herringbone ferns and maidenhair soothe the eye with their fresh green. You know how the orchids, pink and mauve, white and yellow, sprinkle the ground in the springtime, and how the golden-haired dillwynia chases them away with her gorgeous mantle. You know how the

clematis creeps, snowy white, over the old logs, and how the purple hardenbergia and the creamy tecoma drape the tree-trunks. You have seen the saplings' tips glow red in the young year, and the big trees' trunks gleam rosy pink and tender grey in their new season's dresses. You have not forgotten, have you, how the native canaries build their hanging nests in the sapling clumps; how the tits and diamond-dicks feed in their leaves? You have not forgotten the yellow bobs and Jacky Winters, the honey-eaters and thickheads, the fantails and shrike-tits, and all the other dear, soft things that sang amongst the trees and built their nests and brought out their small families? And, if you have ever seen them, you must remember the flittering blue butterflies and those of yellow hue which turned the grassplot to a field of gold.

If you have known my gully with its thousand treasures, you must have loved it, and will carry its sweet memory with you for many a day to come. And so you will weep with me, when I tell you that the days of my gully are numbered. All these years it has lived untouched by the hand of man; the outskirts of civilisation have crept to its borders here and there, but the gully itself has been left undisturbed, a sanctuary for the birds and blossoms and butterflies. Now, alas, the fiat has gone forth, and very soon the sweet bird-songs will give way to the raucous tones of the auctioneer, and hideous red-roofed "villas" will blaze where all was once so green.

Already the wreckers have begun their work. Last week I saw them setting off to their hateful task, a little band of

TECOMA J.R.

executioners armed with axes and theodolites and all the other implements of destruction. They did not walk as executioners should, with saddened steps and bowed heads, but tramped cheerily by with their swags and bags, talking and laughing as gaily as if they were going to a picnic. And all through the week the bush has echoed to the sound of their axes, till now a path of fallen saplings and marked trees shows which way the work of devastation is to go. All the week the birds have been filled with alarm at these strange doings. The honey-eaters have darted in terror from bush to bush, seeking some explanation; the butcher-birds have called forth their disgust in ringing notes; the wrens and tits and all the smaller birds have chattered and scolded in vain fury; and a lone fan-tailed cuckoo has wailed in misery for the fate that has befallen him.

But it has been all in vain. The wreckers have heeded none of them, and the work of destruction has continued. They have driven in their pegs, made signposts of saplings and pieces of paper, blazed big gums and turpentines, chopped ruthlessly at native cherries and she-oaks, and turned the happy sanctuary into a place of terror and pain.

And they are only the forerunners, just a token of worse things to come; for soon will come the builders, the carpenters and bricklayers, plumbers and glaziers. They will come with their dray-loads of bricks and mortar; big bonfires will be made of the red-gums, grey-gums, and the turpentines; new paling fences will take the place of the clematis-covered logs; and fowlhouses will rise where once the shy whip-bird brought out her young. The little ground orchids will make way for pansies and freesias, the dillwynia and tecoma will be ousted for cactus dahlias and stock. The birds which have filled the bush with beauty and song will fly away in search of peace; another of the few remaining bush spots will have been swept from our city; and my gully—my dear, beautiful, sun-kissed gully—will have passed into the land of memory and dreams.

YOUNG COACHWHIP BIRD J R.

Dwarf Apple

THE brow of the hill would be a dreary place in summer without the dwarf apple. In the winter and spring it is gay with a hundred blossoms—wattles, heaths, boronia, spider-flowers, and bottle-brushes; but the summer flowers—the Christmas bells, Christmas bush, and flannel flowers—love the more sheltered spots, and it is only a stray blossom that creeps to the brow of the hill. Here and there you may see the orange of a lonely Christmas bell against the sand; a few red honey-flowers shine out from their sombre leaves; a solitary pink orchid—the wild hyacinth—shelters beneath the bushes; but these stray blooms are not enough to lighten the melancholy of the sad-hued banksias, with their dry dead cones, which do their utmost to turn the landscape into that dreary wilderness it is so often accused of being.

The banksias almost succeed in making the scene a desolate one, but—and there is always a "but" in the Australian bush—the dwarf apples are there to save the situation. It seems that wind-swept country is their special care, for as soon as the spring blooms begin to disappear—and they make an earlier departure from the brow of the hill than from the sheltered gullies—the dwarf apple begins to tinge the country with a rosy glow. It is the deep blush of the young buds, which grow in warm and woolly clusters that are as beautiful as any

crimson rambler; and for months onward the dwarf apple keeps the flag of beauty flying on that rocky hill. For weeks the buds grow deeper and deeper, until the woolly jackets burst open, and show a soft creamy flower folded snugly away inside; there is no blossom in bush or garden more enchanting than the half-opened bud of the dwarf apple. Slowly the red jacket gapes wider, and the creamy stamens unfold, till the full-blown blossom is there—a lovely ring of silky filaments. One after another they come bursting out in quick succession, till the tree is a thing of beauty, with bud and blossom mixed together in a bewildering mass of cream and red and green.

It is in mid-summer that the dwarf apples are at their finest, and the rise is curtained with their lovely blooms. If you would see them at their loveliest, you must go out in the early morning; for then you will see the treasures that lurk within their silky folds—the myriad insects that love their sweet shelter. The slanting sun will shine upon the burnished backs of tiny beetles, whose blue and brown, green and red, gleam like jewels against the creamy background. Honey-heavy bees drowse in the silky clusters; green-backed ants creep happily amongst them; while bright honey-eaters dart to and fro, poking their sharp beaks and long, fringed tongues into the flowers' hearts.

The dwarf apple is the happy hunting ground of the entomologist; he calls it "Angophora cordifolia," and approaches it with a cyanide bottle, or some other death-

dealing device. But, as he seldom sallies forth while the day is young, the tiny creatures have their happy hour, and it is only the laggards that are trapped by the hunter, and end their days in a collecting tube—as pleasant a fate, perhaps, after all, as to serve as a bird's breakfast.

Though the end of its little visitors may be tragic and sudden, that of the flower itself is one of beauty. By and bye, when the creamy stamens shake themselves free on the summer breeze, a gay red fruit will be seen, just as lovely as the buds and blossoms that have gone before it. In its turn the fruit will ripen and open, scattering the seeds on the wind, and leaving a dry brown husk to speak of fulfilment. But even then the plant will not have lost its beauty, for, beside the dead husks of the past, "the folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud"—the tender pink shoots which are the forerunners of the woolly red buds.

And so, through all the changing seasons, the dwarf apple spreads its beauty on that windy hill—an emblem for its lovers of eternal hope and courage.

To Adelaide by Train

"TO Adelaide by train! Oh, poor you! You will be tired, for it's such a dreary trip—through absolutely uninteresting country."

So my friends, when I announced my intention of going overland to the little white city of the south. I was not depressed by their sympathy, for the prospect of travelling over new ground, however well-worn by others, always sends a thrill of excitement through me, and I have never yet seen the country which was "absolutely uninteresting." Still, I would not let myself anticipate too much, and kept my rising spirits in check by remembering that all the visitors from overseas who have most harshly condemned the monotony of our scenery, have formed their opinions from the windows of the Sydney to Adelaide express; and so it was possible that part of the land might be lacking in the beauty and interest which is so common elsewhere.

To one who is not a wearied traveller there is something exhilarating in the rapid rush of an express train. The feeling of intense speed gets into your blood, and as the lights of wayside stations flash by quickly, and ever more quickly, as suburbs give way to paddocks and trees, which, in their turn, sweep by like a cinematograph picture, you become possessed by the idea that it is you yourself that is hurrying. Though you

have the most comfortable sleeper the train can provide, rest is impossible, and you lie looking out on to the fleeting moon-lit scene, longing for the daylight, that you may see more clearly what manner of country this is through which you are flying.

And when at last the dawn comes creeping, your ask yourself, "Is this the land they call monotonous?"

Or at least I did; for the dawn showed me a scene which filled me with delight. Close by the rail ran a red, red road, and beyond it a clump of white-limbed gums flung their long, purple, morning shadows over a green grass carpet. It was a fairy scene, and the flocks of parrots, that swept through the trees, looked like birds from the fairy world, as their gorgeous colours flashed in the sun. Then all too quickly, the mystic wood was past, and a sea of brightest green stretched across the land breaking here and there upon a darker clump. It was a field of young wheat, studded with native pines, which stood as straight and symmetrical as the trees in a Noah's ark. A pair of blue cranes floated lazily overhead, the low sun turning their wings to silver as they flew. Even before they had reached their destination, the wheat fields had given place to stretches of rich, red-brown earth, newly ploughed, where the early-rising magpies were busily looking for their breakfasts. Once or twice a faint echo of their carolling came on the breeze, but the "thumpity-thumpity" of the wheels drowned all other sounds.

But I did not miss the sounds so much, for my eyes were too busy devouring all the beauties of this "absolutely uninteresting country." It was spring-time, and the paddocks, which soon came flying by, were filled with young creatures; long-legged foals stepped daintily beside their mothers; soft-faced calves stared wonderingly at the rushing train; little white lambs sped away across the green as the noisy monster

Waiting for their breakfast L.H.

YOUNG WOOD-SWALLOWS

drew near. On a stump a family of young wood-swallows were waiting for their breakfast, too intent upon their appetites to bother about the train, while a snow-white butterfly flittered unconcernedly to rest upon a blue-bell, which swayed to and fro in the panting breath of the engine.

And of all the sights that charmed my eyes as they gazed from the train windows, there was nothing more delightful than the flowers. All along the line they grew in masses and patches and straggling lines. Between the rail and the road, spring, undisturbed, had laid a carpet of many colours, so bright and varied that the traveller longed to descend and fill her hands with their beauties. From end to end of the country the prevailing colour was yellow, for during October Australia is indeed a field of cloth of gold. In the southern part of our own State the early sun shone upon the soft evening primroses, not yet closed before the heat of day, and buttercups dotted the grass all along the way; but, from Albury to Melbourne the green fields were changed to golden carpets by the bright, round faces of the Cape weed. Oblivious to the cold welcome it receives, and heedless of the fact that it is a "pest," this black-eyed daisy spreads itself for miles and miles over the paddocks, and in one place has even changed a grassy hill into a golden mountain. Within the railway boundaries many of the native plants grow untrammelled, as yet, by this alien, and here again yellow was the dominant tone. Clumps of bluebells waved dainty heads, a delicate white blossom sent little spikes up from the grass, but the majority of the flowers were the sun's hue, gold and gleaming. Mile after mile the ground was covered by a plant with a yellow spike of blossoms, which a bronzed countryman told me, rather shyly, was called "yellow posies."

As the South Australian border drew nearer the flowers changed in shape and growth, though yellow still prevailed. In the paddocks where the white-backed magpies of the south were busy all the day, the great clumps of gorse and broom glowed in marvellous beauty, and filled the air with their scent. These plants have taken possession of South Australia, and very lovely they are—though, no doubt, the farmer sees them with a somewhat different eye. From Murray Bridge to Adelaide one is struck by the variety of introduced plants which thrive all too well. In places there is still a good deal of the original bush left, and a beautiful tetratheca covered whole hillsides with its purple blossoms. Adelaide people call it "purple heather," and prize it highly—as indeed it deserves. It is of a freer growth than the one we know round Sydney, and can be plucked in long sprays, while its scent is very sweet. It was the wild flower most in evidence, for the time of blossom was quickly passing, and only stray flowers remained of many species. In sheltered spots were clusters of deep red, the last flicker of the blaze of epacris, which, I was told, glorified the bush a few months ago. Another red flower which was to be seen in the cuttings was a pea-flower called a "scarlet-runner," which from the distance looked like a small, vivid kennedya. At a wayside station a small boy earned a penny by running across the road and plucking a bunch of gorgeous blue blossom, for which I could learn no name, though its beauty certainly should have placed it on

the list of first favourites. But with the exception of these blossoms, and a few stray wattles, all the flowers that graced the landscape there were introduced. Small red poppies lent an English aspect to many a field—to the owner's disgust, it must be admitted. Irises, white and purple, were to be seen at every passing stream, with clumps of arum lilies disputing the position with them. Hawthorn bushes looked springlike in their gowns of pink or white; briar and hedge roses sweetened the air with their fragrance, and amongst the hills—which are Adelaide's pride and beauty—myriads of ixias, white, yellow and red, grew wild along the railroad. These, it is said, were introduced by a man who, every time he went through in the train, scattered handfuls of seeds and bulbs from the window. The result is charming at present, though the future may tell a different tale.

