

bee-hives, much to the annoyance of the bees; they are sometimes compelled to raise waxen walls at the entrance of the hive to keep out these intruding moths.

The caterpillar of this sphinx varies much in colour, but is usually of a lemon yellow and green with violet stripes on its sides; it is often four or even five inches in length.

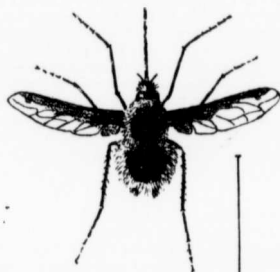
It feeds on the potato, je-samine and deadly-nightshade, but is not often found, because it hides itself in the earth during the day, and creeps out for its food at night.

When labourers are digging up potatoes they frequently find the great chrysalides of this moth, which they invariably call "locusts," "ground-grubs," or "maggots."

I obtained my specimen from a poor woman who was begging her way to some potato-fields where she hoped to obtain work. I learned that she often came across these "locusts" as she called them, when engaged in digging up potatoes, and having received an order for some she duly brought them to me, but unfortunately only one chrysalid survived the winter and reached the perfect stage.

THE HUMBLE-BEE FLY (*Domylius Major*).

The appearance of the graceful humble-bee fly hovering over the early spring flowers is to me one of the welcome signs of spring.



HUMBLE-BEE FLY.

It flutters over my beds of forget-me-not and pulmonaria, and poising on the wing like a humming-bird, it inserts its long and very slender proboscis into each blossom in succession, extracting the honey upon which its delicate life is sustained.

The slightest movement on my part sends it off so swiftly that the eye cannot follow it, and yet it will return after a time and allow me to watch its graceful flights just as long as I remain perfectly still.

It is a fly with a good deal of character, and it differs in many respects from any other with which I am acquainted.

I have sometimes caught a specimen in a soft gauze net and carefully placed it under a glass shade containing a small vase of sweet flowers for its refreshment. At first the fly gives up all for lost and lies on its back with its slender legs in the air as if in a dead faint; but it soon revives, and, softly humming to itself, it hovers gently round the flowers, and when at last assured that there is no outlet for escape, it becomes quite resigned and begins to draw honey from the blossoms until it is satisfied, when it will rest upon a leaf in a contented fashion not in the least minding its loss of liberty.

If my readers will contrast with this the conduct of a newly-caught blue-bottle fly placed under a glass, and think of the wild way in which it will strike itself against its prison walls, buzzing and dashing about in a blind unreasoning fright, I think they will understand what I mean by difference of character in insects.

This might afford a very interesting subject for study.

I believe very little is known about the life-history of this charming insect.

Its larvæ are said to be parasites, feeding upon caterpillars and other insects.

The perfect fly is seen from March to May, but I have not observed it in the summer or autumn months.



FLOWERS OF ASH.

THE ASH.

The ash is now becoming conspicuous by the size of its dark flower and leaf-buds.

This feature has often been noticed by the poets; Bishop Mant speaks of

"Its buds on either side opposed
In couples each to each, enclosed
In caskets black and hard as jet,
The ash-tree's graceful branch beset."

I scarcely ever pass by an ash tree in spring but I recall Lord Tennyson's well-known lines—

"Those eyes
Darker than darkest pansies, and that hair
More black than ashbuds in the front of
March."

As a rule the buds are placed exactly opposite to each other on the branch, but in the illustration they are alternate, as I find is often the case towards the end of the spray.

The flowers of the ash are varied enough to puzzle a young botanist.

Some of the flowers contain stamens, others bear only pistils, and some may be found with both stamens and pistils; these varied blossoms are described in botany as polygamous.

The ash is largely grown in Kent to supply poles for the hop-grounds.

The trees are planted in narrow strips of ground adjoining the fields, and when the young saplings are sufficiently tall they are cut down, and after a few years the stems that have sprouted from the root-stocks are just the straight poles that are required to support the hop-plants.

This process is repeated from time to time so as to maintain the needed supply.

A little wood of this kind is called a "shave," possibly a corruption of the word shaw with which we are familiar.

In olden times the ash was called "The

Husbandman's Tree," as it supplies tough flexible handles for all kinds of tools and agricultural implements.

We may easily distinguish the two kinds of catkins on the birch; the pistil bearing flower is small and upright, whilst the male catkin hangs down and bears the pollen in its bracts. Towards the autumn we shall find the small catkin, which is now erect, will have become



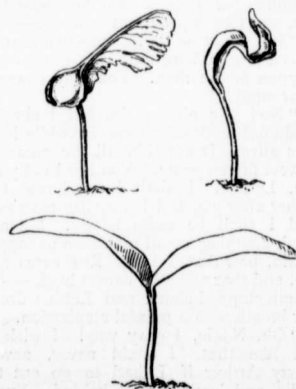
BIRCH CATKIN.

pendant and composed entirely of minute seeds which autumnal gales will carry far and wide.

SEEDLING TREES.

The lawns and flower-beds are now covered with sycamore, beech, and other seedling trees in various stages of growth. As the two seed-leaves or cotyledons, as they ought to be called, differ very much from the mature leaves, it is rather interesting to try and find out each species and thus learn to identify trees in their babyhood.

The sycamores seem to find it difficult to get out of their seed-coats, for here and there we may find one with a stem an inch long with the winged part (*samara*) perched at the top



SYCAMORE SEEDLINGS.