

If I might see another spring  
 I'd listen to the daylight birds  
 That build their nests and pair and sing,  
 Nor wait for mateless nightingale;  
 I'd listen to the lusty herds,  
 The ewes with lambs as white as snow,  
 I'd find out music in the hail  
 And all the winds that blow."

Indeed this spring the winds blew up into a regular "whirly-wind" as the local eyewitnesses expressed it. We had been rejoicing in the giant elm in the park and leading the children under it, gathering the soft rosy blossoms that came before the leaves, and fancying dames in ruffs in Elizabeth's time talking of the Armada, and in the next century gentlemen in ring lettings whispering hair-breadth escapes from Sedgemoor fight that raged the other side of those far hills. But March had hardly shown her face when a hurricane arose and wind and water chased all but the boldest within doors. At 9 one morning anxious faces pressed against the panes watched a moment of unheard of fury in the blast and the giant elm thundered to the ground. Awe came over us as we watched the great root that stood thirteen or fourteen feet in the air and made a sheer wall above the pond which it had created as it was wrenched from the soil. It was pitiful to see the majestic boughs being lopt by degrees and carted away, and the little children climbing in and out of its patient branches, gathering wealth of fire-wood to last for many a long day. How well that it was too early for many little birds to be made homeless; I could find none but perhaps some shared the fate of the ravens in the tree in Losel's wood that White tells of in his *History of Selborne*, that would not be dislodged from their nest: "The tree nodded to its fall," he says, "but still the dam sat on. At last when it gave way the bird was flung from her nest, and, though her parental affection deserved a better fate, was whipped down by the twigs, which brought her dead to the ground."

Indeed, this hamlet, remote from railway trains, is a spot dear to shy birds and beasts as it is to the gipsies. How sure is the swoop of that great white owl that fans the air as it sails away down the field to the old canal and its rushes. It is soothing to a lover of odd and wild creatures to reflect that that bird with eyes like a lake has a young family in an unknown high part of our rambling home. There is no need for you to start with nightly terrors; that is not a poor deserted baby wailing in the night wind; it is the little owlets hooting weirdly to one another, and all unconscious that the baby's mother in the house below has never heard such curious talk before. We are not too instructed here for deep-set superstitions. The next village owns a witch, and I have heard talk in ours of the evil eye, and there is one gentle-hearted dame to whom, not so long ago either, the maids used to go for love philtres. If you looked into her mysterious, deep-set, kindly old eyes you would not wonder at her power. But spite of the spirit of the hamlet the boy there sleeps too soundly in rosy health for any boding owl or "black evet" to disturb his mother's peace.

The country-folk themselves are shy of strange life. It does not win their confidence to protect that green snake which was sunning itself among the pea-stalks. It is a harmless one that could not hurt a child, and it only wriggles sinuously away, raising its pretty head and twitching its forked tongue in wrath

when you try to capture it, yet the villagers count it part of the devil's brood and meet only to be killed. The hedgehogs come sometimes in the lane below and are a choice meal for the gipsies, who tell me of them as they sit and rest in the kitchen before they take their babies down to be christened by a parson near here who has a knack of not frightening them away. Look at that gipsy with her bonny brown baby tied in a neat bundle at her waist: she is as like as a portrait to Fred Walker's vagrant, with her glorious eyes and waves of untamable, black, glossy hair, and all the unconscious freedom of one who has "never slept under a roof."

But before March is over, spite of late biting winds that have robbed us of our fruit harvest, spring herself is with us. The great elms and the little hedge-rows soon have their film of faintest green that clings so tenderly to the grave old branches. In the garden copse where the beeches were golden in late autumn, we can find the ground underfoot alive with loveliness that passes spontaneously from glory to glory. The great splashes of gold and white and purple crocuses are followed by blue and pink-white violets that lie on the turf copse soil like a baby's hand on a ploughman's. Side by side with the primroses that cover the font on Easter Day and comfort the mothers who are reminded of their babies that died and are safe, grow great tufts of purple-red tulips that are cut to be the glory of the festival altar. In between the rock-work are the dark green leaves that soon have sweet-scented narcissus nesting in the middle or the earlier clumps that nod with daffodils.