And so I went by rail to Adelaide, not through dull, uninteresting country, but through a world of wonder and beauty. It is true that most of the way is over plain level ground—but that gives a better view of the distant hills, and of the wood-decked streams that cross the path. It is true that wild flowers are but weeds; that foals and calves and lambs, young birds and butterflies are the commonplaces of every spring; so is the sun the commonplace of every day—but it never loses its wonder. If the thought of snow-capped Alps tropical forests, Italian lakes, and mighty cañons, has blinded you to the beauty of all else, then you may find the journey

"absolutely uninteresting"; but if you set out with love of your land in your heart, and eyes that can see clearly, then you will find that there are more joys than the globe-trotter sees on the road to Adelaide.

The Flame Tree

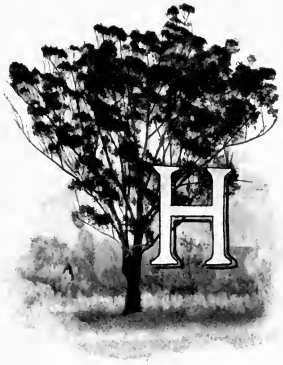
IN some lands it would be worshipped as the living incarnation of the great fire god, for all the warmth of the ages seems concentrated in its glowing mass of blossom. Set round by the glossy green of palms and tree-ferns, cedars and blackwoods, it stands out, a blaze of vivid scarlet that almost bewilders by its startling beauty. The holiday-makers that pass up and down the road above it, stop and gaze in open-mouthed amazement at its gorgeousness.

"What is it?" is the question on their lips; and many and varied are the answers given. Some, with an air of learning, say it is a flowering palm, others declare it is a coral tree; but one and all wonder how it comes to be there, "away out in the bush."

And yet it is not at all an uncommon tree in the South Coast brush, where it chiefly flourishes. It is known to botanists as Sterculia acerifolia, and is sister to the familiar "currajong" (Sterculia diversifolia) of the inlands. Some fine specimens of it are to be seen in the Botanic Gardens, and in several gardens round Sydney it grows splendidly. It is always a handsome tree, with glossy, palm-shaped leaves; but when it is covered with its scarlet bell-flowers, it stands as a burning protest against the accusation that there is no colour in the Australian bush. Before its vivid scarlet the

Christmas bush looks dull, the wattle pales, the Christmas bells seem almost tawdry. It is a gleaming, glowing wonder that transforms the green gully into an enchanted garden.

There, at our very door, it grows; magic, wonderful, a brave ensign of a sun-girt land. And on the road above, hundreds of Australians pass up and down, gaze at its beauty, and ask what's its name, and whence it came. Not one in a hundred knows, or cares, that it is a native; not one in a hundred glows with the pride that must come from possession of so much beauty. But, one and all—thinking it too strangely beautiful to belong to their own land—they wonder aimlessly how "it came to be out there in the bush!"



A Bush Breakfast

HAVE you ever taken your breakfast into the bush? If you have not, you have missed much of the joy of life. Lunch and tea we have all eaten in the open many and many a time, and have all enjoyed to the utmost; but the morning meal eaten under the gum boughs, while the day is yet young, is unlike any other meal known on this prosaic earth.

Breakfast is proverbially the unsociable meal of the day, and the most contemptuous thing that has been said about people is that they are "brilliant at breakfast." According to all traditions the correct way to begin the day is with a silent meal, attention divided between the bacon and the newspaper, not a smile for anyone, and not a word beyond a "pass the butter, please," or similar phrase. And as for the visitor who arrives for breakfast, there are no words to describe him, so unheard of and unwelcome would he be if he dared to come.

But when you take your breakfast into the bush it is quite different. You leave the silent and unsociable self behind, and only your friendliest, happiest you goes out. The horror of

morning guests, which is customary at home, leaves you, and you look forward with delight to the visitors who, you know, will be the best part of your meal.

Quite early this morning, while the dew still spangled the grass and leaf tips, we took our bag and billy, and set out for our bush dining-room. Such a lovely room it is, with its blue ceiling overhead, its soft grey walls, and a carpet of the freshest, greenest velvet, that out-rivals the finest Axminster. On one side the walls are draped with a curtain of royal purple, where the hardenbergia hangs in loops and clusters; here and there great golden masses of dillwynia stand in nooks and corners, while right where our table is laid tall blue orchids wave fairy flowers upon their slender stems. The rugged boughs of the red gum overhead stretch a bold design against the blue of the ceiling, and throw cool, quaint shadows over the velvet carpet; and the brown, crusty loaf, the pot of yellow butter, the red-cheeked apples, and the hard-boiled eggs look very inviting in the flickering gleams.

The thread of blue smoke, stealing up from the fire where the billy is boiling, has evidently told our friends that we are there, for they soon begin to arrive. First come the thrushes in a great state of excitement; indeed so agitated are they, that we guess there is a nest in the hole of the old grey gum just beyond our breakfast-room, but we are too comfortably indolent to go and look. But Mr. Thrush is more inquisitive, and wants to know all about us. "Who, who, who, *who*-are-

they?" he asks in a loud, ringing voice, and his mate answers quickly, "It's that couple again."

"What-what-what-*what* are they doing?" he asks again, and again his mate answers immediately, "Boiling a billy." But Mr. Thrush does not seem to be satisfied, and he comes nearer to see us better, and asks again and again, "What-what-what-*what* are they doing?" At last his wife grows tired of telling him "They're boiling a billy," and flies off to see about her domestic duties.

Then a sweet-voiced honey-eater flies up, crying, "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear," in a plaintive way; but whether he is sad at not being asked to breakfast, or merely disturbed by the thrush's questions, we cannot quite decide. Of course a yellow-bob comes to see what's happening, and he sits on the tree overhead, gazes down at our breakfast with his big black eyes, and then says, "Tschau, tschau," with a scornful tweak of his tail. But he need not be so contemptuous of our humble fare, for hard-boiled eggs have an ambrosial flavour with billy tea; fresh crusty bread with hedge-plum jam is food for the gods, when blue orchids bend towards it; and rosy apples are a heavenly fruit when the sunbeams dance upon them through a red gum's leaves.

And so the little lizard thinks, who has crawled out of the corner, and run across our green carpet to see what he can find; he thinks that even the core of an apple is worth waiting a long time to get, and nibbles at it with evident approval.

THE DEW-SPANGLED PATH L.H.

The big ants that come hurrying over the carpet also think ours is a most desirable breakfast, and are so impatient for their turn that one or two even venture on to the white table-cloth. But their gleaming heart-shaped bodies look much prettier on the green carpet or the grey floor, so we gently drive them back with a twig to wait in patience. They are not the spiteful, ill-natured ants that love to bite mortals, but they just run about busily, waiting until we have finished, and do not worry too persistently.

Indeed, it is not a morning on which any living thing would be ill-natured. The breath of the opening flowers on every hand fills the air with peace, and the dancing sunbeams fill the heart with joy. The magic song of the spring has begun again, and everyone that hears it must come under its spell.

As we are shaking out the crumbs for the ants' breakfast, we hear a footstep on the rocks above, and see a youth walking towards us. His clothes are old and not too clean; his hard, black hat is battered; his neck is guiltless of a collar; if you saw him walking slowly past your house you would perhaps shut your gate more firmly; but here in the bush no such suspicious thoughts come to you.

Nor is there any need. The little bulky packet beneath his arm tells of a meal to be eaten under the trees; the tiny sprig of boronia in the old hat tells of a love of beauty hidden beneath the ragged coat. He walks along with his eyes on the ground, apparently seeing nothing, but the influence of

the day is on him, for as he passes, and we call "Good morning" to him, his dull face brightens into a genial smile, and he answers readily, "Good-day; lovely mornin', ain't it?"

And the day seems still more lovely for that little flash of human understanding.

BORONIA L.H.

An October Day

ON every side shone the wattle in a golden, shimmering mass; it stretched across the empty paddocks, climbed up the hillsides, reared its long heads to peep over the grey fences, doing its utmost to turn the ugly little mountain village into a field of gold. The wind, which came whistling from the west, took the flower spikes in its boisterous grasp and shook the sweetness from them; and the odour went wafting through the breeze, beating down the smell of dust, and creeping with a delicate fragrance into the little weatherboard mountain cottages.

"The wattle has never been better than it is now," said the residents. "It must be due to the dry winter." And the visitors agreed with them that, whatever the cause, the long golden spikes could not possibly be longer or more golden. "It is little wonder," they said, "that poets break into song in the spring. The sight of that golden sheet of blossom under the bright blue sky is enough to drive the most unimaginative to verse."

And, instead of tearing headlong to the bottom of the gullies, as they generally do, the visitors stayed awhile in the village, just to feast their eyes upon the wattle, and to fill their arms with the fluffy balls, which shrank into little hard knobs almost immediately. Even the golfers on the way to

the links waited a moment to gaze and admire; while the flame breasted robin sang his loudest song from the top of the old grey fence, in praise of wattle and spring time.

That was in the morning of the golden October day. By midday the wind, which had been playfully boisterous, grew really angry, and chased the clouds, big and little, in a scudding race across the sky. He blew them right before the sun's face, and dimmed the light; and he shook the poor flowers' spikes in rage, till they almost broke before his fury.

"Spring, is it?" he seemed to say, in his roaring voice. "I'll soon show you whether it is spring or not." And he blew the clouds so hard and fast that at last they could stand it no more, but broke in wet protest, pouring their heavy showers upon the wattle sprays, the flame-breasted robin, the golfers, and the hundreds of picknickers in the gullies.

The flowers bowed their heads before the onslaught, and the golfers, picknickers, and robin all ran for shelter from the deluge.

"Ah, ha!" laughed the wind. "How do you like this kind of spring? Or perhaps you like this kind better?"

He puffed once more, and the watchers saw some tiny white flakes come floating through the air. At first they came in ones and twos; but soon they were arriving in myriads, faster and faster, and whiter and whiter; and the robin crept closer to his sheltering branch, for it was a snowstorm.

"A snowstorm in October!" said the visitors. "Preposterous! It can't be snow." But it was; and soon the hills and valleys and trees and wattle sprays were all hidden by the softly-falling curtain.

All through the afternoon and well into the night it fell, and the starlight shone upon a glistening white world, which drew the fascinated children out from before the big log fires to enjoy the unusual excitement and fun of a snowball fight.

"Hurrah!" they shouted, scraping the white wonder from verandahs and fences, and pelting each other with balls. "Hurrah! Hurrah! This is something like a springtime! If only it would last a week!" And they laughed and screamed with delight in the freezing air.

But that was not at all what the wind expected. He had meant to give pain, not pleasure; so he blew all the snow-clouds back to their winter quarters, and when the children ran out next morning to make more snowballs, there was nothing but slush in the garden, and over the fence the wattle sprays were waving as brightly as ever beneath the shining sun.

"This is more like spring," said the mothers, packing the picnic baskets. "This is really spring," sang the robin as he picked out a grub from the old grey fence. "This is a decent spring," said the golfers, making an early start for the links.

And the wattle shook its golden sprays out in the morning sunshine, and laughed to the passers-by. "Of course it is

spring. Haven't we been telling you so for weeks? The wind must have his little joke, but it takes more than a snowstorm to blight an Australian wattle grove!"

