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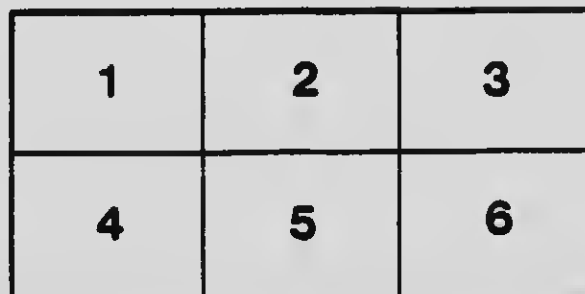
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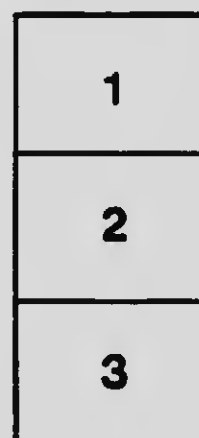
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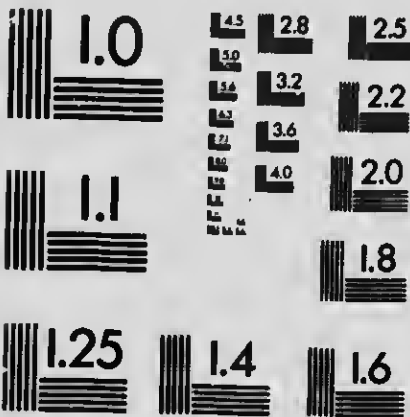
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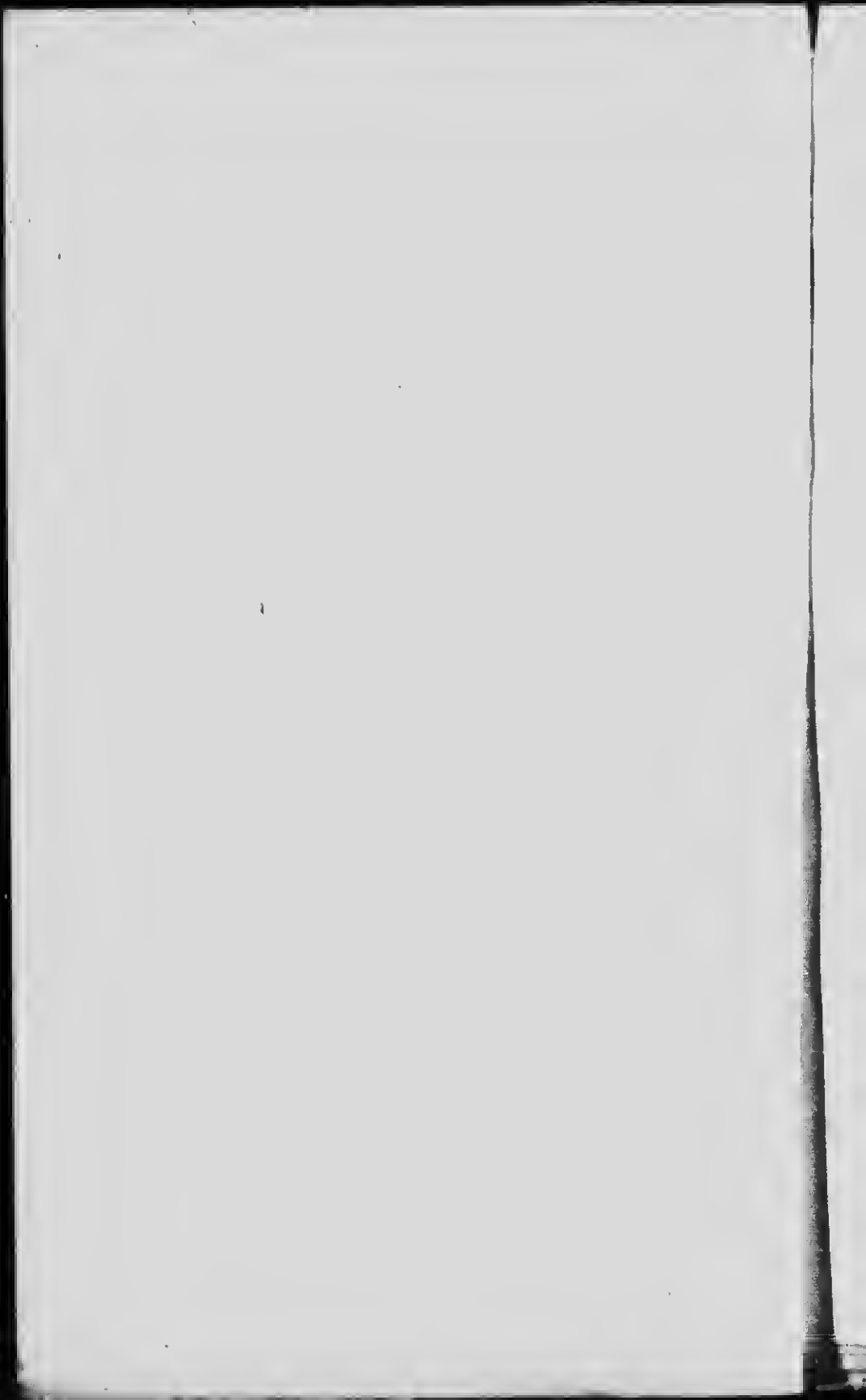
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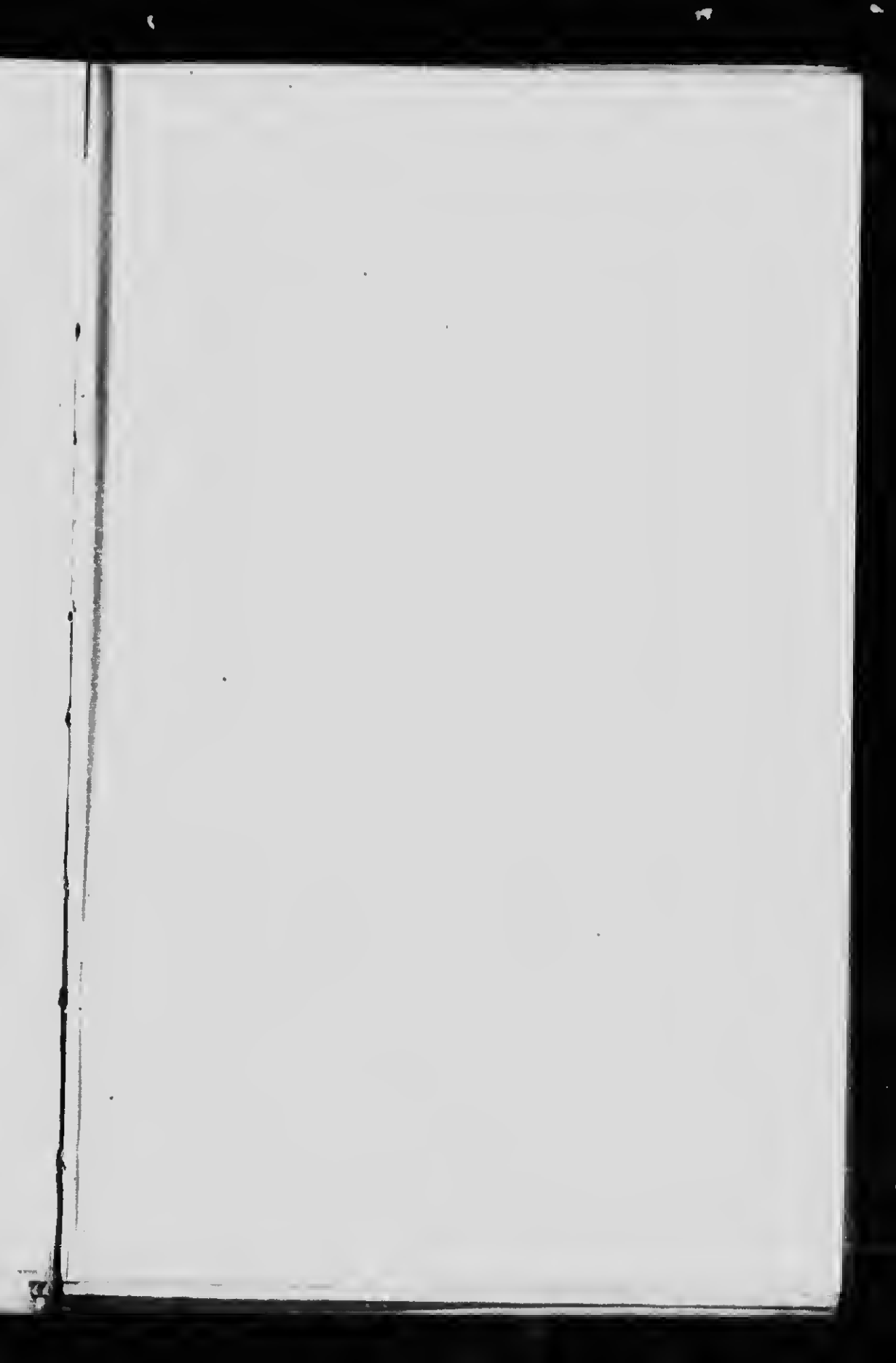
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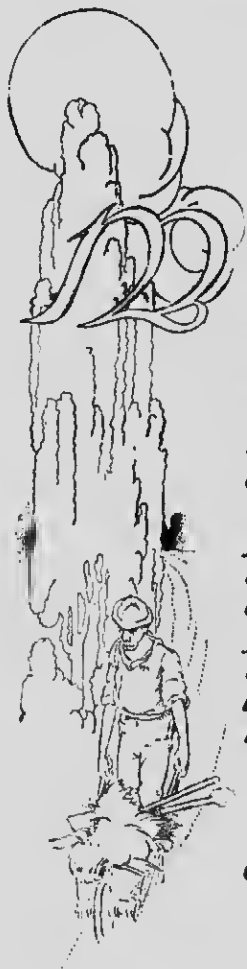
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# Dedications—

To

ERIC LEWIS



Y DEAR ERIC,

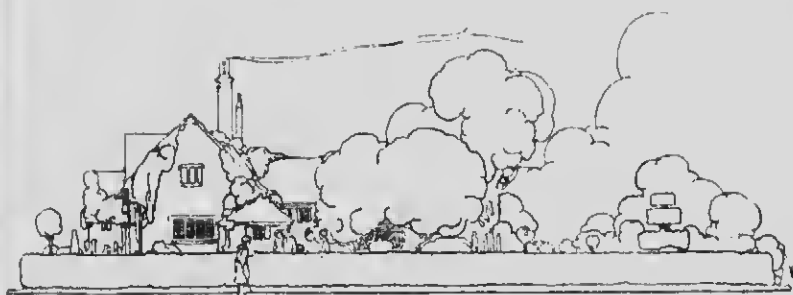
*When it is wet in Town; when you see nothing but umbrellas from your windows in Pall Mall East and the sky over Cook's offices is wearing that drab material of grey which is only sold in cities in the piece—in a word when you can't just shove on your hat and start out for one of your walks into the country, then, if it pleases you, take out this book, pull down the blinds, light the lamp and let me take you there instead.*

Yours,

E. TEMPLE THURSTON.

Gellibrands.