"That come before the swallow dares  
 And take the winds of March with beauty."

This happy family in the copse that comes up in such a hardy way and yet in such reckless profusion, letting the wild hyacinth of the woods with its blue bells and delicate fretted edges mix with the aristocratic purple columbine, folly's child, and the proud tulip be threaded in and out by the white flowers of the wild garlic, is a natural entrance to a garden meant to be the meeting-ground of the parish. But the primroses under the beeches are not quite as thick and tufted as these under the Scotch fir. What would the garden be without that tree? Every season seems to heighten its beauty. The grey green young spring shoots and the dark resinous cones make fresh notes in the green harmony of branches which droop and spray and cast flickering pencilled shadows on the rough red stem at noon: yet in all its grace the fir is never languid, and its scent has the same stimulating force to the mind as the scent of the chrysanthemum, and a puritan touch which steadies the intoxicating odours of the spring.

All beneath the fir and the ilex and the bay was a barren wilderness a year ago, but now it is a sheet of blue forget-me-not, among which the primroses are nested and the periwinkle trails her wreath. One day we harnessed the donkey and went with baskets to that far dingle on the side of the slope and dug carefully among the lovely moss and roots of the wood and carried home the "spikes of purple orchises" and the blue-bells and the violets and set them under the acacia and the leafy mandarin just breaking into large crumpled innocent-faced blossoms; how full the branches are of great green leaves, and how they seem to stoop and stretch a morning shade for us on the sunny lawn; they are very tough and strong and do not break when the little girl

with yellow hair swings and dances upon them. In a few weeks tall foxgloves, white and pink and purple, peer out from this flowery nook at the carts and wagons and gipsy-vans that pass by to the great world. The dark stains on the pure colour inside the "glue of bells," give a cast of thought to these delicate flowers and a refinement of beauty that is all the more queenly for the simple setting. As Gerrard says, "foxglove groweth in barren sandy grounds and almost everywhere," and if you have despaired of any bed under the trees, see what can be done with some good foxglove seed.

But we need not look to gardens for beauty in this witching time when every blade of road-side grass is touched with magic, and the rain when it comes makes "even the cart-ruts beautiful."

How the sunlight revels in that great may-skirted meadow this warm afternoon, and gilds the buttercups and daisies and the clover-flower and every bit of canary and couch-grass, of hare's-tail and meadow-fescue that bend together under the waves of shadow as only those wonderful grasses with their fairy bodies and merry tossing heads can. The butterflies are come, and down below

"... above the daisy tree,  
 Through the grasses  
 High o'erhead the humble bee  
 Hums and passes."

while up in the air the birds

"Make all the April woods  
 Merry with singing,  
 They shall go flying  
 With musical speeches  
 High overhead in the  
 Tops of the beeches.  
 In spite of our wisdom  
 And sensible talking,  
 We on our feet must go  
 Plodding and walking."

London folk think of grass in a lump, but you have only to watch the may meadows not to wonder at the thirty-seven heads under which Miss Plues describes them in her sweet, old-fashioned book on *Rambles in Search of Wild Flowers*.

Before we say good-bye to spring let us peep at that cluster of blue wind-flowers so very cool and fresh under the tall rose-bushes, all spotted with starry-white stamens and buried in dark green leaves. It grows wild in Wales, but it flourishes and comes up hardily in a shady garden-bed. It is a near cousin of the rare purple pasque anemone which Fitzgerald says grows wild on the Fleam-dyke, near Cambridge, and of which the old English folk believed that it grew only where Danish blood had been spilt.

"I sometimes think that never blows so red  
 The rose as where some buried Caesar  
 bled;

That every hyacinth the garden wears  
 Dropt in her lap from some once lovely  
 dead."

Is it because of Danish blood that our blue anemone has such a pure luxuriance? After you have toiled the five miles to our nearest station, the first place to which the train carries you is Athelney where Alfred burnt the cakes. Perhaps some long-forgotten battle raged in these quiet fields and the bones of Guthrun's fierce soldiers and their fair northern brides wait the eternal term deep down under our tender blue anemones.

CLOTILDA MARSON.