And from the grey fence the flame-breasted robin piped: "It does, it does!"

Callistemons

THE heavy rains have brought them out in hundreds, and the swamp is afire with them. Beneath the white, sprawling branches of the scribbly gums, they stretch away across the sodden bush in a mass of crimson and scarlet. The passers-by are few; but those who have wandered from the high road, and braved the mud and slush of the track, forget the wet, and, regardless of dripping skirts and soaking feet, stand spellbound before the feast of beauty. Well do they deserve their pretty name, which, formed of two soft Greek words, means "beautiful stamens." The glowing spikes of colour are inches more than their usual length; the vivid scarlet of the newer flowers tones gently into the softer crimson of the older ones, and the soft, greyish pink of the leaf tips completes the colour scheme; while the whole picture is thrown into relief by the grey sand beneath and the grey sky above.

A minute before, we had been annoyed at finding that our short-cut to the ocean had led us into an impassable swamp, but a bend in the path had brought us face to face with the callistemons, and how could disappointment or annoyance live before such beauty? What did it matter that we had already come half a mile from the road—half a mile which

must now be retraced by reason of the quagmire—when the swamp held all this loveliness?

"It is worth it, a hundred times," we agreed; and then, drawing nearer to the flowery fire, learned how very much it really was worth while. For, as we moved towards them, the bushes broke into life with a myriad birds, which added a still greater beauty to the scene. Redheads went squeaking across the track with a protest at our intrusion; scrub wrens chattered in the safety of the thick bushes; silvereyes "peeked" plaintively at being disturbed; thickheads burst into song as they flew into the white branches above; spinebills flashed by, uttering an agitated cry; tits fussed and scolded at the disturbance; white-cheeked honey-eaters darted hither and thither, calling to each other "Who's this? Who's this?" A blue crane rose silently from the path ahead, and flew with slow wing-beats towards the open marsh; and from the reed beds beyond came the strange note of some waterfowl.

But more than all the other birds together were the blackcaps. The bushes were alive with them, and though dozens flew past us, disturbed by our presence, dozens more went on feeding quite unconcernedly amongst the flowers. In the graceful attitudes that only a honey-eater knows, they sucked the honey from the fiery stamens; sometimes they stood poised upon a bending tip, "making it tremble with pleasure," as they stretched sharp beaks into the flowers' hearts; some-

times they hung head downwards, their white breasts gleaming against the scarlet blossoms; sometimes they fluttered in the air, their bright olive wings quivering in support; and always they were most beautiful, with the vivid colour of the flowers for a back-ground to their bright black heads, white breasts and olive backs. The wet summer had held no terror for them; it had robbed them of their second nesting time, perhaps, but it had given them this gorgeous, luscious feeding ground, this sumptuous field of red callistemons; and like true philosophers, they were taking the good the gods had provided, without a thought of the good they had lost.

Some of their philosophy imparted itself to us.

"What a good thing we came this way!" we declared as we began to retrace our steps over the wet paddock. Then, as we plunged ankle-deep into a puddle, we laughed aloud and bade each other "look not down, but up"—an easy thing to do when the callistemons are in flower.

BLACKCAP L.H.

The City Park

lies midway between two crowded eastern suburbs, within a few minutes' run of the city's heart. On either boundary electric trams rush past with clanging haste. Motor-cars race along the asphalt paths, motor-bicycles snort from gate to gate; civilisation, with its feverish unrest, surrounds and invades it, and yet, in spite of all, it holds a peace and special sanctuary, undreamed of by the noisy, bustling crowd, that casts a careless eye on its beauty, or hastens through unheeding.

Just a step from the made path will lead you to the long, deep grass, which skirts the pond. The water is somewhat low, and each lake boasts a few feet of soft, clean, white sand, which gives it the appearance of an inland sea in miniature. A fresh breeze which ruffles the surface into wavelets adds to the likeness, and a flock of gulls driven inland by the rough weather, ride on the waves, or whirl screeching overhead,

completing the illusion. On the banks of the island a mob of glossy black shags, standing in queer human attitudes, hold court; round about them swim teal, black duck, wood duck, and the quaint little white-faced coots; and from the clump of pampas grass behind comes the sweet-ringing song of a reed-warbler. In the centre of the lake black swans are feeding, their beautiful red bills out of sight as they pick the weeds from below; and close by a flock of tiny grebe duck in and out of the water with a ridiculous regularity. Up in one corner of the pond some children are feeding the birds, and ducks, geese, swans, and coots hustle each other to pick up the morsels. A tall Nile goose grabs all he can get, and bullies the smaller fry if they come near; he is the only foreigner amongst them, and he certainly has no company manners, but gobbles greedily. The natives suffer it quietly as long as they can, but at last a black swan swoops angrily down upon him with a hiss, and the stranger takes himself off to the other side of the pond, where an old man has just appeared with bread in his hand.

One could spend hours watching the antics of the birds, but there is an inviting dip beyond the rise, which promises fresh pleasures, and we turn towards it. Oh, that all "dips" were as rich in their fulfilment! This is no fraudulent penny dip, with hidden treasures turning to a worthless bauble; here are jewels rich and rare, and scattered with a prodigality undreamed of in mid-summer.

Floating from end to end of the pond is a gorgeous carpet of blossom—water-lilies in every shade. The tall blue Australian lilies bow stately heads to the little white English ones which nestle down on the water; a clump of daintiest pink gleams against olive leaves; brilliant crimsons flash against the clear water, and bright yellow beauties shine like fairy gold. And their names, too!—Nymphaea aurora, Nymphaea suavissima, Nymphaea gloria; even science grows poetic over their beauty, while from the shelter of the papyrus which edges the pond, a choir of reed-warblers pour forth their praise, in a burst of song which fills the listening world with glory.

But the beauties of the lakes are obvious, and for all to see. It is amongst the rough grasses, which stretch between the ponds and paths, that the rare treasures are found. Two little dottrels, twinkling along the sand, lure towards the water's edge, and as if by magic we are in another world. Chitwees flit across our path, blue wrens and honey-eaters pass in the low bushes, and a sudden "whir-r-r" makes us jump back a pace as a swamp quail rises at our very feet. Before we can recover from our astonishment, his mate whirrs off in the opposite direction, and a tiny thing like a mouse runs into cover.

Baby quail! It is almost impossible to believe our eyes. We poke about the clump of grass with a stick, making enough noise to frighten a dozen ordinary birdlets, but no sign or sound. Then, kneeling low, with careful hands we slowly part

the blades of grass right at the roots, and at last catch sight of a weeny, striped brown chick, lying as if dead. But one touch of the finger calls it back to life with a squeak, which is immediately echoed, and the clump, which seemed so empty, suddenly becomes alive in all directions. We catch two and put them down on the sand to see them more plainly. But they don't like such publicity, and with a squeak they both make back for cover, and are instantly invisible. We do not disturb the small shy things again, but walk on, quite satisfied at having seen such rarities within walking distance of the city's heart.

A few feet further on another bird rises from the grass before us. This time it is a little light-brown thing with a golden cap—the grass warbler. With lark-like flight he soars straight up above our heads, uttering a pretty little song as he flies. Higher and higher he goes, till he is just a speck against the blue, and all the while his little song comes down to us. Then suddenly, like a bolt, he drops to earth, and is silent. But immediately the silence is broken by another sky-bound singer—the English skylark, whose gush of song shimmers through the golden afternoon, and leads us into fairyland.

As he

> "Singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest"

the inarticulate thoughts which have haunted us throughout the golden afternoon, find voice in the words of that poet, who

in the far-off days caught the spirit of the embodied joy, and set it in a song for all to hear:

> "Better than all measures
> Of delightful sound,
> Better than all treasures
> That in books are found,
> Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground."

Some day, it may be, one of our poets will hear the singing of our birds, and translate it into golden words. But while we are waiting for our Shelley or our Keats, the skylark of the poets lifts his glad voice within our city park, and pours his song from heaven's gate, the golden mouthpiece of all sweet, neglected singers.

Jacky Winter

"CERTAINLY one of the least ornamental of the Australian birds" was the way the great Gould described him, and later ornithologists, following in the steps of the master, have spoken in the same depreciating way of our friend, Jacky Winter.

But never was there a clearer case of libel and wrongful description. That he does not possess the gorgeous colouring of the parrots, or the grace of the swallows, is true; but his actions have the brightness and vivacity of a child, and in his scheme of colouring his tints are just as perfect and beautiful as those of any of his more gaudy brothers.

Had he been known in the days of the dandies he might have served as a model of elegance for the great Beau himself; for nothing could be more harmonious than the shades of grey, which range from the pale pearl of his breast to the deeper clove-like hue of his back. He is a regular dandy, too, in the way he flicks his tail from side to side as he alights, showing the white lappets which brighten his costume.

But even if one can see no beauty in the quietness of his clothes, his very cheeriness and sweetness should put him beyond all charge of plainness. He is the embodiment of peace and good temper.

Nothing could be more cosy and restful than he, as he sits on the point of an aloe or a sharp stick, with his feathers fluffed out, looking as soft as the answer that turneth away wrath. No bird is more joyous, as he chases playfully after a brother, at times fearlessly darting within a few inches of your face. All through the winter months, when other birds are silent or

The embodiment of peace and good temper J.R.

JACKY WINTER

skulking, his voice may be heard from the tree tops, proclaiming joyously that the world is "sweeter, sweeter, sweeter." That is his message in life, and no matter what the weather may be he calls it forth, and to many a world-weary heart his glad voice comes, bringing a message of hope and courage.

And yet, in spite of all his lovableness, he has been called dull and plain. If the grey of a mother's hair is plain, then he is plain; if the soothing quietness of home is dull, then no bird is duller; for he can boast no flaunting colour, no exciting song, but just the softness, the peace and the love that soothe the heart and rest the weary mind.

The Northward Flight

SUCH a chirping and a cheeping! Such a darting hastily up to the line, and a skimming over the blocks! Such a chattering and a fussing, till the man in the street stands to gaze in surprise, and even the tired tram traveller looks up from his evening paper, and wonders what it is all about.

It is the annual meeting of the swallows, preparatory to taking their northern flight. Every autumn for years they have met in hundreds and thousands on the telegraph lines at the Haymarket, and there each year, apparently, they discuss the question as to whether migration is advisable or not. For many of them stay with us all through the winter, though the majority, following the faith of their forefathers, travel to the warmer climes of Northern Australia for the cold season.

For weeks they blacken the wires every day at sunset, resting there all through the night; then one evening the wires are bare, and they are seen no more, except in stray instances, till the spring. And though they must depart in flocks, there is no record of anyone having noted their going.

It is one of the eternal mysteries of bird life, this coming and going, and though of late years ornithologists have given great attention to the subject, there is still much to be learned. So great a part of the travelling is done by night, that there is little chance for observation, and with birds the method of

locomotion is so rapid that it baffles the casual observer. It is little wonder that the poets—the naturalists of the past—conceived such ingenious theories for the annual disappearance of the birds. For centuries the popular idea was that the kingfisher built her nest on the waves of the ocean in calm weather—hence the term "halcyon days." The belief that swallows went beneath the water to hibernate was quite undisputed, and Dr. Johnson even describes their method of going. "A number of them," he says, "conglobulate together by flying round and round, and then, all in a heap, they throw themselves under water, and lie in the bed of a river." Even Gilbert White held the theory of hibernation, till his belief was upset by a duck being shot in a neighbouring village, bearing on its neck a silver plate engraved with the arms of the King of Denmark. This seems to have turned the great naturalist's thoughts towards the theory of migration, which eventually quite superseded the idea of hibernation.

And now the question which puzzled the philosophers of the ancient world is an every day fact, and every schoolboy knows that the kingfisher builds no watery nest, and that the swallows do not lurk beneath the mud of a pond, but leave us to spend the winter in Northern Australia.