## *PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS*

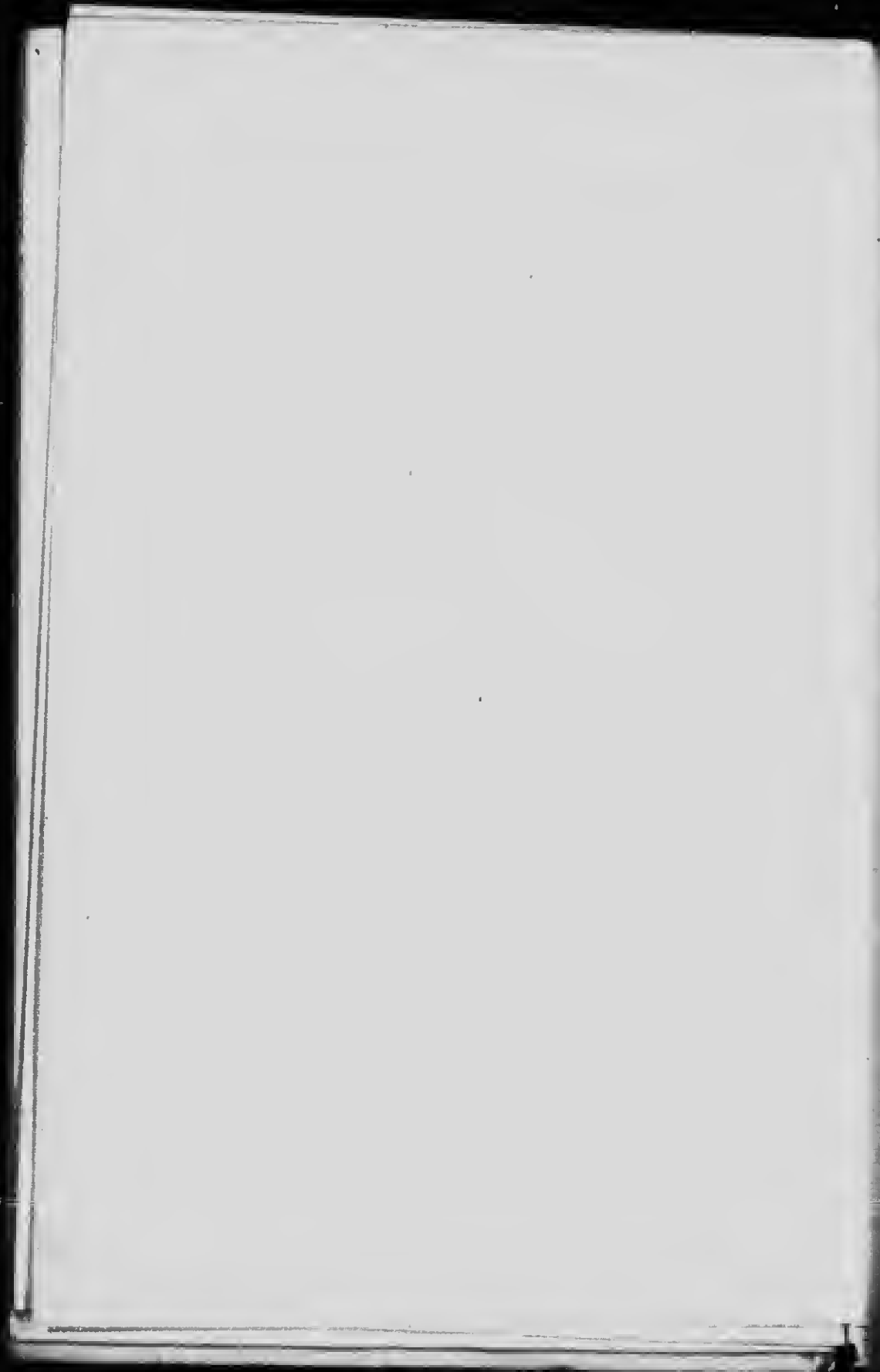
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*APRIL 14*



**B**



## THE OPEN WINDOW



DOUBTLESS in absence the heart does grow fonder, but tempering the sting of that absence must be some certain knowledge of return. If the pair of Blackcaps which, for the last four years, have built their nest in the quickset hedge that runs about my garden were never to come back, I should miss them indeed; but in time I sadly suspect that the prolongation of their absence would diminish my regret. Human nature is thus adaptable. The sorrows of this life are lessons. I hold no sympathy with those who regard them as a chastisement. None of which is to the point, for the Blackcaps, as is the nature of these little creatures, have returned to their old nesting-place for yet another summer.

Just as we were at tea the other evening—the window was wide open, for the sooner spring comes, the more ready are we to let her in—I heard a familiar sound. It brought the years back to me,

one after another in quick succession, the last four years during which Georgina and I have come to find our home in this old vicarage of Bramlingham.

"The Blackcaps have come back," said I, and she looked over the tea-cosy at me and smiled.

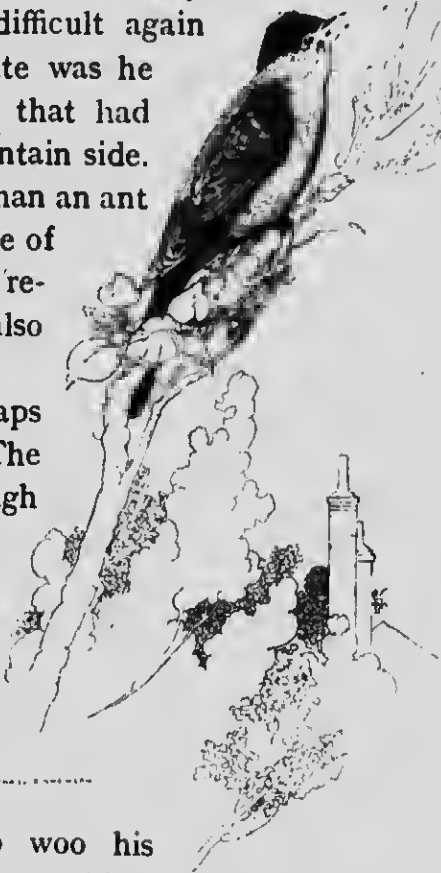
It sounds very little, a slight incident indeed of which to make record, but I repeat, it brought back those four years. After St. Margaret's in the East End, this little living of Bramlingham with its church of the thirteenth century, its vicarage, in the pantry of which the date 1615 stands carved upon one of the oak beams—well, I am no hand with the pen. I cannot describe the joy or the difference it is to me.

Parting of course is no easy matter. There were many friends I left behind in that grey, desolate corner of the world. But there is always the post. I hear from them constantly. They write to me for advice and I reply with such counsel as I can offer them. Mrs. Sumpter has another baby—her eighth. Is she to take any notice because her husband is annoyed? I write to her that the world being as it is and God being more generous to those women who deserve it than to those who do not, it were as well to call the child after him and assure him it will be the pride of the family. She replies, it is a girl. Whereupon I wait a week or so, then write again to enquire how things are going on. She replies that she has called the child after his

favourite sister and that he has taken quite a fancy to it. We are very small and God meant us to deal with little things.

I remember once standing upon a mountain and watching a man walk through the pass below. If ever I took my eyes away, it was difficult again to find him, so minute was he amidst the boulders that had rolled down the mountain side. He looked no more than an ant crawling over the face of the earth. I always remember that. God also sees from above.

But the Blackcaps have returned. The sound I heard through the open window was the gentle song of the male bird recording, as they call it. This is no more than a soft practice of that song with which he is going to woo his mate. The same song, which, when once he has won her, he will sing to her in the long evenings while she is set upon her nest.



As soon as I had finished my cup of tea, I went out into the garden and listened. I think I would as soon hear the song of a Blackcap as that of a Nightingale. And when he is practising during those early days of April, playing those tender notes, all muted, lest the secret of his song should be disclosed, there is no bird in England can compare with the sweetness of his voice.

For only a few days does this rehearsal of his melody take place. Then he bursts into the free, open song of his wooing, wherefore I beckoned to Georgina to come into the garden and sit beside me, and together we both listened to the softened music of his promised serenade. Whenever he touched a phrase it seemed he liked, he would repeat it two or three times, a little louder on each occasion, as though to gain the fullest confidence of his voice.

"'Tis nearly as good as a Nightingale," said Georgina.

"'Tis better," said I—"there's not a sad note in his compass."

"'Our sweetest songs,'" she quoted—"are those which tell of saddest—'"

There must have been a lot of the woman in Shelley, and it was the woman alone in him which wrote such a couplet as that. Is it women, particularly, who find the joy in sadness? I know nothing about them.

" You like the Nightingale best ? " I asked.

" I do," said she.

Perhaps it is because women often lie awake at night. Men wake early. It is then mostly that the Blackcap sings, when the sun is up in the early heaven of the morning.

When once his lyre is attuned, it is then the Blackcap sings indeed. He does not like to be seen when he is practising his song. He hides in the leafy thicknesses of the hedge. But so long as you do not discover him, he will let you come quite close to listen. We sat within two yards of him that afternoon.

He gains more courage as the Spring draws on. Indeed it is his habit when taking the place of his mate upon the nest, to sing his song, beguiling away the minutes as he sits upon the eggs. Hearing that song, just four years ago, I peered into the quickset hedge and found him there alone upon the nest, singing away to cheer the hour of duty.

Now had I been a thoughtless boy, what might he not have suffered for his folly ? Men should take no hand in these matters. I never meddled with Georgina when Diana was born.



*APRIL 23*







**T** has been an extraordinarily early Spring with us this year. By the middle of March, the quickset hedge around the garden was covered with bread and cheese, as we used to call it, where the elms and beeches had protected it from the wind. Just at about that time, on a day when the sun was shining so brightly as to make you forget how recently the cloak of Winter had been spread across the land, I met the first Brimstone butterfly down the little lane that leads to my orchard. How thankful one is for such a sight as that. I am not surprised that certain persons are so overcome with the delight of it, that they must write in haste to the papers. They are proud no doubt of the especial honour vouchsafed to them. Indeed it was the first thing I told Georgina myself that evening when I came back to tea.

"I saw a Brimstone butterfly in the lane," said I, directly I opened the door. Nothing short of a promise would have bound me to keep it to myself, and Nature exacts no such promise of a man. She gives you her secrets and you may tell the whole

world if it pleases you. And how it does please ! But I wish Georgina could have seen it too.

Here too we are, not yet out of April and she is complaining that some daffodillies are already faded. I leave the garden to her. The woods and the fields are more than enough for me. Indeed a man might well make study of a single hedge and he would find enough therein to engage him for a whole lifetime.

