

## THE OLD FORD

THE "rise" was over—one of those brief "rises" of the early year, during which the trout come swiftly to the fly. Lest time should be wasted in repairing broken tackle, I had taken every precaution against fouling my line, and had kept to the open reaches, where, with ease, I could cast over the feeding fish. Satisfied with my sport, I leisurely waded to the bank, laid my rod aside, and rejoiced awhile in the spring-tide day. How good it was to realise that the gloom of winter had passed, that the first of eagerly anticipated days beside the river had already come, that summer, in all its beauty, was drawing near!

In moving up the bank I had chanced to overturn a stone, and thus had exposed the tender shoots of the young grass beneath. My eyes turned to the spot; how plain was Nature's message, written even there! Life had awakened: not the life of the late-winter flowers, blooming in sheltered nooks while yet the snow-clouds gather in the north, or of the fragile water-fly, begun and ended in one sunny hour of noon, but the ageless, changeless life of the green meadow-grass.

From the thickets beside the river, from the little copse on the hillside, and from the budding hazels fringing the near meadows, came the songs of many birds—the clear, sweet notes of the greenfinch, the rapid, jubilant phrases of the chaffinch and the hedge-sparrow, and the full, delicious piping of the blackbird and the thrush. A brown wren, creeping,