With such a range of distance and climate as our continent possesses, there is no need for our birds to leave Australia itself, and very few of the birds that breed in Victoria, New South Wales, or Tasmania, go further afield than North

Queensland. The smaller birds, such as the native canary, the caterpillar-eater, and some of the fly-catchers, which arrive here in August and September, go north again during March and April, to spend their winter in North Queensland, but they do not leave the continent. At the same time go the bee-eaters, which build so freely along the banks of the Nepean all summer, and the dollar-birds. These both go further north, spending their winter in New Guinea, Molucca, the Celebes, and thereabouts.

Other regular spring visitors are the cuckoos. With the first bright days of August and September comes the rollicking note of the pallid cuckoo, and the sad wail of his cousin, the fantail cuckoo, both having just arrived from North Queensland. At the same time, from further north—Timor, and New Guinea—come the two little bronze cuckoos, whose woefully plaintive voices are heard night and day throughout the country; and the brush cuckoo, a shy fellow, who frequents the brush country, and fills the gullies with his almost hysterical whistle. From the same region comes the koel, also a dweller in the brush, where he utters his loud monotonous note day and night. By the middle of April all the cuckoos have departed for their northern homes, except a few lone birds that occasionally seem to be left behind, and sadly bewail their fate the winter through.

In direct contrast to the lugubrious cuckoos is the reed-warbler, one of the most delightful of our summer birds, which

comes south in August. Only those who live near a reed bed can appreciate these birds to the full. For months the reeds will have been silent and deserted, and then suddenly, without a note of warning, you wake one spring morning and hear a gush of song from the creek, and you know the reed-warblers have arrived. Day and night for about five months you hear their voices, sweet and ringing, as they build and breed amongst the rushes. Then, as the summer fades, the chorus lessens, and grows thinner and thinner, till one morning there comes no sound at all, and you know the birds have joined the northward flight in quest of warmth and sunshine.

All the birds mentioned so far are, properly speaking, Australian, for they all breed here, and with a few exceptions, do

The home in the rushes J.R.

REED–WARBLER AND NEST

not leave the continent. But there is another class of birds that also spend the summer with us, but go far north across the world to build in the northern spring. This class includes some of the best-known of our birds, amongst them the swifts, which may be seen on summer evenings circling round in the upper air in search of insects. Though most of us are familiar with the long sickle-shaped wings and graceful flight of the swifts, but few of us know that these same birds, which are better known to us than many Australian forms, are really aliens, and have travelled thousands of miles from their birthplaces. The two species, the spine-tailed swift and the white-rumped swift, are often seen in company throughout Australia and Tasmania, but while the first-named builds in Japan, the latter travels on to Central Siberia. The flight of these birds is amongst the marvels of natural history, and the distance that seems so awe-inspiring to us, is no more than a few beats of the wing to them. There is no authentic record of their resting in Australia, but they seem to be possessed of tireless energy, and, according to Gould, the great bird observer, think nothing of breakfasting in New South Wales and lunching in Tasmania.

With such powers of speed and ever soaring flight, it is easy to believe that the swifts have come from "far beyond the horizon's rim"; but it needs more imagination to realise as globe-trotters the birds we are accustomed to see walking slowly and sedately upon the ground. And yet of the forty-

five species of shore birds—plover, snipe, and so on—which frequent Australia, quite half the number belong to the old world.

Anyone who has walked round the shores of Botany Bay at low tide must have seen a large grey bird with a long curved bill stalking about in search of crabs and marine insects. It is the curlew proper—not to be confused with the stone plover, popularly so miscalled. This bird arrives in New South Wales about August and September, and for five or six months lives peacefully and unobtrusively at our doors; but with the flight of summer it also departs, and travels north by the East Indies and Japan, till it reaches Siberia, where it stays throughout the northern summer.

People living in the western suburbs of Sydney may often hear during the summer nights little faint bird cries, sounding weirdly through the dark. They are the voices of the godwits, flying over from their feeding grounds at Botany to the mud flats on the Parramatta River. This is another native of Siberia, and with its friends the greenshanks, curlews, sandpipers, stints, and whimbrels, joins the northern flight for the Arctic circle.

Among these long-distance travellers are several birds known as game to all sportsmen. The spur-winged and black-breasted plover we have with us always, but the grey and the golden plover breed among the tundras of Siberia. Our friend, Jack Snipe, the well-beloved, which, as all men know,

arrives here in September and October, if lucky enough to escape the guns, departs from these shores in March for his home in Japan. There on the grass-clad uplands, at the foot of the famous Fujiyama, our little friend of the field and table builds his nest and fulfils his domestic duties.

But though these globe-trotters come here year after year, they do not appear to have instilled a love of gadding into our native birds. Of all the shore birds and waders that build and breed in Australia, none are really migratory. True, they wander continually throughout the country, but that is a question of food supply. In a continent like ours, where one part may be suffering from drought, while another is flooded out, it is natural that the birds must move their quarters if they do not wish to be starved. And as the insects follow the crops, grasses and other vegetable attractions, so we have the herons, the ibises, the cranes, and the spoonbills following in the wake of the insect pests and keeping them well under control, too.

Drought is the bird's greatest enemy in Australia, and has more to do with forcing them from their native haunts than any other cause. At times whole colonies of birds are driven from one part of the country to another for want of water. Perhaps the most marvellous instance of this on record was in 1840, when the little black-tailed native hens positively stormed Adelaide. They ran about the streets, crowded the rivers and tanks, and did much damage to the fields. They

NEST OF ROSE-BREASTED ROBIN J.R.

had been driven south by the severe drought inland, and for some months literally took possession of the town. Another instance of a bird irruption was in the dry summers of 1895 and 1896, when the beautiful white-eyebrowed wood swallows, or martins, came to the neighbourhood of Sydney. They came in thousands, and for a few weeks the western suburbs swarmed with them. They built everywhere and anywhere, on trees, stumps, and even on the fences. For several summers they came, then disappeared, and were seen no more till the dry weather again drove them seawards. The drought of 1896 also drove to the coast some of the inland finches, including the very rare painted finch, which had never before been reported from Eastern Australia; nor has it been seen here since.

Most of the fruit-eating birds are nomadic in their habits, and, as every orchardist knows to his cost, parrots follow up the food supply, as do also leather-heads, and, to a certain extent, the black magpies. All the honey-eaters are wanderers, though sometimes the distance of their travelling may be very short. Anyone who has a gum or coral tree in his garden will notice that when they are in blossom dozens of honey-eaters will appear as if by magic to feed amongst the flowers.

Other birds which also move from place to place are the robins. The familiar "yellow-bob" stays with us all the year round, but the red-breasts, rose-breasts, and flame-breasts, though seen in open country and round about the farm-houses during the autumn and winter, disappear from sight in the

L.H.

NEST OF WHITE-CHEEKED HONEY-EATER

spring-time. They do not migrate, as it is sometimes supposed, but retire to the gullies and sheltered brush of the mountains for the nesting season. The gill-birds, too, so dear to the heart of the sportsman and gourmand, are plentiful along the heathlands of the coast during the winter months, but retreat to the recesses of the Blue Mountains in the spring, there to build and bring out their young. It is strange that the gill-birds should be so shy about their nests, when most of the other members of the same family (the honey-eaters) build quite openly in heathland and open forest.

But then isn't all nature full of strange and inexplicable things, about which even the most careful scientist can only theorise? Who can understand the workings in the mind of a small creature, which compel it twice a year to travel thousands of miles, braving the elements and innumerable dangers, without any absolute need? For the question of food does not sufficiently explain this annual southern invasion and northern flight. It is one of the many mysteries which are always facing the naturalist; the subject of migration opens a wide field for observation on the part of the nature-lover, and is a question in which the student, by quick perception and careful watching, may give invaluable help to the scientist.

The Royal Mantle

IT is with no niggardly hand this mantle is cut; there is no skimping of material, no saving or sparing of yards and inches. With a reckless sweep the great scissors go, and the mantle spreads out and falls into lavish folds beneath the designer's hand. There is no need for sparing, for the maker has the whole store of spring to draw upon; and no matter how prodigal and reckless her planning may be, she knows there is an unlimited supply ready to her hand.

At all seasons of the year the great designer dresses her child, the bush, with taste and beauty. There are robes of green, or grey, or brown for different months, robes of softest pink and richest copper; but of all the garments in the daughter's wardrobe, there is none in which Mother Nature takes so keen a pride as in the royal mantle of gold and purple which is donned to greet the spring.

The foundation of the mantle is the rich purple creeper, soft and satiny as a baby's cheek. Over every part of the bush the regal colour climbs. Charred trees are turned to columns of beauty, green saplings are garlanded through and through by the purple trails. All the sad and ugly bruises made by man's hand are hidden beneath the masses of blossom. The great red scars, which the railway cuts, are softly hidden by the purple veil, and the fences, which show where man

A clump of starry blossoms L.H.

ERIOSTEMON MYOPOROIDES

means soon to chop and clear, are turned into trellises for the support of the gay garment.

The foundation is purple, but the trimming is of every shade and tint, as befits a regal robe; the chief embroidery is gold, and never artist yet wove such a gorgeous mass of colour as runs in waving, lovely lines throughout the mantle. In the least expected parts it is placed. Sometimes at the hem it sweeps along a shady gully; sometimes at the shoulder it turns a hillside into a golden glow; again it is found in the folds between two crags, or on the skirt of the thickly wooded brush. But, wherever it is seen, it is always just in the right place; for there it is put by the artist's hands, not a chance effect, but part of the carefully planned design.

But gold and purple, regal though they are, do not satisfy the proud mother. Her daughter must be decked in all the beauty of all the fairest colours; so delicate shades of mauve and pink, blue and brown, are skilfully woven into the gorgeous garment. On the gently sloping breast of the hill, pale lilac orchids are loosely strewn, while at the waist, where hill and valley meet, a pink girdle of starry blossoms is set. Here and there throughout the mantle the vivid blue of the lily makes a bold contrast, while ever and again the deep red of spider flowers or wild fuchsia stands out in daring relief. Such shades she weaves together in the great flower mantle, this wonderful designer, Mother Nature! Colours that no human artist would dare to unite, she throws together without

L.H.

BLUE LILY

restraint, and never does she make a mistake.

Every year, as spring draws near, she begins her weaving; and every year the mantle is more wonderful and beautiful to all beholders; and whether she works in masses of gorgeous blossom, or deftly throws a single flower upon the cloak, it is always just the perfect touch that was needed to complete her daughter's beauty.

And is it any wonder that all eyes are turned with admiration upon the lovely daughter? Poets try to voice her beauty in their verses, painters try to capture it upon their canvas, the wild birds almost break their hearts in their desire to sing the anthem of her praise, while even the trees grow higher in their tip-toeing for a better look at her.

But no words, or songs, or painter's brush can do her justice. Only the hearts of her lovers respond with a silent thrill of ecstacy and admiration, as she passes by in her regal mantle of the early spring.

A Holiday

THERE was a tang of autumn in the air; the sun shone warm and bright, but from the hills beyond came a sharp, cool nip that made its way into the sunny day, and caught you when you left the sunshine for the shade. Out on the ocean the sunbeams played on water of a blue that only autumn knows—a deep, dazzling, sapphire blue. Between the mountains and the sea lay the paddocks green with the freshness of spring, stretching in waving lines to the southward. From the little orchard came the mingled scent of a stray lemon blossom, the first small violets, and a scented verbena—the meeting and mixing of two seasons in their perfume. In the lingering purple blossoms of the solanum, which curtained the verandah, a bumble bee buzzed drowsily, pretending it was still summer, and a white butterfly came drifting by, as if there were no such thing as winter in the world.

"There is only one thing to do to-day," we said, "We will walk across the paddocks till we come to the bath in the rocks, and there we will swim all day."