Of course Georgina does not work all the garden by herself. We have a handy man. The last vicar of Bramlingham employed him, and when I took over the living. I could not find it in my conscience to send him away. It is not that we do not need him ; but I cannot bring myself to like his face. He is civil and willing enough no doubt, and when I find these narrow prejudices rising in my mind, I must struggle with myself to keep them down. No man should judge another by his countenance. He may inherit features which have no relation to the mind which God has given him. I am sure, at heart, that Hodgins is an excellent man.

But strangely enough, I rather feel Georgina is of the same opinion as am I. What is more, it is for the same reason too. She does not like his face ; but has never informed me that she does not like the man. Perhaps it is merely my prejudice which tells me that is why. I only remember a little

conversation that once passed between us soon after we had come to Bramlingham.

"What is it?" she asked me—"that makes Hodgins such an ugly man?"

"Is he ugly?" said I—"I should have thought he had good features."

"I know," she replied quickly—"his features are all right, almost superior for that class of man—but whenever he looks at me, I can't help thinking how ugly he is."

"You don't dislike him on that account, do you, Georgina?" I enquired.

"Oh, no," she replied earnestly—"but do you remember Acres—the gardener we had at home, before we married. You used to see him surely whenever you came over?"

"Do you mean that ugly-looking chap," said I—"the man with a red moustache and a nose that wasn't quite straight "

"Ah—but he was such a splendid fellow," said she.

It is probably my prejudice again. Perhaps she meant nothing by that comparison at all.



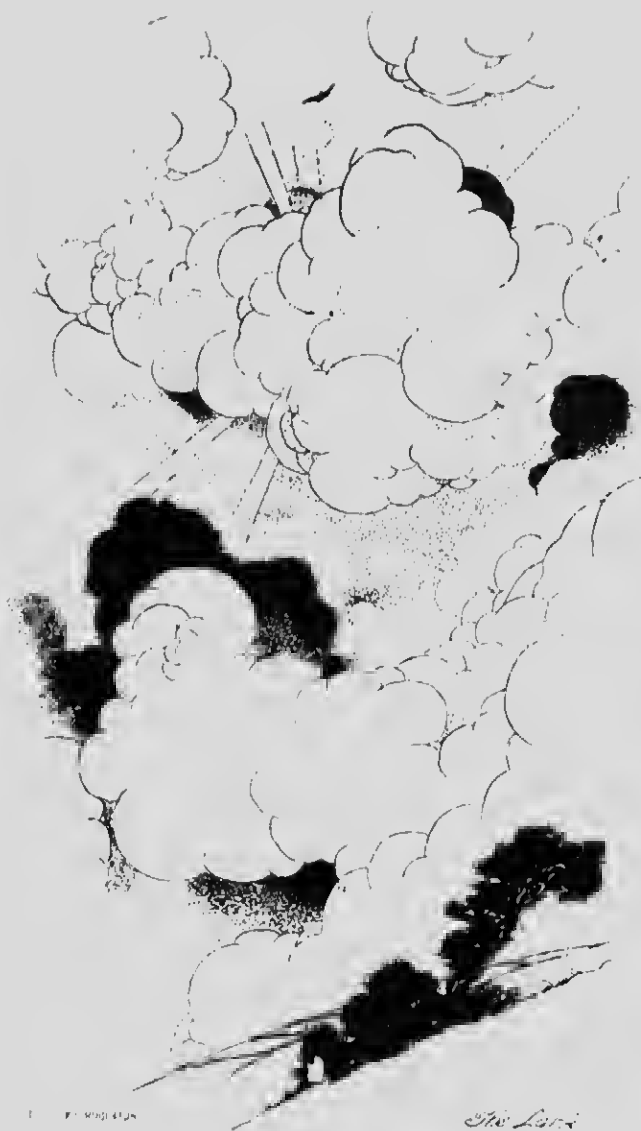
The Larks in our meadows have already paired. The flocks have broken up and I know we are on the verge of summer. Early this morning, the day broke grey and still, I saw one trying to rise above the mist which hung about the country. But the atmosphere was too heavy even for the lightness of *his* heart. He rose some thirty feet above the ground, striving with beating wings and a trembling song to lift himself above the mist into the sunshine above. But it was no good. After a brave struggle he sank back again into the grass of the meadow and I saw him no more. It reminded me of the days when depression sets in upon me. It reminded me of the days when I have given way without even one effort to rise above the mist. Indeed there are books in the running brooks; there are sermons in stone, and all the lessons I have ever learnt, I found in the hedgerows and the fields.

Last year I watched a Merlin hovering above the meadows beyond our orchard. Georgina was with me.

"She's up to no good," said I, and as she swooped downwards, a Lark rose swiftly out of a clump of reddening sorrel. Swiftly he ascended with the Hawk in hot pursuit. Georgina took my hand and held it closely.

"Why is it?" she whispered, and I think I know all the questions in her mind. "What has the poor little Lark done?"

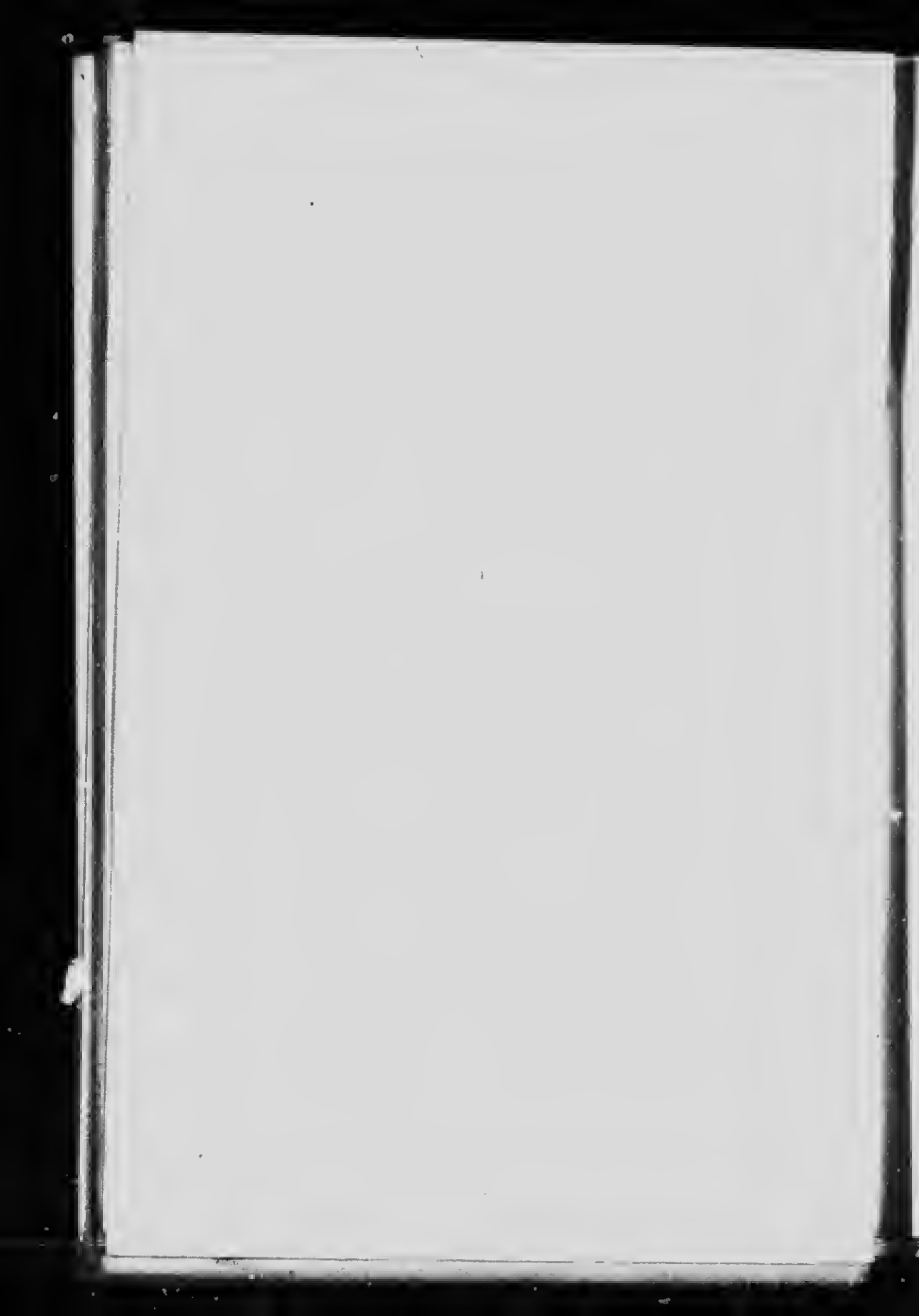
But I did not answer just then and we watched



W. H. M. 1894

*The Lark*

*To face page 14.*



the chase together. With all the strength of its wings, the powerful creature strove to soar above the Lark. At a great height so that our heads were thrown back to watch it, it succeeded so far. Beneath it the Lark was fluttering with trembling wings. I think we both then held our breath. It swooped downwards again, but with a swift flight the Lark swerved out of reach then, closing its wings, it dropped like a falling stone and in a moment was hidden in the tall grass of the meadow once more.

I looked at Georgina.

"That's what it has done," said I—"it's learnt to nerve itself to great effort. That Lark now perhaps will rise above the mist and find the sunshine where another one might fail."

