

## RAMBLES WITH NATURE STUDENTS.

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

## PART I.

It is quite possible to take a walk in the country, through the most beautiful scenery, in lovely weather, with everything to conduce to our enjoyment and invigoration of spirit, and yet to return feeling bored and weary and half inclined to say how dull the country is! That is one side of the picture.

On the other hand I have known young people come back from a ramble in a quiet and rather unpromising country lane, their faces beaming with pleasure, and their hands filled with an odd collection of specimens. Leaves, mosses, stones, anything in fact which had taken their fancy as curious or interesting. Then eager questions are poured forth with bewildering rapidity, and it is easy to see that keen enjoyment has been derived from even this commonplace little stroll. May I point out that the difference between these two results simply arose from acquiring or not acquiring the habit of seeing intelligently what lies around us. If we pass everything by with our mental eyes shut, our physical eyes observe nothing.

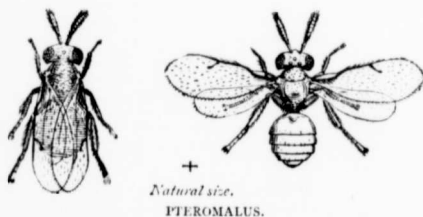
I am going to take for granted that a large number of our GIRL'S OWN PAPER readers belong to the former class, that they are intelligent observers and yet are in need of a guide to help them to understand the thousand and one things that they may see in a country walk.

The curious objects in hedges, trees and fields all have a purpose and a meaning, but very often these need interpretation for those who never have had the opportunity of acquiring facts in natural history.

The practice of putting down the results of each day's ramble, making notes of things seen or obtained, the first appearances of birds and insects, the flowering of trees and plants, will result in the course of a few months in a record possessing a certain value. We can thus compare one year with another and note the differences in each, and the effect of temperature in hastening or retarding the appearance of flowers and insects and the arrival of migratory birds.

The remarks I shall endeavour to make upon all these and other points will be the result of my own actual observations made from day to day and noted down at once, so that any readers who may like to follow this plan can do so with ease if they happen to live in the country or have access to it from time to time.

The first appearances of birds, insects and



flowers may vary somewhat as to date, according to the mildness or severity of the winter, so that I cannot promise that every object that I write about will be found upon the same day in the following year, but probably within a short period earlier or later each object will be discovered.

It need not be thought that one must be far

away from cities in order to learn about nature. I live only twelve miles from Charing Cross, and yet I find abundant subjects for study in my own place and the adjacent common. I think it is especially interesting to try and find treasures in most unlikely localities.

Having on one occasion to wait a whole hour on a pouring wet day at Bedford railway station, I determined to see if I could collect anything to while away the time. Things looked very unpromising outside the station; new houses in the act of being built, heaps of sand and mortar and plenty of mud everywhere seemed hopeless enough; but a bare patch of common, across which ran a newly-gravelled road, caught my eye; there might be possibilities in the gravel, so I made my way to the new road and before long I had the pleasure of finding there several rare fossils, pieces of chalcid and jasper, a shell impression and sundry other treasures; so in spite of rain and wind, my waiting hour passed, not only without weariness, but in positive enjoyment.

I believe I have heard of as many as fifty species of wild flowers being found in a single field, and a well-known scientist discovered an equal number of wild plants in a piece of waste ground in the outskirts of a large town.

It is a little discouraging to begin our natural history diary in November, just when all animal and plant life seem going to sleep for the winter, but as our magazine commences its annual round in this month it has been deemed advisable to begin now. Perhaps we shall find to our surprise that there is hardly a day in the blankest season of the year which will not afford us some sources of interest and much that will lead to pleasant thought and study. The limits of space will not admit of a daily ramble, and bad weather sometimes hinders outdoor study, so for a little variety I have sometimes discoursed upon objects taken from my own museum.

## PTEROMALUS.

Although the weather is very cold I see a quantity of little hardy flies upon the window-pane. Apparently they are unaffected by a temperature which paralyses almost all other insects in the depth of winter.

This special little fly, *Pteromalus*, has a very curious life history, for it lays its eggs in living caterpillars, chrysalides, or hibernating blue-bottle flies. The eggs hatch into very minute grubs which feed upon but do not kill the unfortunate insect until they are full grown, then they emerge from the creature they have preyed upon, turn into tiny chrysalides and in due time appear as perfect flies. They are so excessively small that they can creep through a mere crevice at the back of a picture-frame and make their way under the glass. Thus I have frequently found thirty or forty of them

spread over the inner surface of some valuable print and there was no getting at them but by removing the picture and re-framing it.

These flies perform a very useful office in reducing the number of caterpillars and other noxious insects which would otherwise abound in our gardens.



## THE HOLLY.

The hollies are reflecting the bright morning sunshine which glistens on their polished leaves.

These are, as far as I know, the only trees which have sharply-spiked leaves on the lower branches only, to defend the foliage from the attacks of browsing cattle. Higher up out of reach, the leaves are perfectly smooth and unarmed, resembling those of the camellia. It is difficult to believe such differing leaves can belong to the same tree.

Southerly's well-known lines refer to this peculiarity in the holly leaves.

"O reader! hast thou ever stood to see  
The Holly Tree?  
The eye that contemplates it well perceives  
Its glossy leaves  
Ordered by an Intelligence so wise  
As might confound the Atheist's sophistries.

Below a circling fence, its leaves are seen  
Wrinkled and keen;  
No grazing cattle through their prickly round

Can reach to wound;  
But, as they grow where nothing is to fear,  
Smooth and unarmed the pointed leaves appear.

I love to view these things with curious eye

And moralise;  
And in this wisdom of the Holly Tree

Can emblems see,  
Wherewith perchance to make a pleasant rhyme,  
One which may profit in the after-time.

Thus, though abroad perchance I might appear

Harsh and austere; [intrude  
To those who on my leisure would  
Reserved and rude;

Gentle at home amid my friends I'd be,  
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree."

## OWLS.

We are constantly hearing the brown owl's hoot, both in the daytime and in the dusk, and occasionally I see it and the White Barn owl flitting across the lawn in the twilight.