When autumn is in the air it is as easy to act as to think, and in a very little while we passed through the white orchard gate, and were out on the road with our faces set south. The old stile, which led into the paddocks, was almost hidden beneath the bracken and bramble, so lush have the wild things

grown this year; but we climbed over with only a scratched wrist and a torn veil to tell of the struggle. And once inside the hedge the way was clear. The little track across the grass was just wide enough at first to walk single file, for here again the blackberries had overspread their bounds, and tried to keep us back. A few luscious berries still hung upon their stalks, and tempted us to stay awhile; but the brambles could not keep us long, for our faces were set seaward, and we knew the joys that awaited us.

Not that we hurried—oh, no. Who could hurry across a paddock with grass so soft and springy to the tread? Briskly we walked, just for the joy of swinging across the responsive turf; but hurry, never. There was too much to see upon the way. The field of sorghum up the hill waved its tasselled tops to us in greeting; red cows, knee-deep in the long grass of the valley, turned their friendly white faces upon us as we passed; a grey pony, feeding in the shade of the sheoaks, threw back his head and whinnied to us. Swallows circled round our heads before they flashed off to dip into the pool; and across the paddocks the magpies chortled and gurgled as if they too were glad we had come. Who could hurry from such friendly greetings?

But the paddocks stretched ahead, and the swimming bath was far to seek; so we left the stream and the shady she-oaks behind, and went on up the hill and out into the open again. A ground lark ran with twinkling feet before us, her striped

brown body barely perceptible against the grass, and we suspected a cosy nest hidden under one of the full green tufts. Here and there a tall cabbage-tree lifted its quaint head into the blue air, telling of the days when thick luscious brush covered the land which now lies so clear and calm. Their

GROUND–LARK AT NEST J.R.

loneliness struck a note of sadness, and we thought with a sigh of the brave bush gone. But a little green frog hopped out of the grass at our feet and made us laugh—and the cloud had passed.

Do you know anything more fascinating than a little slim

frog all gleaming green and yellow? I do not. And these paddocks of ours were full of the little creatures, which darted up every few yards and hopped away, looking at us with bright, black eyes, or slipping quickly into the grass, where they were lost from sight at once. The grass itself was in flower, and the scent of its tiny blooms filled the sunny day. Here and there a small bright blossom showed against the green—a tiny yellow pea, or a wee pink star—but mostly it was just the flower of the grass itself, pale green or dull purple, which gave the autumn bloom to the paddocks. And over the grass, as if in love with the humble flowers, flittered and fluttered the butterflies. Of every shade and size they were—the big "wanderer" of brilliant orange-brown, who loves all lands; the little one of pure gold, which looked like an embodied sunbeam as it skimmed across the paddocks; the tiny one of pale mauve, which hung to the grass stalks like a sweet, frail violet; and the one of purest white, which hovered here and there across the grass, then fluttered off up the wind like a wandering thought.

Frogs and butterflies may seem a world apart, but out on those scented paddocks in the sun and the breeze, they came together as parts of the beautiful whole.

The waves boomed louder as we went forward, for now the paddocks were curving out to the white beaches. The fences, which stretched in soft dull lines across the green, were growing fewer, and the last boundary was a running stream, which

rippled along over grey shingle, purling and sparkling in the sunshine. A nimble-legged dottrel ran along the bank before us, uttering his small, sharp note as he went; he gained the shelter of the shingle, and was at once lost to sight amongst the grey stones which seemed to swallow him up. We looked in vain for a while; then saw him again as he left the stones and showed up against the water. There was no bridge across the stream, and no stepping stones; so we followed the dottrel, and went barefooted over the shingle, down the path of the stream. And so at last we came to the sea itself.

There in the dark brown rocks lay the swimming-pool, like a blue jewel beneath the midday sun. Not a living creature was in sight, except the cows in a distant paddock, and some gulls resting on the rocks. The day was ours—sunshine, breeze and water—all our very own, to loaf and play in as we liked. And we seized it with both hands. In a very few minutes we were standing on the rocks ready to plunge into the sparkling, dancing water. The tide, which was still running out, had filled our bath afresh for us, and the water was sharp and buoyant. In we plunged, splashing and laughing as the fresh salt bit our skins; and there for an hour or more we stayed, swimming and diving for the big white shells, which showed clearly at the bottom of the bath. The sun laughed down upon us, the terns flew overhead, and the sea splashed a fine shower of spray towards us now and then—all joining in our happiness.

SEA–GULLS J.R.

But there is no day will stand still, and the sun was working steadily westward.

"Just one more dive, and then for lunch," we said, and took one, and yet one more leap into the laughing water.

But at last we were satisfied, and left the pool, tingling and glowing, to find a grassy knoll where we could sit and rest, and have our lunch. The old drift-wood was soon ablaze, and the chops were soon a-sizzling. There is no meat in the world that tastes like a chop grilled over a drift-wood fire, and eaten with the smell of the sea in one's nostrils. And when you have earned your lunch by a three-mile walk over paddocks, and an hour-long swim in the sea, you need no other sauce. Then after lunch to lie on the short, dry grass, with the sun warming us, and the breeze fanning us, while we gazed, now seaward, to the white-capped waves, now shoreward to the purple hills, and the paddocks, shimmering in the afternoon light—surely that were joy enough to still our voices, and shed a silent mantle over us.

The cows, gathering towards the upper paddocks, told us that it was milking-time—and time to go. So with a lingering sigh we set our faces homeward—along the seashore this time, where the wet sand made firm walking, and already the first pink glow of evening was beginning to paint the white wave crests.

There was a Child went forth every Day

ROM the high crown of her feathered hat to the broad toes of her calf boots she was "well groomed." Her perfectly-fitting tailor-made, her faultless white gloves, her fashionably-dressed, brilliantined head, with every hair in place beneath a net, her smooth, pink cheeks—all spoke of the infinite care and time and patience spent upon her toilet. On her face was a look of complete self-satisfaction, of utter content; but it was the content of one to whom a good meal, a new dress, and a reserved stall are the "summum bonum" of life.

The child who sat beside her was equally "well groomed." The broad-brimmed, white felt hat, the coat of softest blue cloth, the shining curls, all told of care and attention. But the look of satisfaction on the mother's face was lacking in the child's. The wide grey eyes, and sensitive red mouth were hungry with the hunger of one who desires to know.

The mother's pale blue eyes were fixed in comfortable contemplation on the hat of the woman in the next seat. The eyes of the child were pressed to the window-pane, gazing with wide-open wonder at the passing scene.

Suddenly she turned to her mother with a little cry of joy:

"Oh, mother, mother, look at the beautiful blue flowers! Look, look, mother; what are they?"

As her mother apparently did not hear, the child turned back and craned her head to gaze once more at the blossoms, now left far behind. But there were many more things to hold her gaze, as the train rushed forward past trees and paddocks: every few yards brought some fresh wonder to the childish eyes; and ever and ever again she turned to her mother with an eager little cry:

"Oh, mother, look at those big birds! What are they, mother?" Or else, "Mother, why are those sheep shut up in that paddock?" Or again, "What are those men going to do with that wood, mother?"

But whatever the question, however loud the voice and eager the tone, the mother's eyes remained fixed in the same placid contemplation of the hats in front of her. Either she did not hear her little daughter's questions, or hearing, would not heed.

At last, as if realising the hopelessness of response, the little girl ceased her questions; but, glueing her eyes more closely to the pane, she gazed out at the passing scene, every

GUM TREES J.R.

now and then a little sigh of ecstasy or wonder escaping from her delicately-parted lips.

The train began to slacken speed, and at last the mother's eyes were turned from their hatward gaze. She looked round at her little daughter, and straightened the child's hair.

"Come, Myra," she said, as the train slowed into the station, and, gathering her sables round her, she walked out of the carriage, still with the look of complete satisfaction on her face.

For into her mind had entered no tiniest suspicion of the golden chance she had missed.

Copper Tips

THE coach sways from side to side as it rattles down the mountain road, and the wheels crunch under the brake. Then the corner is past, and the dangers that lie behind are forgotten in the sight before us.

Rising up from the road in an almost perpendicular line is the hillside, gleaming and radiant with a thousand young gum trees.

Their new tips of deepest, brightest copper sway in the afternoon breeze with a glitter that dazzles. Right up the hill they go from base to summit, scintillating like a million polished sovereigns, and behind them the tall mountain glows soft and blue, heightening by contrast the glory of the hill.

I hold my breath at their beauty, and forget to clutch the seat bar.

"Are they always like that?" I ask the driver, when I can find words.

"Which, miss?"

"Those gum trees on the hill. Are they always that colour?"

"Yes, miss, they're always like that now; pretty, ain't they? But you should have seen them a few years ago, after the bush fires. They weren't much to look at then. The

fires came all down these hills and burnt out every man-jack of them. There was nothing for miles but black bush. But they do say that a good fire's the very best thing for the trees—when it don't kill them."

Then the driver attends to his horses, and I turn in my seat, so as not to miss one glimpse of that gleaming slope. And as I gaze the fullness of the splendour bursts upon my mind. It is not merely the passing beauty of spring that glorifies these trees; their's is a beauty which is a joy for ever, for it tells of dangers overcome, and indomitable courage. They have been through the fire, and come forth again, not cowed and conquered, but filled with new life and glory. Their leaves and branches have been blackened, but their brave hearts have withstood the flames.

And now the gleaming copper tips blaze out on the hillside, a glorious legend for all Australians—"Fire is the very best thing for us all—when it doesn't kill."

And while the sap of courage runs high, fire never kills.

As I was going to St. Ives

I MET—not "a man with seven wives"—but many other things more pleasant to look upon, if not as exciting.

The path to St. Ives, as everyone knows, leaves the main road with a sharp turn under the railway line; it dips at once to a little creek, then up the hill again; and thus the whole way—down a valley and up a rise. But though the road stretches white and inviting, with bush and orchards on either side, we deserted it to-day, and travelled to St. Ives by a cross-country route. It was not sheer perversity that made us leave the high road; we were driven from it by the stream of motor-cars and their trailing clouds of dust. The road, which a few years ago was a joy to the pedestrian—firm and smooth, and easy to walk upon—has now been turned into a howling wilderness by the "honk honk" of motors and their attendant dust clouds. So we left the main road long before the corner where the St. Ives road branches off, and set out to find our way as the crow flies.

There is always an exciting flavour of adventure in setting out on such a quest. The path may be quite well worn and known to many, but if it is at all off the beaten track, and you find it for yourself for the first time, it has all the joys of an undiscovered country to you.

And when the path leads, as ours did, into a lovely gully whose very existence is undreamed of, you know that it was well worth while to leave the dusty high road. We had been following a tame suburban street, with neat cottages and tidy gardens on either side, when a sudden bend in the path brought us, without any warning, to the edge of a gully as green and wild as one would find in the heart of the mountains. Sassafras and black wattle struggled together over the rushing stream, maidenhair grew thickly under the cutty grass, the young fronds of the herring-bone fern made little pink blushes amongst the grey rocks, while over all bent the beautiful red-gums. The road crossed the creek by means of a white bridge, but the gully had hardly been disturbed by the builders. It was a fascinating beginning to our walk, and we congratulated ourselves in having ventured on a new way. And, as the road led us up on the other side to a stretch of open country, we felt quite superior to the stupid people who trudged along in the dust and smell of the motor-cars. There was no dust here, no smell of petrol to wrinkle up our noses with disgust; but the autumn sun drew the fragrance from the gum leaves, a little breeze came across the open space, gently laden with the scent of orange blossom, and the real bush smell rose from the ground as we crushed small plants beneath our feet. A fantail flirted by us with a friendly flutter of her tail, and amongst the trees a wagtail called in his cheery way—"Aren't you glad you came here?" And, indeed, we were glad. A cuckoo

tried to persuade us that we were not, but we took no notice of his peevish wail, and were just as glad as glad could be.

THE EDGE OF THE GULLY J.R.