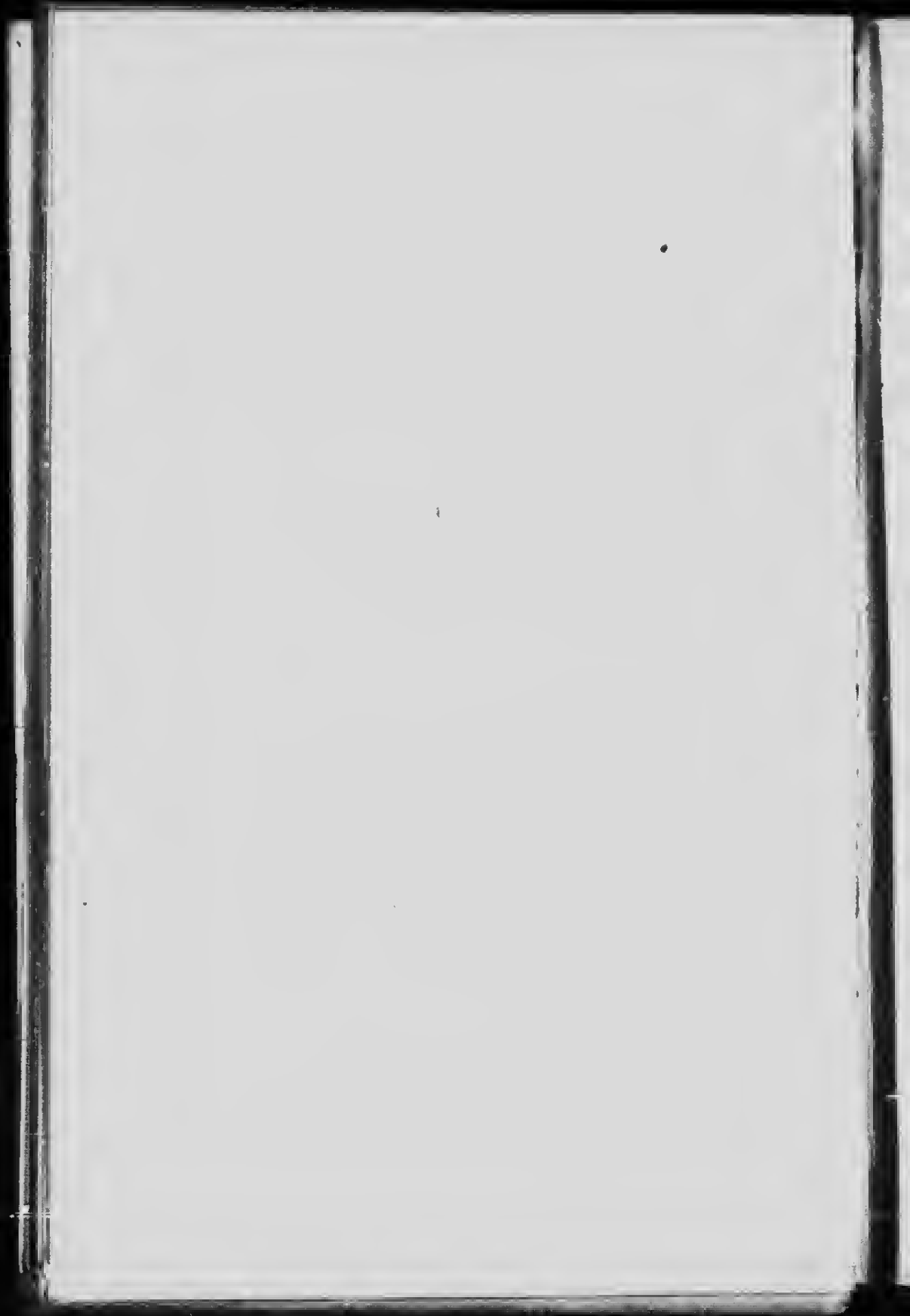
"I don't think they ought to be tried so much," said she—"do you mean to say they wouldn't learn without?"

"Do you regret St. Margaret's in the East End?" I asked her.

She looked up at me and smiled.

Then all round about her she looked—at the stream that wanders by at the foot of the meadows where the Sedge-Warblers and the Reed-Buntings build each year. She looked at the vicarage chimneys, their smoke a milky blue among the trees. She looked at the carpet of cuckoo-flowers that spreads down to the stream's edge.

All this is our sun above the mist.



*APRIL* 30







**FOUND** a dead Robin in the thicket of laurel shrubs near the gate this morning and all day have vainly endeavoured to imagine the cause of its death. There were no signs of violence upon its body. Its feathers practically were unruffled. Had it

been the cat, surely she would have eaten it. Can it have been old age? Can birds ever grow old?

I have said no word of it to Georg'na.

But this evening, I went out to examine it again, curious in my mind to learn the cause of its death. I approached it with no thought of caution, and for a moment was surprised to find that it had shifted from the position in which I had seen it last. As I stooped down to look at it more closely, I discovered that the earth had been scratched away at each side of its body. Then I guessed what was happening. The Sexton Beetle was doing his work and, taking up a position as near as I dared, I waited and watched the burial of one of God's creatures over which no service was read other

than by the voice of Nature. Never have I attended a more solemn or inspiring burial before. It was as though God Himself, who counts the sparrows when they fall, had lent His hand to the spade to consecrate this little creature to the earth.

There is nothing very beautiful about the Burying Beetle, with its large head by means of which it scoops out the ground beneath the body it inters. Its brown wings, the orange-coloured spots and bands upon the abdomen make it in no way remarkable. Only the Stag Beetle amongst its kind seems beautiful to me. But the Sexton is surely the most interesting of these insects you may come across.

With the utmost care, working incessantly and methodically, the mould was slowly scooped away from under the Robin's body. Almost imperceptibly it was lowered below the level of the ground. When I left them, their excavations were almost half an inch deep. The little Robin was sinking to its last rest.

At tea-time, Georgina asked me what were my thoughts.

"I was thinking," said I—"of my sermon for next Sunday."

This was true enough for it to be the truth. I was thinking how I would speak about the dignity of Nature as compared with the need of it in men. But had I told her the whole truth, I should have



Georgia



had to speak of the dead Robin and it was not necessary to distress her mind.

I was indeed thinking of the Sexton Beetles, still at their work, how silently and without the need of ceremony they laboured at their task. It is our custom to have our bodies laid to rest with candle, bell and book. But surely God must receive the poor body He has made as willingly, if not more so, when it is given silently and without vanity to the grave.

Perhaps it is heresy for me, a clergyman, to say this, but I think I would sooner that two honest men dug silently my grave and laid me down when all the village was asleep.





MAY 1







THE vicar of Maple St. Dennis came over to see me this morning shortly after breakfast. I went into the little room which is my study and found him there—I believe Georgina uses this study more than I.

“Good-morning, Mr. Hanbury,” said he.

“Good-morning,” I replied and we shook hands.

“I’m in a very difficult position,” he informed me, and I told him how much I regretted to hear it.

“Well,” he continued—“I came to you, because with your last living in the East End, I thought perhaps you might have come across a similar case and could assist me with your advice.”

I told him it was very good of him to think of me, and that if in any way I could help him most certainly I would. I remember as I said that, a hope flashing across my mind that it would not occupy too much of my time. I wanted to see the Burying Beetles at the conclusion of their work. I admit I confess

this to mortify myself. It was a thought I put aside as quickly as it came.

"What is it?" said I.

He explained then how the doctor of Maple St. Dennis had sent word to him that morning that an old woman in the village was dying and wanted him to administer the Holy Sacrament to her before she passed away.

"The doctor assures me," he continued—"that I had better come as quickly as possible, since she cannot last out the day."

"Well?" said I—for quite honestly I could not see his difficulty then.

"Well, my dear sir," said he—"of course, don't you see, I've had my breakfast. It's not even as if I took a light meal at that hour of the day. Breakfast is my most hearty meal. I am an early riser. In fact I take a constitutional at that hour. It gives me an appetite. Now you see how can I possibly consecrate the Bread and Wine under such circumstances? Had I just had a piece of toast and a cup of tea, it might have been different."

"What did you have?" said I.

"Well—I—I had some porridge—bacon and at least two poached eggs. So you see how impossible it is."

"You mean," said I—"that it is impossible to give the old lady Holy Communion?"

"Impossible for me—certainly—perhaps—have you had your breakfast?"

"I have," said I—"and it was not merely toast



and tea, but I shall be only too willing to officiate. The greatest service of the Church to me is the comfort She can bring. Shall I come with you now?"

"If you've had a similar meal to what I have,"

he replied—"I'm afraid I cannot permit it in my parish. No doubt your ideas are more low church than mine. I have nothing to say if you should wish to do it here, of course. But in Maple St. Dennis, I, and I think I can speak for my parishioners as well, think differently."

I paused a moment before I answered.

"Well—there is the reserved Sacrament," said I—"you can get that in London if you send a telegram for it at once. You would have it here by this afternoon."

"How?" he asked.

"It could be sent with a messenger by train?"

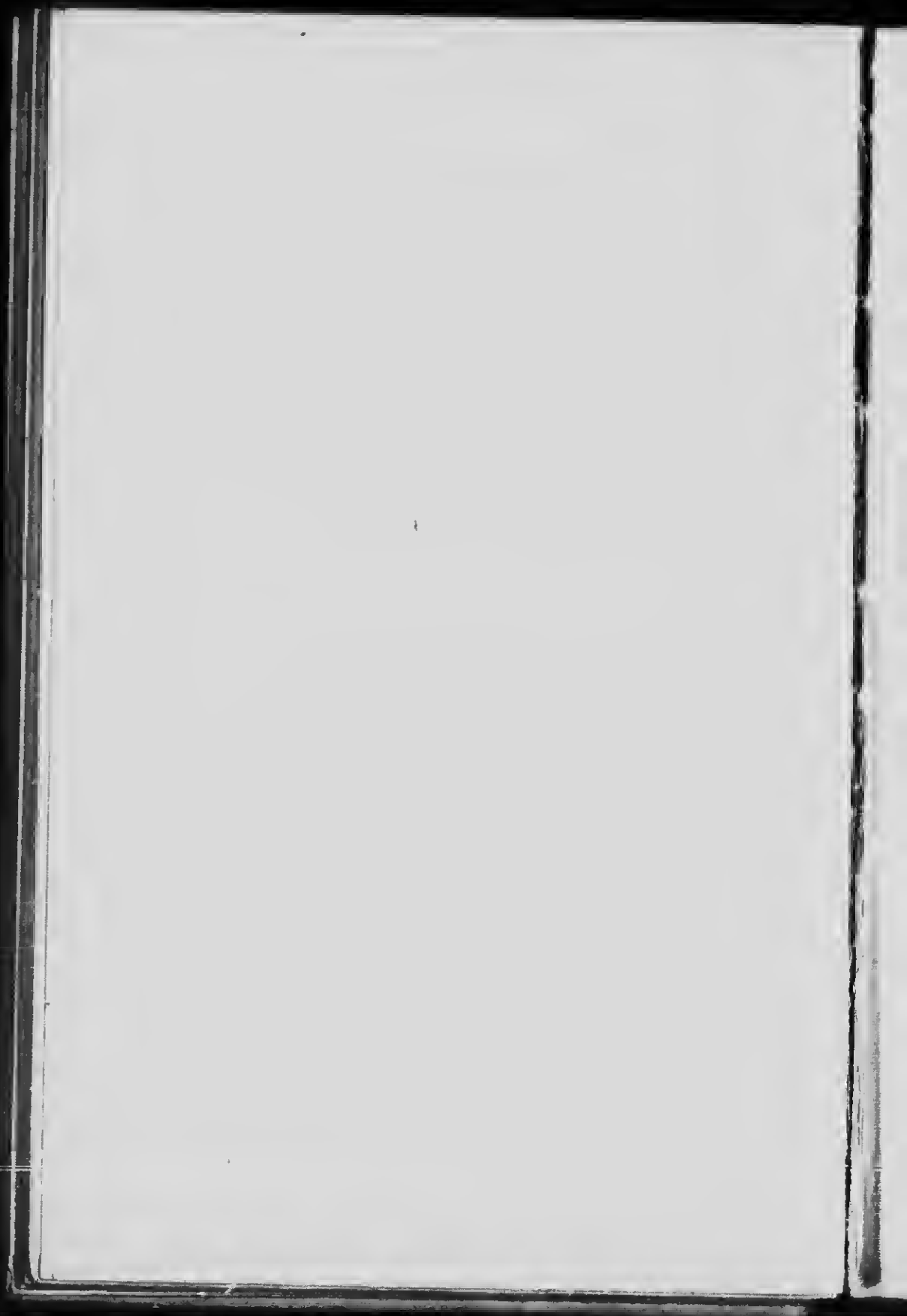
"You don't mean travel in an ordinary carriage with passengers who might be making coarse jests, or speaking irreverently—with people even who might be of other religious thought—some perhaps with no religion at all."

