

RAMBLES WITH NATURE STUDENTS.

By Mrs. BRIGHTWEN, Author of "Wild Nature Won by Kindness," etc.

MOTHS.

DURING the past few years I have made the acquaintance of a good many members of the moth family.

A small room built out of the conservatory

their cradles, and I shall watch them turn into chrysalides, and eventually into moths.

The smallest specimens of this destructive tribe that I have yet met with are the cork moths; they lay their eggs in the corks of old sweet wine with the result that the grubs bore

holes into the said corks, and thus let in the outer air and turn the wine into vinegar, and in this way thousands of bottles of choice wine become spoiled by an enemy so minute as to be very seldom seen in the winged state.

This fact points to the necessity of protecting the corks of valuable wine by sealing-wax or metal capsules.

The name *ficaria* is said to be given to this species because the small tubers somewhat resemble a fig, (*figus*) in shape.

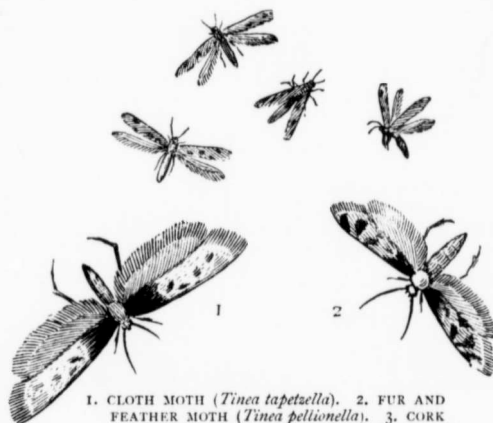
SPIDERS.

A spider's web empearled by hoar frost is indeed "a thing of beauty." To-day every tree-branch, bush and spray is seen to be hung with these jewelled webs, even the lawn is covered with them, and one realises that flies live in a very world of snares unseen by us until the frost reveals them.

There really seems to be a spider fitted to every situation in life.

In our houses reside the *tegemarias*, those black, long-legged, swift running creatures which are the *betes noires* of nervous people, but which, notwithstanding, are full of curious ways and instincts, as I can vouch for, seeing I kept one as a "pet" for more than a year.

I watched with interest its making silken tunnels, laying its bag of eggs in a corner of



1. CLOTH MOTH (*Tinea tapetzella*). 2. FUR AND FEATHER MOTH (*Tinea pellionella*). 3. CORK MOTH (*Oinophila v. flava*). (Much Magnified.)

was found to be too damp for my daily use and was for a while unused in consequence. I find that the moths have been having grand times there; they found out some boxes of curious feathers and reduced them to shreds and atoms, they reared extensive families in the buffalo skin which carpets the floor, a stuffed gazelle has afforded a delightful feeding-ground for another species. I find that a box of owl pellets is swarming with *Tineas*; in fact nothing seems to have come amiss to these little plagues. They can adapt themselves to digest every kind of material, and very diligently do they set to work to reduce feathers, cloth, furs and stuffed animals and birds to a heap of dusty fragments. One is familiar with the ordinary moth cases containing the grubs, and sometimes the small white larvæ make tunnels in the substance they are devouring, but in the room I speak of a certain red plush table-cover contained a number of neat, little oval cells, and in each reposed a fat, white grub, no doubt the maker of the cell. Since the cloth is ruined I have allowed these innocent babies to remain in

THE LESSER CELANDINE (*Ranunculus Ficaria*).

The lesser celandine is amongst the earliest of our spring flowers.

"The first gilt thing
That wears the trembling
pearls of spring."

Wordsworth.

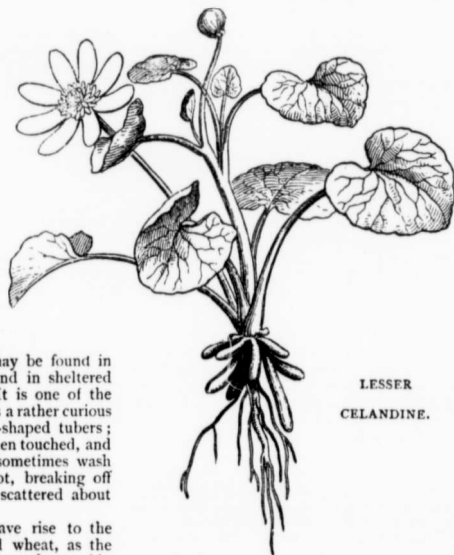
Its bright cheery flowers may be found in this month starting the ground in sheltered nooks or on hedge banks. It is one of the buttercup family, and possesses a rather curious root consisting of small oval-shaped tubers; these break off very readily when touched, and a heavy storm of rain will sometimes wash the earth away from the root, breaking off these tubers and leaving them scattered about on the surface of the ground.

This fact in olden days gave rise to the belief that it sometimes rained wheat, as the small bulbs when detached very much resemble wheat grains.

Like all buttercups the plant is poisonous, but in spite of that its glossy green leaves and golden flowers are welcome to our eyes as tokens of the coming spring.

It may be interesting to observe that in different flowers the petals vary in number from five to nine, and the sepals are equally varied, ranging from three to five or six.

The small honey glands at the base of the petals render this plant attractive to bees and flies, and the flowers thus become fertilised by their visits, but if by reason of its growing in a shady place no insects happen to visit the flowers and they fail to ripen fruit, then the plant has another resource and produces small bulbils in the axils of the leaves, and these in time fall off and become new plants.



LESSER
CELANDINE.

the box it resided in, and concealing it by sticking all over it the legs and wings of the flies it had fed upon until the egg nursery looked only like a bit of old spider's web.

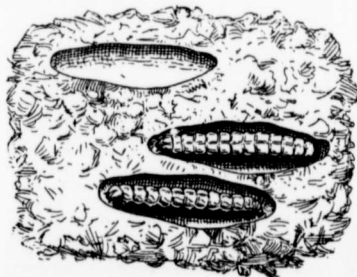
Another species of spider haunts our window sills.

It makes no web but catches flies by lying in wait and springing suddenly upon them; it is called zebra, from its lovely stripes and markings.

In pine-trees we may find a spider of the most vivid green colour weaving small webs to entrap flies, and in some hidden corner it places a little mass of brilliant yellow silk which contains its precious store of eggs.

On the surface of ponds spiders may be seen running swiftly to and fro.

One species elects to reside upon a floating leaf, and on this little raft it must lead rather a precarious life driven about with every gust of wind.



MOTH LARVÆ IN PLUSH CLOTH.