The scent of orange blossoms on the breeze told us that we were on the right way; for St. Ives is renowned for its

oranges, and the breeze was blowing from that direction. Some bits of yellow peel upon the path told their own tale, and when a bend in the track brought us out on to the road again we were not surprised to see and hear a group of boys. It was indeed "hear" them, for the air was noisy with their shouts of laughter. They were all busy tobogganing, and no travellers to Kosciusko or the Alps ever enjoyed the pastime more. True, there was neither snow nor sleds, but that didn't matter. They had formed a track down the hill between cart ruts, and from its neat appearance it was evident that they had spent the morning sweeping it in preparation. The sled was just a board fastened to the wheels of a lawn-mower; but it was good enough for these boys, and they crowded round to take their turns each time it was dragged to the top. The track was not a clear, straight line, but wandered from side to side, as is the way with country lanes when they run down hill, and it required some clever steering to keep the sled from running into the ruts; and if a boy less skilful than his fellows did not keep it on its proper course, the spill which followed only brought forth more shrieks of laughter.

They stopped their game as we passed, and we asked them the nearest way to St. Ives. They all knew, and all answered together, but there was a difference of opinion amongst them as to whether it was quickest to "keep right along Plum-street," or to go up the hill and on to the main road. Anyway, we found we were going in the right direction, so, leaving them

to settle between themselves which was the nearest way, we passed up the lane and found Plum-street.

We did not hesitate long in our choice. Up on the left was the high road, which we knew so well, but to the right, Plum-street, a grassy lane, ran down the gully between green, green fields, and over the top, and away. A flock of peewees flew across the paddocks, calling loudly "this-way, this-way," so that way we went, and a quarter of an hour's walk along the grassy path and through the bush brought us out at the foot of a long red lane, with orange orchards all along one side. Little neat cottages with shining windows faced the afternoon sun, and the golden balls gleamed amongst the glossy leaves. On the opposite side of the road the big uncut timber reared tall tops, and the rays of light came in long shafts through the gum trees and the she-oak needles; while a couple of tip-carts, resting in week-end idleness at the side of the road, made a little patch of blue against the red of the earth and the green of the bush. Over the rise of the hill we could see a group of pine trees which looked familiar, and as we drew nearer we found that we were right at St. Ives itself, and nearly at the end of our walk.

For our walk had an object this day—the object which draws most people to the little old-world village. We were in search of oranges, and there is no fruit so sweet and juicy as the oranges picked from the trees at St. Ives. Perhaps the name lends a flavour, and perhaps the walk in search of them

gives an added sweetness; but these oranges of St. Ives are worth going a long way to taste. So we walked through the orchard and picked the yellow fruit, and ate it as we went, without the aid of knives or plates; and believe me, that is the only way to get the best of an orange. Then we came across some trees of Sevilles, and my housewifely soul turned to thoughts of marmalade; so we added a dozen of the pretty things to our bag, and then made once more for the road and home.

We chose the highway this time, for the gullies are dank when the sun has left them. Far to the westward the trees on the hilltops made a fine black etching against the topaz sky; to the east the tall timber stood behind the orchards; away to the south glittered the lights of the city, twinkling like brilliants in the clear air, and overhead the comet streamed across the sky. The bag of oranges was heavy, and a good six miles lay before us; but our hearts were light, for the motors had all gone home, and what is six miles on a silent, starlit road?

The Gorgeous Gully

I KNOW a gully which would set a miser's heart a-beating, for from end to end it is lined with purest gold. Weeks ago the warm weather drove the wattles from our bush, but "yellow-haired September" has brought in their place a blaze of gold, before which the wattle pales into insignificance—the gold of a million million pea-flowers.

The gully is long and steep, and the sides go up and up by rocky ways; but the roughness is hidden beneath that gleaming carpet, and the steep slopes only serve the better to display its gorgeousness. Wherever you stand you look up or down upon this yellow bed of blossom. The graceful flower stems of the tall dillwynia floribunda wave towards the stiff regal heads of the pultenea stipularis, till all are mixed and mingled in a riotous confusion. Through the sprawling branches of the scribbly gums the sunbeams come dancing down, and are caught in the growing sunshine of the flowers. Sometimes a big grey rock tries to frown upon the scene, but the gay blossoms wave their arms before him and hide his roughness. The bees do not frown, for they love the honey-laden blossoms, and the air is heavy with their drone. The spinebills love them, too, and dart hither and thither, as if unable to choose where all is so desirable. The little stream that goes singing down the valley bed

makes a mirror for the beauties here and there in a rocky pool; and if it murmurs now and then at leaving the flowers in the upper slopes, it does not grumble long, for it is hastening to fresh beauties in the lower gorge.

For the wealth of this valley seems inexhaustible, and never has spring poured forth her treasures with so lavish a hand. From the upper slope you look down across the myriad yellow flower spikes to the lower valley, where amongst the deep soft green of the sassafras and water-gums countless splashes of gold tell of the existence of still another pea-flower (pultenea flexilis). This one is sweeter and more graceful than its stately sister on the hillside, and spreads in tall slender shrubs all over the creek bed, till the sun itself seems to have slipped into the valley and lost its way.

And then, as if this wealth of gold were not enough, the "flaunting extravagant queen" has spread the slopes beneath the rocks with a carpet of the pale pink boronia. All amongst the taller golden blossoms it grows, and if it cannot vie in gorgeousness with them, its sweetness and delicacy give it a charm of its own, unknown to the more flaunting flowers. And down in the rocks of the creek itself great clumps of the wild dog-rose (bauera rubioides) add an old-world note to the scheme.

If you had to travel a hundred miles to see my gully I am sure you would set off in your cars and carriages at once.

But as it is only a few miles from the city itself, and the little creek runs down into Middle Harbour, you whiz past it, and in searching farther afield for the beauties of the spring you miss the loveliest spot in all the bush—my gorgeous gully.

The Sweet o' the Year

SWEET of sound and scent and sight, the sweetest month of the year, sweet September. The world is full of sweetness, the song of birds, the scent of flowers, and the opening buds all joining in the eternal spring-song. In the garden the little baby flowers are a-growing and a-blowing—pansies, daisies, and the tiny banksia roses, have all come out to enjoy the freshness of the world. Later on the more gorgeous sisters will arrive in all their glory, but at present the smaller blossoms bloom unrivalled. Over fences and arches hang cascades of lilac glory where the wistaria reigns for a few brief weeks; shining red tips show where the new leaves have sprouted out on the rose bushes, which but a month ago were bald and clipped; in the borders, primroses gleam against soft leaves, almost compensating for the loss of the violets which so lately enriched the edges with their sweetness; stocks and phlox, anemones and ranunculus, make brilliant patches on green lawns, and beds of poppies hold their own against all comers. The garden is an unending joy and a bower of sweetness.

In the orchard are rows of trees all gaily decked in pink and white. Near by, the soft, red blush tells where more blossoms are waiting their turn to dazzle the world with beauty, while the tender green on the other trees

speaks of blossoming done, and the approach of an early harvest.

But sweet though garden and orchard are, it is out in the bush that September has been most bountiful. Every tree and shrub and little weed is clothed in beauty. On the heathlands the wealth of sweetness is bewildering to the senses. Tall bushes of the lemon-coloured phebalium scent the air with a citron perfume; beneath them the prickly, white leucopogon sheds a nutty odour, softening the aromatic harshness of the native roses which start up from the sand all round. Beneath the shelter of the taller bushes a sister boronia flourishes finely, and sends up masses of bright pink flowers through the branches of the protecting bush. Pink is the order of the day—where gold does not prevail. The eriostemons—daintest perhaps of all the spring blossoms—are showing masses of pink stars amongst the rocks and sand; tall sprays of the pink epacris stand in regiments amongst the green tea-trees, and wherever the land dips down to a hollow, sprengelia spreads a rosy carpet over the marshy places. On the uplands the woolly buds of the dwarf apple are flushed to a deep crimson with pleasure at the knowledge of the creamy blossoms they will soon unfold—blossoms which will intoxicate the bees by their wealth of sweetness.

In some places the reign of the pink is disputed by the yellow, where the dillwynia, pultenia, bossiaea and many others wave golden blossoms which dance and flutter on the

breeze like a thousand tiny butterflies. At times the gold stands out in bright relief against some vivid green, at times melts feelingly into the soft brown tints of the neighbouring she-oaks; but always it catches the eye with its intensity and brings the sunshiny feeling to the heart.

The flannel flowers are not yet properly opened, though here and there a white star flower gleams out. In the half-blown buds little bright beetles rest snugly, nestling down on to the soft woolly bed with its velvet coverlet. There never was a sweeter, cosier cradle than the half-shut bud of a flannel flower, and they are happy beetles that rest thereon.

L.H. *Tall sprays of pink epacris*

But sweeter far than blossoms, or buds, or beetles, are the birds. The air is filled with their sweetness, the liquid note of one honey-eater, the sharp call of another, the ringing cry of a thrush, the clear bright call of a thickhead, the sweet dropping notes of the native canary—they fill the land with joy and melody, and by their swift and joyous flight they seem to bring the world a little nearer heaven.

But sweeter even than their songs is the sight of the baby birds. Of all the treasures that spring brings, there is nothing more entrancing than the sight of a dainty bird's nest, swung like a cradle on the twigs of a young sapling, or rocking gently to and fro in the soft breeze, while within two tiny nestlings snuggle together, or peep little inquisitive faces over the edge into the big new world.

In their very earliest stages they are not always things of beauty, these baby birds. They are blind, and all their covering is a few tufts of thin down, and the greatest part of them seems to be a huge yellow mouth, which they hold up insistently to be filled. But a week changes all that, and the little feather buds which follow on the down, throw off their sheaths, and the ugly, squirming little object is transformed into a soft ball of downy feathers, a stage at which all young birds are wholly delightful.

Baby birds are easily seen. They have not learned caution, and sing for their supper all through the day, reckless of all the speering bodies who may be about. One has only

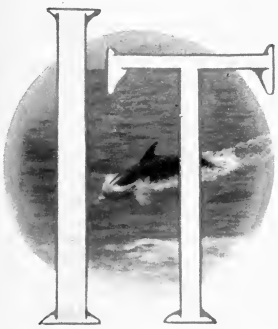
to follow the gentle sound of their peckings, and they are soon apparent, perching in some low sapling. Their parents fly busily about them, and utter sharp warnings to them to

Swung like a cradle J.R.

YELLOW-TUFTED HONEY-EATER

be quiet, when the cracking of a twig tells of an intruder. All birds have special warning notes for their young. The

yellowbob says, "chut, chut." The coachwhip has a funny throaty note quite different to her ordinary ringing call; the wagtail and the Jacky Winter both chatter angrily; the little fantail utters a single note, sharper than her usual squeaky warble, and so on. And the baby birds obey immediately, and are dumb. But, like little boys and girls, they cannot be quiet long; and if they hear no noise themselves, their chirping soon breaks out again, and their little voices add a new fresh note—the note of young lives—to the sweet spring song.



On the Reef

IT was Anniversary Day, and all the world seemed to be going out to enjoy itself. Boats and trams and trains were laden with throngs of holiday-makers, girls in shady hats and white dresses, young men in light summer suits, children and parents all in holiday garb, and all wending their way to the races, the cricket match, the regatta, or to the sunny beaches and the white-foamed breakers The bluest of blue skies looked down on the bluest of blue seas, scarcely rippled as yet by the light north-easter. White sails of every size drifted slowly over the harbour's face, on their way to the starting line. Flags waved from pole and mast in a hundred shades and shapes, and from the excursion boats the music of band and violin floated across the sunny day. It was such a holiday as only Sydney knows—a day when young and old join in their pleasure, and Nature herself seems bent on celebrating the great occasion.

But though I love a good-natured happy-go-lucky holiday crowd, a whole day spent amongst the noise and excitement tires; the languor of the late summer was in my blood, and I

felt that to mix and mingle with the moving crowd would be a weariness to flesh and spirit. I loved to see them enjoying their holiday in their own way, but I wanted to enjoy my holiday in mine—and mine was a quieter and more peaceful way.