"The old lady is dying," said I—"and death will not wait."

"I'm afraid," he replied—"you can't help me. I'm sorry. We see things evidently from different points of view."

I walked to the gate of our little drive with him. Then, as I turned away, I stepped into the thicket of laurels. The Robin had been buried. I could just see the marks of the new mould showing the spot where it lay. The Beetles had deposited the eggs of their young in its body and there anew the

young life would come forth again. The wind just trembled the laurel leaves. Then everything was still. Without ceremony, without vanity, the last office had been performed. God had taken His hand from the spade.



MAY 10



D





FAMILY of Long-tailed Tits have visited the garden. At the end of last month, I heard the cry of their pass-word which, when they are upon their travels, keeps the brood together. *Zit-zit—Zit-zit*—I heard it all about the garden. One of the males came fearlessly to the window-sill of my study. How strangely like some old man they are. The loose grey feathers about their heads, the short hooked beak, add, I suppose, to the comical appearance of old age.

I called to Georgina. She came in with her duster in her hand to look at him. When she saw him she laughed.

"I suppose that's how you'll laugh at me one day," said I.

"We shall be laughing together then," said she.

That is more than a week ago and I still hear the cry—*zit-zit*—about the garden. I believe—or is it that I hope they have come to stay? Perhaps they are going to build. There will be few caterpillars on my rose-trees this summer and I shall

pay nothing for their extermination. God has His gardeners.

I can imagine when all the world was a garden and man had not been born. Every creature then must have been turned to His account. I

wonder if Hodgins or his like are better substitutes. I prefer the appearance of the Long-tailed Tit.



But I hope it is true. I hope they really are going to build in the garden. It seems almost too much to expect that, after all their journeyings throughout the winter, they should select this spot so that I may watch all those interesting preparations of the home. For the nest of the Long-tailed Tit is a most elaborate undertaking. She will spend as long as three weeks in the making

of it. I have known her, when the building operations did not go to her satisfaction, take nearly as many as four.

I used to notice the houses they built in the suburbs of London; dwellings to last a man his

lifetime, and in two months' time from the laying of the first brick, there was a family in occupation.

They did not build like that when this old vicarage was set down amidst the beech-trees. Far away across the rolling plains of corn-land, I see sometimes from my bedroom window the white smoke of a train as it winds in and out between the dark blue belts of trees. That I should think is the only difference in the landscape since the first Vicar of Bramlingham looked out of his bedroom window across the countryside.

When I look at the frame-work of great oak beams, hewn laboriously with an axe to give them simple shape, I often wish there was such leisure in life now as there was then. All these inventions of modern science merely put on the hands of the clock to hasten the day's completion. But it does not alter Time. The day is just as long as ever it was and the labourer's work is not over till the sun has set.

But the Long-tailed Tit builds just the same as ever she did. With just as much care she selects the lichen for the walls of her dome-shaped nest and knits it all together with wool; with just as much trouble she felts together the inside with rain-proof dome of cobweb and of moss, laying her carpet of the finest feathers she can find.

We, who are ever progressing, outgrow the knowledge we have won that we may attain to some other knowledge beyond our reach. If it were not that

amongst all the wisdom which we lose, we had retained the knowledge of God, I suppose the world would have grown old indeed.

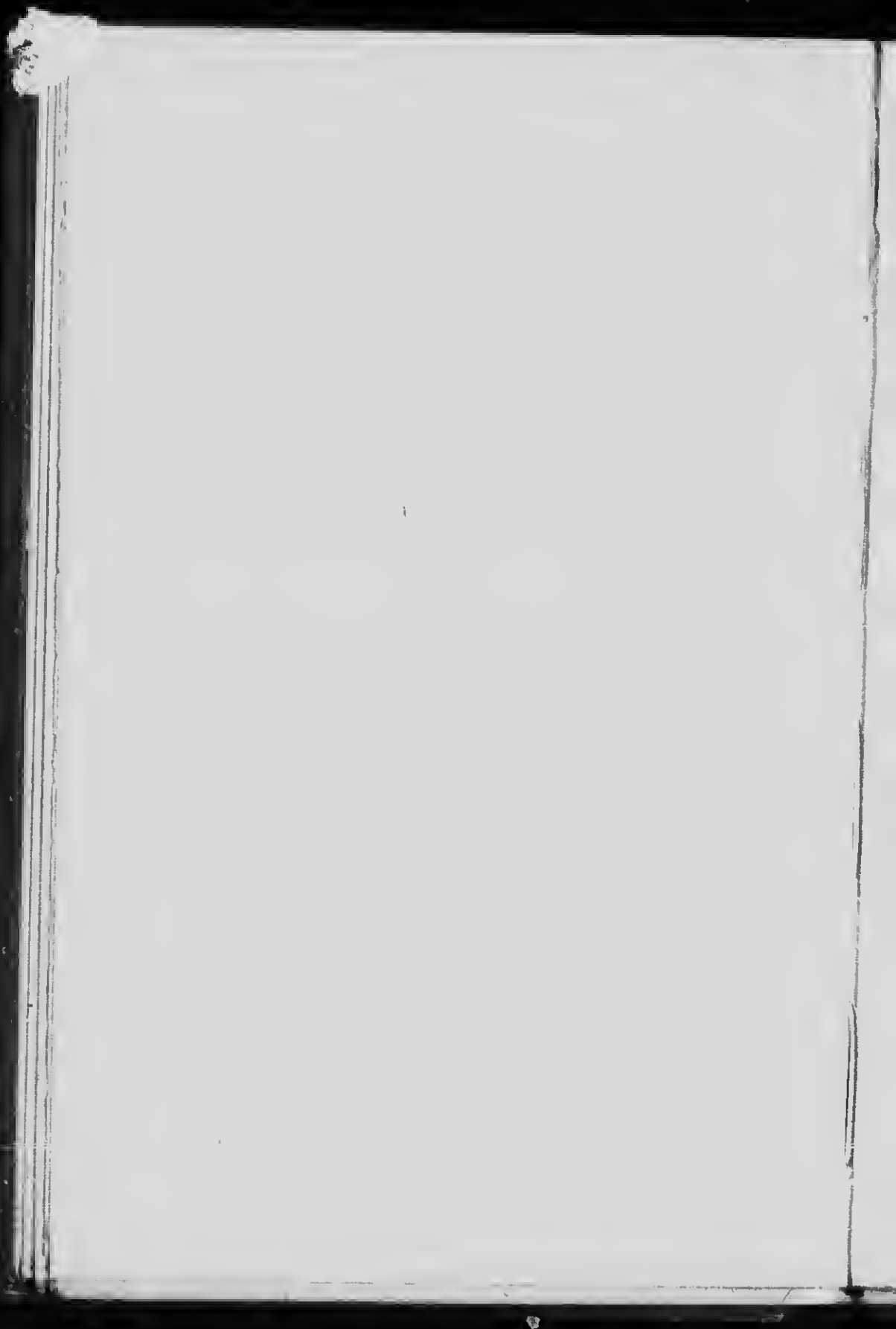
The whole family of Long-tailed Tits have just flown past my window now. Straight as an arrow they follow one behind the other, and if any should stray, the cry—*zit-zit*, brings him back again into line. So they have traversed miles and miles of country all the winter through.

Here in these parts they call them—Long-tail Mag. Indeed the Long-tailed Tit has more nick-names than any other bird I know. Bottle Tom, I have heard him called—Poke-pudding, Mum-ruffin, and I believe there are many other names by which he is known.

The female has flown past my window again. She carried a piece of moss in her beak. I must go and tell Georgina. The Long-tailed Tits *are* going to build.

MAY 18







**DURING** the Easter holidays, Diana informed me that she had seen a white Sparrow in the nut-trees near the orchard. I am sure it is a morbid instinct which excites our interest in the abnormal. A thing is not real because it happens.

Reading my paper the other morning, I chanced for a moment to look at the reviews of recent novels. These do not interest me, for I take no pleasure in the reading of the books themselves. Nature herself seems so full of stories, stories of romance, of tragedy, of comedy, of what you will, that I for one should become a spend-thrift of my time were I to study them. I know there are many who choose to have Life put before them rather than see it for themselves. I do not grudge the novel to them. Georgina reads them sometimes. Sometimes she recounts to me the stories which they tell. How strange it must be to have to invent, when Life itself is so full of stories that no-one ever has told.

However, I read one of these reviews. The

author, so the critic said, had marred his work by too desultory an attention to Realism. I remember that struck me as an odd phrase. I wondered why the critic had gone so far out of his way to think of it. "Mr. So and so," he continued, "relies too much upon coincidence."

I don't know whether that is a usual thing for critics to say, but it struck me as being full of illumination. The author had not paid sufficient attention to Realism—he had relied too much upon coincidence. Now that exactly describes what I feel about things abnormal in nature. They are coincidences which happen; but they are not real. There are far more unpleasant and unsightly forms of coincidence than albinism, and people are morbidly curious and interested even in them.

When I was a child, I recollect being taken to a travelling show of human freaks. The horror of it comes back to my mind still clearly whenever I think of it. My nurse who brought me there seemed to take a great delight in all she saw. And that is the mind of a great many persons.

I, too, found myself particularly interested when Diana told me of the white Sparrow. I have seen a Blackbird with a white wing, but never a complete specimen of albinism. I asked Hodgins had he seen it; he was more in the garden than any of us. He looked surprised and told me he had not. He had never heard, he said, of such a thing. Whereupon

I explained to him how in an albino, Nature fails to supply the necessary pigment to the skin and that a Blackbird has been known to be pure white.

It seemed to me at the time that he was not interested. I could have said a lot more upon the subject but he showed me by unmistakable little signs that he wanted to get back to his work. He spat on his hands three times and handled his spade. After the third time I went away. I would never hinder any man in his industry. But I confess his want of interest had surprised me, for Hodgins is by way of being a bird fancier himself. He has many canaries in cages at his cottage and appears to bestow the greatest care upon them.

Diana has gone back again to school now and the white Sparrow has not been seen since. Nevertheless, I have discovered all about it. Georgina came to my study this afternoon and the moment I saw her face, I knew that something was the matter.

"My dear, what has happened?" I asked.

I believe some people think it foolish, but we always call each other—my dear.

"Mrs. Naismith has just called," said she—"She has seen the white Sparrow and she asked Weyburn, their gardener about it."