"Let us go out to the Reef," I said, "There we are sure to find quietness."

So to the Reef we went; out from the village by the tram which leads to the northern end of the beach; over the hill, and through the Camp City on the other side, by a grass grown track to the third beach; across another cliff path more rugged than before, along still another beach, and at last to the Reef itself.

Have you ever spent an hour on a reef when the tide is out? Have you paddled about amongst the fairy pools, and watched the little fishes dart through the weeds, or the old crabs scuttle away into the crevices? Have you seen the sea anemones bloom in their own sea gardens, and watched the star-fish gleaming beneath on the pale, clear sand? If you haven't done all this—even at the risk of scratched feet and draggled skirts—then you have missed a lot of the joy of living. You may be absolutely ignorant of the wild life that exists there, you may not know a limpet from a tadpole; but if you give youself up to it, the charm of the reef will fold you and hold you with a power too subtle for words. And if you have the tiniest knowledge of the wonders to be found amongst

the rocks, every step you take, every little pool, will reveal fresh treasures.

The tide was not at its best when we reached the reef, but it was still low enough for us to spend a couple of hours among the pools. Our walking boots were quickly changed for sand-shoes, brought for the purpose, for the coralline growth on the rocks is very cruel to tender feet. My short skirts were shortened still further, and then we were ready for the fray.

If you go into the bush to watch the birds, or gather the flowers, you often spend a whole afternoon in a fruitless quest. If you go to collect shells on the beach, you often find it as bare as if

> "Seven maids with seven mops
> Swept it for half a year"

but on a reef you are never disappointed. There is always something to be found among the rocky pools, some treasure to be unearthed by the turning of a stone.

And this day was no exception. On the side of the rocks, well below high-water mark, we found some rare and beautiful chitons. The chiton, it might be explained to the uninitiated, is that flat shell beastie which every one has seen clinging to the rocks at low tide, and whose shell is not in one solid piece like the limpet's, but is a series of overlapping plates encircled by a girdle. These beasties are often possessed of exquisite sculpture in their shells, and when seen beneath the water are radiant in colouring, although, like most seaborn things,

their beauty soon fades when carried away from their natural surroundings. Across the sandy bottom of one pool a sea hare was travelling. His bright yellow skin gleamed through the shallow water as he dragged himself forward by a series of curves, and a weird little creature he looked with his funny long ears and crouched up body.

In almost every pool were to be seen the little soft molluscs which have no shells, their varying hues of mauve, pink, lilac, red, yellow, and brown glowing softly under the water. In one pool, bigger and deeper than the rest, a tiny octopus lurked amongst the weed; he was no bigger than the palm of my hand, and in colour of the loveliest indigo blue and black With his little tentacles waving softly he certainly didn't look as if he could do any harm, and as he never grows any bigger he probably would not. Through the same pool darted some old friends—the toadfish, or "toad-oes" of our childhood; quaint little chaps they are with their speckled brown and white skins, and stumpy tails. They looked so happy in their quiet home, that we were glad there were no small boys about to disturb their peace; for boys have a most horrid habit about these little fish. They catch them and roll them with their feet on the rocks, until the poor little creatures swell out like a balloon; then the young savages—for boys are nothing else—throw their victims at a rock, where they burst. Fortunately there were no young monsters on our reef, so the toad-oes swam in peace in the sunny water. Little crested rock-fish

moved about in the rock basins, too, and with their fern-like fins and their skins of grey and brown and green it was hard to pick them out from the seaweed. Down at the sea's edge grew the cunjeboy, brown and red, upon the rocks. Everyone knows what a fascinating squirt it has when it is touched, but few realize it is a living creature. From a crevice in the rocks a green eel poked his little sharp head out from the weeds; he also is an easy prey to the small boy, who, when he goes a-hunting, pokes a stick into the water, at which the eel snaps angrily and so is caught.

Then there were many, many shells, periwinkles, whelks, tritons, Venus ears, all alive, and moving here and there There were hermit crabs and sea-urchins, worms and other strange sea-creatures that have none but long scientific names.

But its shells and fishes were not the Reef's only charms this day. Strutting about on the outer edge were two black birds with deep orange bills and legs. They were sooty oyster-catchers in search of their lunch. They poked about amongst the oyster beds, and whenever they caught an oyster napping the strong flat bill was quickly prized between the shells, and the occupant was taken out. This bill, flat like a pair of scissors, is particularly suited for the work, and the oyster has no chance once it is inside the shell.

Through the green clear waves just off the Reef came darting shorewards a shoal of big fish—kingfish we thought. Just one glimpse of them we caught as they flashed forward, then

they disappeared into the darker depths. Then over the water, splashing and dashing, came a school of porpoises in holiday mood; some darted rapidly through the sea, others rolled over lazily in the still water, but one and all seemed to be enjoying the day to the utmost. On the surface of the water, not far from the rocks, sat a mutton-bird fast asleep. Up and down he floated, riding dry and secure above every wave. We watched him for a long time, as he drifted quietly southwards, a rusty brown-grey speck on the green waves, until he was lost to sight in the distance.

Then, while we were eating our lunch, came sailing up four beautiful grey birds. "Reef herons," we whispered excitedly, and kept very still for fear of frightening them. But they took no notice of us. For they, too, were intent on lunch, and swept gracefully down on to the Reef. We had seen the birds before, just odd ones sailing along off shore, as we had stood on the top of some cliff; but to find them here, quite close and quiet, and a whole four of them, was indeed a bit of luck. For nearly an hour the four beauties stalked about the Reef, feeding on the many crustaceans, and we were able to admire them to our hearts' content. At last something seemed to frighten them, and all four rose suddenly and swept away northwards.

But they did not leave us lonely. A flock of gannets had come flying up from the south, and we watched them feeding about half a mile from the shore. Evidently it was a regular restaurant, for the birds stayed in one spot, diving again and

NEST OF SOOTY OYSTER-CATCHER L.H.

again after their fish lunch. There is something extraordinarily fascinating in a feeding flock of gannets. High up they fly, white specks against the blue sky; then, with folded wings, they drop, beak first, straight into the sea with a splash that can be seen a mile away. For hours the birds were feeding, and the supply of fish seemed to be endless, for as the time passed, more and more birds joined the feeding throng; and, mingled with the gannets, the black-capped terns, those graceful swallow-like birds, also dived and caught their prey.

But the afternoon was wearing on. The Reef was almost hidden now by the tide, and the walk back was a long one. So we set our faces homewards. Back along the beaches, now rosy in the setting sunlight, over the cliffs and away we tramped, happy and healthily tired. We carried no specimen bag; we had left our treasures where we found them—"With the wind and the waves and the sea's uproar"; but in our hearts we carried the magic memory of a golden day.

The Snow Bush

IT is no wonder that the red gums rear their heads so proudly, no wonder that they blush a rosy pink with pleasure; for in the early spring they are the guardians of the most fascinating parts of all the bush. They do not crowd together as some trees do, but leave wide, open spaces beneath their branches, where the smaller things can grow in freedom. And grow they do, with a will and a vigour that tell of the rich bounty of the good brown earth.

Here and there a young turpentine sends up his head, or a she-oak turns a thousand dew-wet needles to the morning sun, while every now and then a clump of young gum suckers gleams a rosy red. But the chief joys of the red gums, the treasure which they guard so proudly, is the snow-bush. All the open spaces beneath their boughs are white with its blossoms; a thousand thousand tiny snowy daisies shine from every bush. Sometimes they form a small, almost solid white mass, a foot or so from the ground; sometimes the bushes stand tall above your head, their long graceful sprays waving gently as you pass. Their delicate fragrance, of a honey-sweetness, floats on the clear air, and it is little wonder that the bees drone drowsily amongst the blossoms.

For weeks past the bush has been a-gleam with these white flowerets. Close beside them grows the little myrtle-leafed

wattle, with its rosy buds and fluffy cream balls; but exquisite as it is, it has to take second place to the snow-bush. Its

UNDER THE RED GUMS L.H.

botanic name, more suited than most names, denotes its right to shine supreme above its neighbours—Aster ramulosus it

is called, and its million stars make a "milky way" beneath the trees. It belongs to the same big family as the Michaelmas daisy and the China aster, and can hold its own beside them both. There are few bush flowers that look so sweet in the house, and if you can put it into water soon after it is plucked, it will last for a couple of weeks, and bring the spirit of spring into your rooms.

It has dozens of relations throughout Australia, and some botanists call them olearia, instead of aster. But soft and pretty as the other name is, "aster" is a more fitting title for our snow-bush which, with its million gleaming stars, covers the bush during July and August, and makes the red gums glow with pleasure.

SNOW BUSH (ASTER RAMULOSUS) J.R.

Autumn Jewels

YESTERDAY it rained all day, but this morning the sun rose up in a sky that knew no clouds. Not even a white fleck remains to tell of the big grey clumps which lowered angrily a few short hours ago. But the soft, sweet rain has left its mark on tree and grass and garden bed. The paddock across the road is gleaming like a jewelled carpet, the bracken holds a million gems in its graceful fronds, the young gum suckers wave their ruby tips towards the emerald of the sheltered shrubs beyond. At the far end of the clearing where the tall trees are growing, diamonds and pearls glow and glisten on a myriad leaves of blue gum, turpentine and slender she-oak. They are held in a setting of silver, when the long grey branches of the gums enfold them, or in the deeper-hued platinum when the turpentines and she-oaks make the background; and no nimble-fingered jeweller ever yet worked such a magic tracery as those wild bush trees. From amongst their upright trunks come more jewels; the flute-like notes of the magpie carolling in the crisp air, fall like softly dropping pearls upon the autumn day; high in the tree tops the Jacky Winter sends his sweet, round voice across the morning; his song is daily growing fuller and longer as his beloved cold weather draws near. In amongst the saplings and grasses two tomtits are sending forth a trickle of soft

NEST AND EGGS OF BUTCHER BIRD J.R.

music; as they flit about, the sunbeams catch their yellow backs, and the world is the richer for two discs of purest gold.

A group of little tree runners have just come flying fussily across the road and are now busily engaged in clearing my side fence of insects; as they move along, head downwards, and fly from spot to spot the sun catches the orange band across their wings, and they look like some rare Oriental gems against the dull brown of the palings. Now a razor-grinder has come to join them, uttering his quaint grinding note, as if he were filing the gems.

Up on the hillside an autumn orchard stretches in beauty, with a wealth of precious stones; the red leaves of the persimmons burn like fiery opals, and the late apples, filled with "ripeness to the core," blush like tourmalines amongst their green leaves, while here and there a solitary quince shines out like a yellow sapphire from its silver setting. And from the orchard come the rarest jewels of all—the full, round, ringing notes of the butcher birds. Free from the domestic duties which keep them in the valley during the summer, they are now to be heard each day singing amongst the trees, and springs holds no sweeter melodies. On the fresh morning air their song comes with a richness that only autumn gives. It tells of "mellow fruitfulness," of deeds accomplished, of a happy harvest; and as I listen, the words of the sweetest of sweet singers come as a soft accompaniment to the bird's song:

> "Where are the Songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
> Think not of them, thou hast thy music too."

Nature and the Materialist

"I DON'T see what you get out of this nature study," said the materialistic one, helping herself a second time to strawberries, and emptying half the cream-jug on to them. "Of course it's very pretty and romantic, this caring for flowers and birds and creepy things, but what do you get out of it?"

"Nothing to eat or drink," I murmured, with an eye on her piled-up plate.

"No, nor much to wear, I should say," she retorted, with a glance at my washed-out holland.

I laughed. "Holland's a good colour for the bush; it doesn't show the stains when you crouch under a low bush and squat on the ground."

"Ugh, and have things crawling up your sleeves and down your neck. I know."

I looked at her pink, slightly puffed cheeks, her round, clear, rather colourless grey eyes, her grey hair brushed smartly up over a frame—and wondered if she did know. I

could not imagine that placid face and immaculate head poking through bushes and prickly undergrowth. I looked at her slightly over-plump figure, well laced in, and erect in its most correct gown of grey muslin. No, that was not the figure for creeping stealthily through bush and scrub, for hiding behind trees, or flattening on to the ground. It was the face and the figure of one whose interest in botany would travel no farther than a ripe, juicy peach or a strawberry plant, and to whom the only birds that mattered were a fat goose or plump young duckling.

I pushed the strawberries again towards her, and said, "Oh, it just amuses me."

For how could one ever hope to explain to that placid, well-fed person the joy of the bush. How could she be expected to know the delight of rising with the rising sun to listen to the world's great morning song, to know the thrill that comes at the sound of the first nesting note, the tense excitement of creeping, creeping quietly and stealthily through shrubs and bushes to peep into the nest of some new bird friend? How could she know the rush of pleasure which floods one's being at the sight of the first spring orchid, or the scent of the first spring bloom?

And how could one ever hope to explain to the owner of those clear, colourless eyes, the peace that wraps one round under the shade of the big gums and turpentines, or the feeling of content that creeps into one's heart at the sighing song

of the leaves? Gladly would she pay a guinea to hear the singer of world-wide advertisement; but the song of the bush is free—and worthless. Those not-too-well-shaped ears, with their little diamond rings, were never made to listen to the gentle conversation of the bush; to her it would bring no soothing balm after the sting of human tongues. She would never know the comfort to be had from laying one's hot, angry cheek on the cool grass of some shady gully. When the world had lost its savour, the dash of the cold sea spray could not bring back to her the salt and sweet of life. The racing wind only blew her hair out of place, and

The nest of a new bird friend J.R.

LARGE-BILLED SCRUB-WREN

made her irritable; it had no power to blow all dark thoughts and phantoms from the corners of her mind.

But then, of course, her mind had no corners. It was round and sleek like her body. Walled in by a narrow little circle of things to eat and drink and wear and buy, how could it ever reach out to the vast illimitable spaces? How could she ever understand what you "get out of this nature fad?"

So I passed her the cream, turned the talk to the new summer hats, and left her to the enjoyment of the things that she could grasp.

Along a Garden Avenue

ITS name is more suitable than names generally are, for, though on one side it faces an open reserve and looks away to the river, on the other it is bordered by garden after garden, each with its different wealth of beauty. Black painted fences succeed grey stone walls, white palings join red brick, and over and above all grow hedges of hawthorn, privet and laurel, with here and there an intruding briar to lend sweetness and colour. Jealously these hedges hide the beauties behind them; but the unfettered scents of lilies, mignonette and roses float over, bringing me a picture of white lilies and standard roses, and of stiff box hedges surrounding beds of tall pink foxgloves, Canterbury bells and pansies—for they must be old-fashioned those gardens hiding behind the tall straight hedges.

But, though the flowers are sheltered from prying eyes there are treasures within the gardens that the hedges cannot hide—and these are the trees. Oaks and elms, willows and limes, ashes and sycamores—they lean out above the sentinels of hawthorn and laurel, and throw their friendly shade across the avenue. The eye revels in their beauty, and their very names are a joy, each one laden with a message of old time song or story. The black branches of the spreading oak rouse stirring memories of brave deeds; the sycamore recalls sweet Desdemona; "hard by a poplar shook alway," and a group of

sweet-scented limes are fragrant with memories of Heine Each tree has its charm of romance and the soul should be soothed and satisfied. Yet a vague unrest stirs within me, a feeling of incompleteness which I cannot understand. Then I turn a bend in the avenue and know what was missing.

Before me, rearing its splendid head above all others, stands a gum tree. Covered with blossom, it is a mine of sweetness to the hundreds of honey-eaters which are noisily feeding amongst its branches. In this Garden Avenue, stocked with trees and flowers from far-off climes, the gum tree, with its honey-eaters, stands out in bold relief, fresh and strong and free. Its tall, slim trunk rises above the tallest oak, and its branches stretch proudly skywards, as if to leave below the thought, that here in its own land, it is a stranger amongst strangers.

But to an Australian heart it fills a want that no trees of old romance can satisfy. It does not send its branches across the road to gossip with each passer-by, but it lifts its head regally toward heaven, and speaks, not of a by-gone glory, not of old song and story, but of a golden future to be. It tells of a land where battles are bravely fought; where courageous hearts have won their way through drought and flood; where men have struggled hand to hand with Nature herself, and conquered. It is an emblem of the nation to be, strong, fearless and erect, living no longer in the stories of the past, but carving its own history through the unknown future.

And I pass along my way, glad with the knowledge that beyond the narrow sweetness of the Garden Avenue there are myriads of tall gum trees telling the same brave lesson to all who will hear.

The First Daffodil

THE year is full of joyful emotions and surprises to the flower lover and grower, but of all the sensations that a garden brings there is none quite like the joy of seeing one's first daffodil for the first time. Daffodil growers are admittedly "daft"; roses, dahlias, carnations and stocks all have their devotees, but none have their lovers in such complete subjection as the daffodil. The real daffodil-slave grudges no time or thought or money given to his darling; it is all poured out lavishly for the very best cause.

But, though the old admirer runs through the gamut of delicious sensations every season, he never again experiences just the same thrill as he felt when his first daffodil opened her golden glory to the world. And, though the old grower can count his treasures by the score, the latest comer has one gem which he can never know again.

From the moment the little jagged crack runs across the brown earth, and the tiny green spear shows its tip, the excitement begins. Every morning the garden bed is carefully scanned for more cracks, and the sight of each fresh tip gives a new thrill. Every day the height of the first little spear is noted ,and calculations are made as to how long it will be before it is really "up." The days are no longer marked as Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, but as "the day when the

daffodil came up." With gentle impatience the gardener watches the tiny spear shoot higher and higher, till, followed by others, it has grown into a tall group of spears; then one morning it is found that the spears are parting, and up from their centre is gently pushing that most fascinating thing in the whole world—a baby bud.

Now, indeed, the excitement really begins. "What will it be?" is the question. "Long trumpet or short? Emperor or Sir Watkin?" Not that it really matters, for whatever its shape or size it will still be a daffodil. And so the gardener waits and watches, and by degrees the little bud comes farther and farther into the sunshine; the soft, fine sheath holds tightly round the curled-in petals, as though loth to loosen its treasure; but the petals inside have felt the sun's kiss, and are striving to reach the sunbeams, so the soft sheath stretches and stretches its arms in vain; the petals are too eager for it, and push it away with all their might, till one morning the sheath finds it is overpowered and gives way graciously. Slowly it draws back and makes room; and shyly, now that they have really had their way, the silky petals uncurl, and shake their crumples out in the breeze.

And the gardener, who has been anxiously watching the friendly contest between sheath and petals for some days, comes out very early that morning to find that the earth is beautified by one new treasure, and a golden jewel is waving across the grey-green of his flower-bed. From that moment

his subjugation is complete, and he is bound hard and fast by the fascination of the lady in the "frock of Lincoln green."

Her very name is full of charm. Shakespeare told us that a rose might change her name and be as sweet, but he knew that there was no other word could half describe the beauty of the

> "Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty."

Herrick knew it, too, and Spenser and Drayton and Wordsworth, and all the poets and lovers that have ever been. "Daff-o-dil!" It is as softly sweet as the ringing of the flower's own golden bell. It is as full of grace and stateliness as rose or dahlia, yet can be as lovable and intimate as a daisy in its homely guise of "daff-a-down-dilly."

Soon the flowers will be with us in myriads, and our eyes will feast upon them in masses in the flower-sellers' baskets, or in golden clumps,

> "Beneath the trees
> Fluttering and dancing in the breeze."

But, though our hearts will rejoice in their beauty, and our arms will be greedy to embrace them, there will never again be just the same delicious joy that we felt when the silken sheath gave way, and the golden trumpet of our first daffodil sounded the opening note of the spring song.

Lapping up the Stars

"DON'T you think it is rather risky," said Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, "to throw up a fixed income for the sake of something so uncertain?"

The Enthusiast's eyes sparkled. "I would rather earn a shilling a day at the thing that's worth while, than a thousand a year grubbing at work I loathe for people I despise."

"A shilling a day will hardly pay for crusts," said the elder, dryly.

"But it will leave me the illusion of lapping up the stars," retorted the Enthusiast.

"And very little else! Still, if you prefer stars to sovereigns—well, it's your own life!"

"Yes, and the only one I'm sure of, so I mean to make the most of it; and piling sovereigns is a very poor occupation for a lifetime. There's better gold than that to be had for the taking."

"Perhaps you're right," with a most unworldly touch of wistfulness. Then, with a shrug, "but I prefer the sovereigns myself; they're tangible."

The conversation was finished; Mr. Worldly-Wiseman had pronounced the final judgment, had spoken the last grown-up word on the subject. "They're tangible"—therefore desirable and comprehensible; they can be touched and counted,

saved and spent; they are something that everyone can understand and value. But this business of stars—well, leave it for dreamers and poets; it's a harmless fad. And the Enthusiast, with a laugh of good-natured scorn for the man whose mind could not soar beyond the spending power of a sovereign, went on his way with the whole wide world before him.

What mattered it to him if the gleam ahead should never turn into solid sovereigns; gold is not the only thing that glitters. Age would have us believe so, but youth knows better. For youth and enthusiasm together there are worlds to be conquered whose very existence is undreamed of by the worldly-wise. "Give me," says Age, "a fine house, a warm coat, a big banking account, a motor car, and a good cook, and I ask nothing more."

But Youth laughs, and demands a cause to champion, a road to tramp, the scent of the grass, the song of the wind, and the light of the stars, and Age can have the rest.

So it has been from the beginning and so it will be while there are trees for the wind to whistle through, or stars to shine on summer nights. And happy it is that things should be so, and bad and sad indeed the day when Youth is content to give up the ideal for the real.

Yet every day the pressure of Age is greater to force out of life all that is beautiful and desirable. "Let us be practical," cry the grown-ups. "There is no place, no time

for dreaming." And Youth is dragged from his star-gazing to learn bookkeeping; the poems are snatched from his hands to make place for the ledger. Ideals are all very well for poets, he is told, but there is no room for them in the business world. He must give up dreaming now, and become a man of common sense. They stuff his ears with business platitudes, so that he may not hear the song of the wind; they dazzle his eyes with electric lamps, so that he may not gaze at the stars; they tell him that motor cars are better than his own strong feet, so that he may think no more of the long red road. And when they have robbed him of all that made youth beautiful, and bound him tight with their cruel bonds, they smile with satisfaction and say, "Ah, here is a sensible, clever young fellow; he will make his way—he will be a rich man."

And not for one moment do they dream that they are digging at the very foundation of all they most dearly prize. It is the dreamer, the idealist, who through history has opened the way for the man of action. It was the spirit of romance and adventure that sent the old navigators out into unknown seas—and they steered by the stars. It was the boy who sat idly watching the kettle boil who gave us our railroads and ocean liners; it was the idealists who abolished slavery, and who gave us the laws which guard and protect us. It is the dreamer who coaxes from nature the secrets which fill the coffers of the worldly-wise; the man of action follows quickly

and seizes the opportunity, but the way has been opened by the man of dreams. Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, blind in his own conceit, gives no heed to the seer who has opened up the way, or else pushes him aside as a foolish fellow who does not know how to use his opportunities. Or, unkindest cut of all, he drags the dreamer's head down from the clouds, and claps on it the silk hat of business commonplace.

But—and happy for the world that it is so—despite all efforts to bring the whole world into the kingdom of commerce, where gold is the only sovereign, there are still to be found foolish young men and women who cast aside the fleshpots, turn their backs on cheque-books, and motor cars, and, like dog Patou, prefer to follow the shepherd with a single crust in his wallet, so long as they keep "the illusion of lapping up the stars."

Printed by W. C. Penfold & Co., 183 Pitt Street, Sydney