"Diana was right then," I replied—"She'll have a lot of observation, that child, when she grows up."

"Yes, but it was not an albino," said Georgina—"Weyburn told Mrs. Naismith that one day when

## THE OPEN WINDOW

he and the boy were over here, helping with the peasticks, Hodgins told them that he had caught a Sparrow in a trap and painted it white. He was boasting about it."



"Caught a Sparrow," I repeated—"and painted it white!" And then there flashed across my mind how a few weeks ago I had told Hodgins to paint the white gate at the end of the drive—"When did he do this?" I asked.

"A few weeks ago," replied Georgina. It was all I could do then to keep my mind from condemning him already.

For a few moments we looked at each other in silence and then Georgina said—"I never have liked Hodgins."

"But we don't know that he did it," said I—"We've only Weyburn's word for it?"

"And the boy's," said she—"You don't think he hasn't done it, do you?" she added.

"I don't want to think," said I—and I took her hand—"I'll speak to him to-morrow. Remember, he's fond of birds. He has at least five pet canaries."

"I've thought of that," she replied.

"Well—you must keep on thinking of it," said I.

"I do," said she—"it only makes it worse."

It makes it all the worse to me too. I wish I were not so certain of his guilt. Now, had it been Acres, we neither of us should have believed it for a moment.



MAY 19







It is said of the Red-backed Shrike that it flays the bodies of its victims and hangs up their skins near its nest as the trophies of victory. That the Butcher-bird, as he is best known, lives upon the young of other birds and, stealing them from the nest, impales them upon the points of thorns in its larder is established. I found such a larder myself last year in a thick blackthorn bush in the midst of the spinney near our orchard. Two young Sparrows and a half-fledged White-throat were thus suspended by the side of the nest in which I found four young Shrikes exhibiting signs of a voracious appetite.

For a moment at the sight of it, I was stirred to an accusation of cruelty. Those little bodies with the blackthorn through their necks, shrivelled and still, seemed so wanton an act of nature, that I turned away and walked home, wondering why the spirit of living and letting live had come so late into the world.

"How many years," said I to myself—"must the earth have been in darkness before the coming of the Son of God!"

It was at our mid-day meal that very day that Georgina looked across the table at me and said—

“ Why does Suskind make such a show of all the meat he has for sale ? I suppose every butcher does it, but why must they ? We know what they sell. There’s no necessity for them to hang up their dead bodies on hooks right in front of the shop.”

Perhaps it was a long time before I answered, because, presently, I heard Georgina repeat her question.

“ Why is it ? ” said she.

“ Because the earth’s *still* in darkness,” I replied. “ One of these days perhaps we shall know how to live without preying upon each other. One of these days we may grow to be ashamed of taking life. There’s still too much of the Old Testament in us—still too little of the New.”

Yet however Suskind may be like the Red-backed Shrike in the habit of dressing his window, he does not lure his victim with cunning. I have read that this characteristic is questionable in the Red-backed Shrike. But I have proved it to be true.

Last year I made close observation of the Shrike that had built in the blackthorn bush in the spinney. When the brood was well-advanced and more voracious in their appetites than ever, I saw the female on one occasion from my hiding-place, seated, in concealment such as mine, behind a cluster

of bramble leaves. She sat perfectly still—as still as I—and I wondered what her intentions were.

Presently I heard the notes of the Yellow Hammer. Yellow Ammer as it should properly be spelt. The song is unmistakable. It is as though she were begging from door to door and dared not ask too much. Indeed in Devonshire, the country folk call her—"Little-bread-and-no-cheese." Her song is just like that. "A little bit of bread and no cheese," is her plaint, all on one note until at the last word it drops into a minor third below.

I looked with caution at my watch. True to the custom of her song it was nearly three o'clock. And then I gazed about me to see where she could be. My eye as it wandered here and there came back again to the Shrike.

Just at that moment, the song broke out afresh. I saw the swelling of the Shrike's throat, the beak just opened to emit the notes. She was imitating the Yellow Hammer to lure the young birds to her grasp. I could not believe it at first until at the faint chirping noise in the bushes, I saw her swoop forwards. A moment later she had brought back a young bird in her claws.



Perhaps I moved then, for taking sudden fright, she flew away though never dropping her prey. The next morning I found a young Yellow Hammer hanging in her larder.

Not only had she imitated the voice, but had chosen the very hour at which the Yellow Hammer's note is most times heard.

"Suskind does not do things like that," said I to myself. I don't know why I felt it necessary to defend Suskind against my own conscience. He does perhaps make an unnecessary show of the meat he sells—but he is an honest, open-hearted fellow.

I come back to this note book of mine for the second time to-day to add that I have spoken to Hodgins about the white Sparrow. I spoke as kindly as I could, not wishing that he should see for one moment the suspicion which, despite all my efforts, was harbouring in my mind. He came into my study.

"I hear from Weyburn," said I—for I had questioned Weyburn myself first—"that a little while ago you caught a Sparrow in a trap and painted it white."

"It's a lie," said he promptly.

I wished he had not been so prompt. If this was the first he had heard of it, it seemed to me that he should have shown more surprise. My suspicions grew deeper. I felt I knew he had done it then and the more I knew, the more I kept suspicion from my voice.

"Why then," said I—"does he tell this story about you?"

"'Cos 'e 'as a grudge, I s'pose," he replied.

"Well—what are you going to do about it?" I asked—"It's not a nice thing to have said about one. I think I'm right in saying it's a punishable offence. What are you going to do?"

He replied that he did not know.

"And you say it's not true?" said I.

"No—it's a lie."

"But the boy corroborates his story," said I.

I was quite sure he had done it.

"Can't 'elp what the boy said," replied he—"E's been told to say it."

"Then I'm to understand that what Weyburn's told me is not true."

"Yes—it's a lie," he repeated.

I did not like his face as he said that. But then I have never liked it. I tried to think that until that moment, I had.

"Do you know that he says you told him this about the Sparrow just at about the time you were painting the gate at the top of the drive—painting it with white paint."

He looked sullenly at me. I suppose my persistence was leading him to realise that I knew his guilt. Then suddenly his face lit up with malice.

"Did Weyburn tell you 'e tarred a Sparrow?" he asked me, and in the answering expression in

my eyes must have known how fatal a step that was.

"You've said a very foolish thing," said I.

Sullenly he asked me why.

"Well—do you wish me to believe what you say?"

"Yus."

"That's the truth?"

"Yus."

"Then why am I not to believe Weyburn? Why is your story the truth and his a lie?"

I knew I had caught him then. He knew it too. His face grew whiter as he tried to meet my eyes.

"Do you wish me to believe it?" I persisted.

"Yus," said he.

"Then I must believe Weyburn," I replied.

"You can believe what you like," said he—  
"Weyburn tarred a Sparrow."

"And you painted yours white?"

There was a moment's pause. He looked at me to see how firm was my mind in that statement. Then he gave in.

"Well—I did paint a Sparrow if yer want to know," he declared.

"I knew it," I exclaimed—and, whether it be to my shame or not, a thrill of pleasure passed through me to know that I had forced him to confess.

"That's all we need say," I added—"You can go. I can have no-one in my service who is cruel. You can go."

He turned on his heel, but at the door he looked back.

"Any'ow, Weyburn tarred a Sparrow," said he.  
I nodded my head.

Georgina was waiting for me in the drawing-room.  
Her cup of tea was cold.

"Well?" she exclaimed.

"He did it," said I.

"He admitted it?"

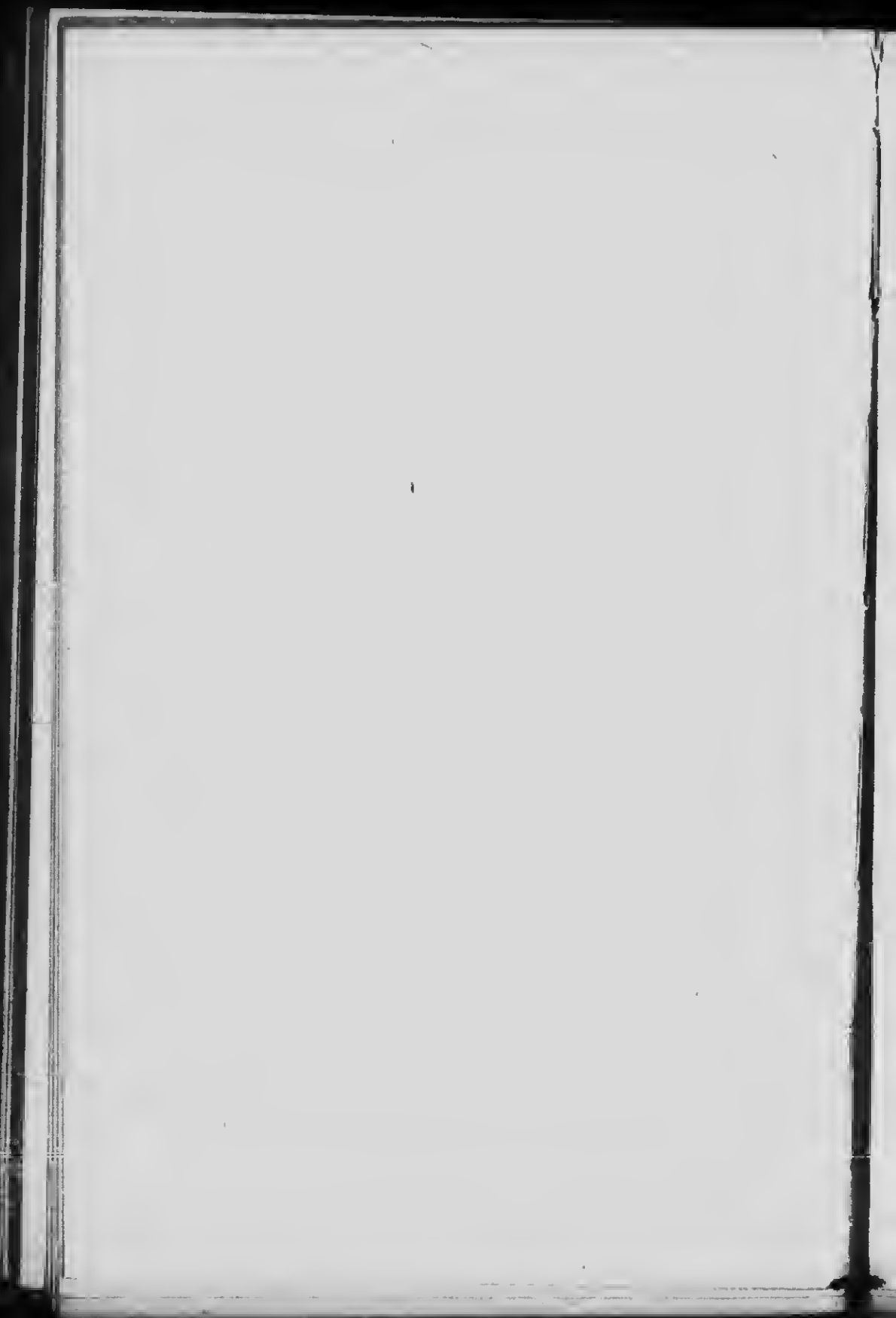
"Yes."

"However did you get him to?"

"I talked to him very quietly," said I—"I didn't let him think I was suspicious—but I kept on at it till he fell into a mistake. Then it was all up with him."

Suddenly as I said this, I thought of the cunning of the Red-backed Shrike, the voice she imitates to lure her prey.

It is I who need defence—not Suskind.



MAY 27







PERHAPS it is in the nature of women to be superstitious. I have found traces of superstition in the most sensibly-minded of women. Even Georgina is not exempt from it. This year she heard the Cuckoo before the Nightingale and told me about it with a quiet smile as though to assure me she would take no notice of it.

"But you don't really mind, do you?" said I. For answer she just quoted me a passage from her favourite Chaucer

"It was a common tale  
That it were gode to here the Nightingale  
Moche rathir \* than the lewde † Cuckowe singe."

I would always firmly put down superstition. It belonged to the age when the mind of man was in the darkness of idolatry. But how can I blame Georgina? There is beauty even in the faults of those we love. So it seems to me is the great reality in forgiveness of sins. God loves us all.

But certainly the Cuckoo did arrive early this

\* Earlier.

† Unskilful.

year. We were walking down the boundary lane in the beginning of April when first those two strange notes fell on my ear. E flat is the first, I believe, and almost invariably C natural the second. It was then Georgina told me how she had heard him



two days before. She must really be very superstitious for she had said no word about it until then.

What a good-for-nothing fellow he is, that Cuckoo—an inveterate wanderer without a home. Seldom are the male

and female ever seen together and the latter as everybody knows builds no nest but from one place to another wanders in search of what food she can find.

The Cuckoo I have seen flying about our meadows this year, has been followed persistently and respectfully by a Pipit. I have heard of this unaccountable fact with regard to these little birds before, but never witnessed it until this year. Wherever the Cuckoo flies, the Pipit follows at a respectful distance.

When the Cuckoo settles in one tree, the Pipit rests in another close by. The difference in size between them makes them a ludicrous pair.

I have tried in vain to discover the reason of this. It defies me at every turn. For it is in the Meadow Pipit's nest that the Cuckoo most often lays her eggs; yet this little creature, with a faithfulness that almost amounts to fascination, seeks the company of the interloper, even to the extent of ignoring her own duties of the day.

I often wonder will the Cuckoo ever learn better habits, ever follow the example of industriousness which is set her by the various birds in whose nests she lays her eggs. She has the choice of many for the Hedge Sparrow, the Robin, the Sedge-Warbler, the Redstart, the Skylark, Chaffinch and Greenfinch all of them at some time or another have shown her in their various perfect ways how a home should be made. In all of these she lays her eggs. I have heard of a Cuckoo's egg being found in the nest of a Wren.

But no—the hundreds of years have gone by since Pliny wrote of her and she is the same vagabond as then. She will never change. Vagabondage is in the blood. Yet I suppose even the wandering spirit brings men at last to God. How tired of it all they must be!

We have been without a gardener since Hodgins

went away, I can find nobody in Bramlingham to take his place. Now at last I think I have discovered some-one.

"There's a man," said Georgina to me this morning—"who wants to see you. He's at the back door. I'm afraid he's a tramp. But he's got a nice face."

I knew that meant that Georgina liked him and hoped I would give him something wherewith to help him on his way. I went round to see him. He was a dirty-looking fellow, unshaved, with shoddy clothes. But I quickly saw what it was that Georgina liked in him. He had a clear and an honest eye and there was a look of humour in his mouth. When straight-away he asked me for some work and did not want alms, I was well-impressed with him. It so happened that I had plenty of work for a man to do.

"Can you dig in the garden?" I asked.

There were few things, not requiring skilled labour, which he could not do, he told me.

"When you're on the road, like as I am," said he—"there's a poor chance for you if you can't turn your hand to anything."

I asked him why he chose the road.

A wry smile came into his eyes.

"T'aint choice," said he—"You come to it as I did, by playin' the fool when you're young. I was in the Navy once and I used to think time was

better ashore than aboard. I stayed ashore past my leave. That's what started me on the road. I got sent out of the Navy. Then I had to look for work and when you do that you 'ave to walk to find it."

Georgina is nearly always right when she likes or dislikes a man. It was honest of him to tell me he had been turned out of the Navy. Another man would have hidden the fact. I took a liking to him from that moment.

"But why don't you get regular work?" I asked. I was determined not to let my feelings get the better of my judgment, though I suppose by then I had decided that I would take him on.

"Ever tried to get regular work, sir?" he replied. I shook my head.

"Well, sir—you walk for two or three days, more sometimes, along the road. Your beard begins to grow. You sleep out under a hedge and wake up dirty in the morning. Then you set off again on an empty stummick and wonder where you're goin' to get your next bit of bread. Then you hear there's some work to be 'ad about six miles further on and you tighten your belt a bit and step it out. By the time you get there you're not lookin' the sort of man as they'd take on regular. If I could get regular work, sir, I'd never go near the road again. A free and easy life some calls it—the people as 'ave never tried what it's like. But there ain't much

freedom when yer stummick's at yer day and night. As for easy ! "

He looked round our garden at the rows upon rows of peas and scarlet runners, at the lettuces swelling below their waist belts of bass and I felt ashamed of all my plenty. Certainly we know but little of the lives of others. I had often thought that I should like to be a tramp. It has always seemed so great an opportunity for the studying of Nature. I had thought of putting it to him in that way, but when he cast his eyes about our well-stocked garden, the suggestion seemed so ludicrous, I kept the thought to myself.

" Well, I'll give you some work," said I. After that glance of his, I felt I could not well do otherwise. " There's some digging in the garden to be done. Would you like to start at once ? "

I determined not to tell him that I had regular work about the house; not certainly on our very first acquaintance. But in my mind I had decided that here was the very handy man we needed. " I will save him," I said to myself—" I will save him from the road."

" I'll just go up," said he—" and tell a friend of mine what was walking with me—I'll just go and tell him I've got a job and then I'll come back."

I returned to the house quite pleased, with a warm feeling of satisfaction in my mind.

## THE OPEN WINDOW

65

"Georgina," said I—"he'll make a splendid handy man. He can turn himself to anything. We're going to save him from the road."

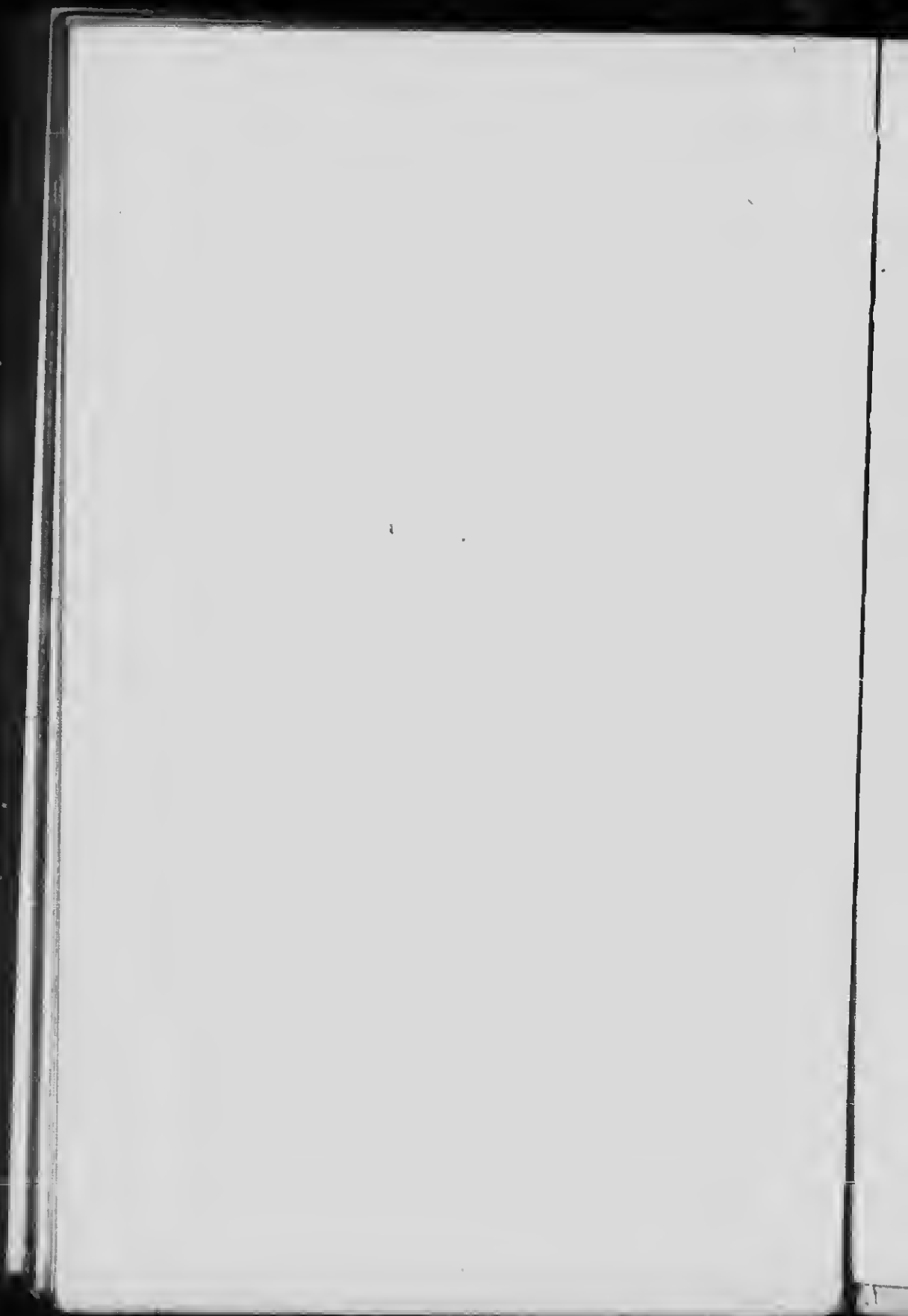
"I knew you'd like his face," said she.

Which was not what I meant at all.



*JUNE 1*







HAVE found a Pipit's nest and think it must be the same one who was fascinated by the Cuckoo I saw in our meadows last week, for there was the Cuckoo's egg along with four others in the bottom of the nest. I suppose if the Cuckoo did not lay so small an egg, she would never be able so successfully to practise her deception as she does. I think also in this case, the Cuckoo must have laid her egg on the ground and then, with her mouth, have deposited it in the Pipit's nest, when the female was away. The structure is so small that the chances would have been ten to one against her ever getting it there in the customary manner.

And now she has left the neighbourhood. What a Vagabond the Cuckoo is!

Jesse Webb is the name of my new handy man. He has been working for three days in the garden and in that time has accomplished as much as Hodgins would have done in a week. Both Georgina and I are delighted with him. He has cleaned himself up, has shaved and looks a different man.

"I liked him from the first," says Georgina

—"When are you going to take him on for good?"

I am going to speak to him about it to-day. I am going to give him that regular work which will save him from the road. Yet the road has taught him something. He is full of little wisdoms and expresses them in a most humorous way. If only people would give these men a chance, I feel sure that half the vagrants in this country would cease to exist. For Webb is not by nature untidy or unclean. The morning after I had engaged him, paying him at the end of the day, he came back, as I said, a different being. He even had so much regard for his appearance as to stick the flower of a little red rose in the band of his cap. Georgina was the first to notice it.

"It makes him look quite smart," said she—"The colour goes beautifully with his tanned skin."

It certainly gave a finish to his appearance.

I have just been out into the garden and can find Webb nowhere. He told me yesterday that he had had to walk six miles before he could find lodging. It appears they will not give a bed to these men of the road, except at recognised rest houses.

"But you can't go on walking twelve miles a day," said I.

"No, sir," he replied—"it ain't goin' to make

me much good for a 'ard day's work. But I've tried every place around here and they won't take me."

Now, Georgina thinks he may have been run over.

I am going out into the village to enquire whether anyone has seen him.

I found him myself in the Cap and Bells. He was drinking a glass of beer and smiled at me when I looked in. What disappointments there are in life! I told him to come outside, that I wanted to speak to him. He followed me obediently.

"Why haven't you come to work this morning?" I asked.

"Well, sir," said he—"I 'ad to walk six miles again this mornin'. I started to get ready at 'alf past five. There was the clock pointing to 'alf past five. I asked for a cup of coffee just before I started. The coffee wasn't ready and they brought me a glass of beer. Well, I felt cold inside, sir, so I took it. Then I got talking and presently I looked again at the clock and it was still 'alf past five. The blessed thing wasn't going, sir. It was 'alf past six. So I started at once to come along 'ere——"

"And on the way?" said I.

"Yes—sir, on the way I 'ad a glass or two. And then it seemed to me well—what did it matter. I couldn't get here in time, so I just came along and sat in the Cap and Bells. I was going down

presently to get my things and then I was goin' on."

"Back to the road?" I asked.

"Back to the road," said he.

"And what you wanted," said I—"was regular work. Now do you know I was going to give you regular work. I'd taken a fancy to you."

"Yes—sir," he replied—"that's what I thought. 'That gent's taken a fancy to you—here's your chance.' But what's the good—the road's got 'old of me. I couldn't get here in time. I'd lost me day. I might as well get back on to the road again."

"But if you'd come to me—even though you were late, it would have been all right. Why don't you trust your fellow creatures more?"

"'Ave you ever 'ad to work in a gang, sir—?"

I admitted I had not.

He nodded his head. He evidently thought I had not.

"Well now," said I—"suppose I give you still another chance. You go and get the drink out of your head and come back here at two o'clock. I'll give you work for three weeks and if you're all right then, I'll make it longer. In the meantime, I'll find you lodging."

He looked straight into my eyes and then, pulling the little red rose out of his cap, he dropped it on the ground.

"I'll be back 'ere at two o'clock, sir," said he.

But three o'clock came and there were no signs of him. I went back apprehensively to the Cap and Bells. Jesse Webb was lying on the seat outside, lost in a drunken sleep. The landlord came out and looked at him.

"Those sort ain't no good, sir," said he—"They're born on the road and they sticks to the road. You might 'a known when you saw him put that rose in his cap."

"Why?" I enquired—"What does it mean?"

"It means as 'ow they've got money for to 'ave a good old drunk."

I turned away in despair.

"And it looked so well in his cap," said Georgina when I told her.

At half past five he came down to the back door to get a piece of sacking and an old briar-wood walking-stick he had left behind. I met him slinking away up the drive. He was still greatly intoxicated.

"What a fool you've been," said I.

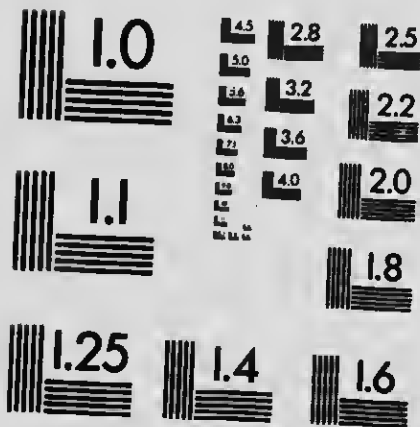
"Yeshir—" he said thickly—"Itsha besht chance I shall-ever-'av."

And then he looked at me with the twinkle in his eyes which Georgina and I both liked so much and he said—"Mishsta Young draws all hish water from—Canterbury," and with that he rolled away.

I don't know what he meant by it.



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As he opened the gate onto the road I saw a man join him and they walked away together.

"The Cuckoo and the Pipit," thought I. Yet the wandering spirit must bring a man at last to God. How tired of it all they must be !



*JUNE 3*







LAST night Georgina complained of feeling unwell. She went early to bed and I settled her comfortably on the pillows. Later, I crept upstairs, hoping to find her asleep. She was still awake.

"I've been listening to the Nightingale," said she—"Has he ever been so late before?"

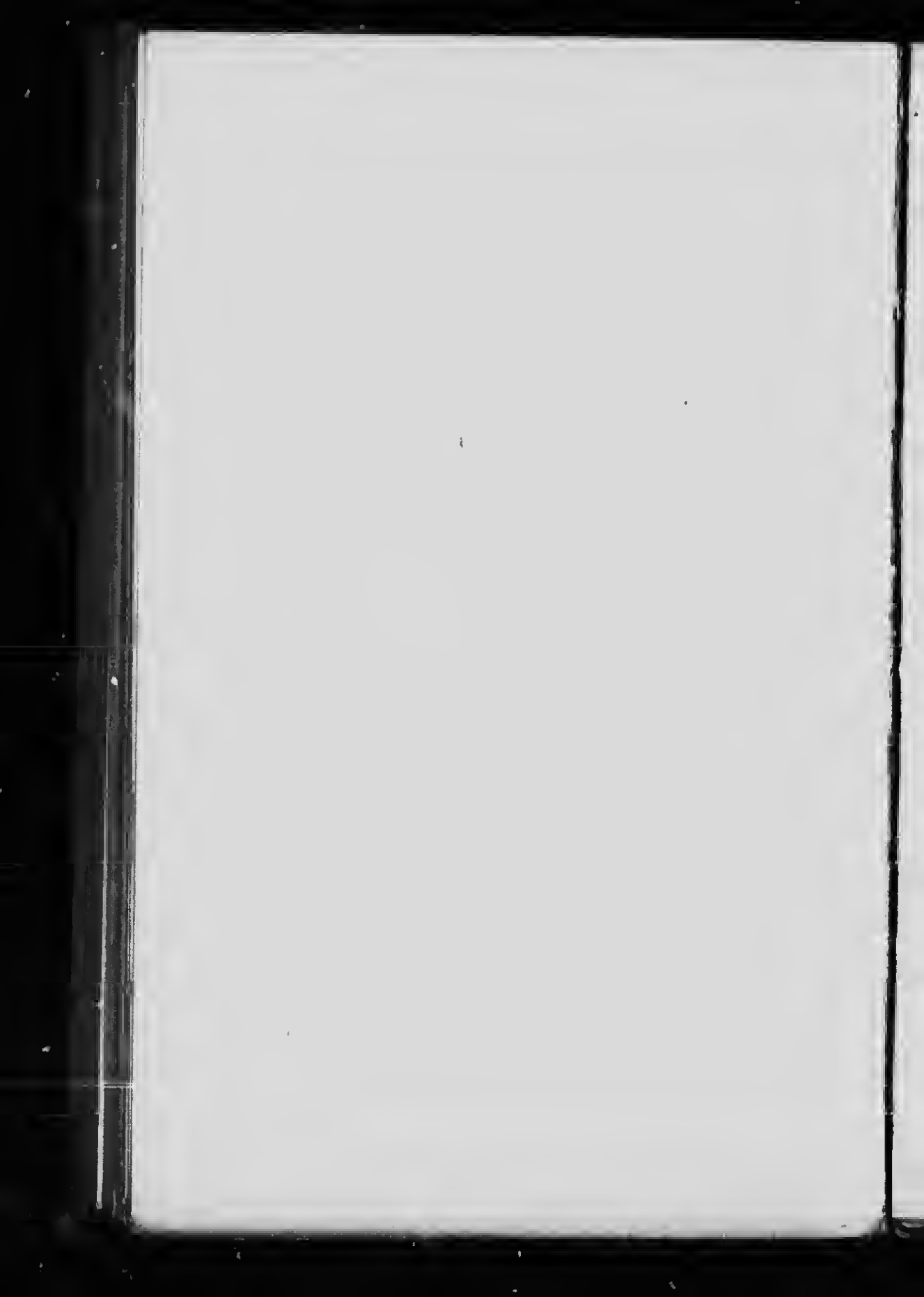
I believe she was thinking of how she had heard the Coo first.

This morning her temperature is very high. I have sent for the doctor. I wonder why the Nightingale was so late this year.



*JUNE 5*







HAVE sent for Diana. The doctor fears typhoid fever. He took me down into the study after he had seen Georgina yesterday and, when I had closed the door, told me what he was afraid was her complaint.

"It may be only a mild form," said he — "She's got a good constitution. She may throw it off without it becoming much more serious than it is at present."

"It is serious now?" I asked.

"It is," said he.

We stood in silence then by the open window; in silence as one does when there are the many things one dare not say. The Sparrows were chattering loudly in the ivy. Around the house the Swifts were chasing each other with joyous screams, exulting in their power of wing, rejoicing in the cloudless sky. Again and again they appeared, then disappeared; now flying high above the laburnum trees, now flying low across the purple iris. Even there in that room we could hear the purr of the wind in their wings as they swept by.

Somewhere in the quickset hedge a Robin was

singing; the deep-throated Blackbird made his sudden flights. We could hear his notes like water dropping in a well. Beyond the orchard where the spinney lies, I saw the sharp blue spurt of a Pigeon from the wood and in the elm tree over by the gate a Dove sat cooing her three plaintive notes.

It was then I knew how much the joy of the world lies in the mind of a man to find it. These were the sounds to which, when I was a boy at home and now, during these four years since we have lived in Bramlingham, I have listened with such thankfulness, such unquestioning delight. They have been to me the very voice of Nature singing, as we sing in the choir on Sunday, to the glory of God. Yet whereas our efforts are poor, though they may not be vain, this choir of birds in the hedgerows has not one note which does not harmonize to perfect beauty.

Often I notice when we sing the *Te Deum* in church, how Suskind's voice, carried away no doubt by the devotion in his mind, rises loud and discordant above the others. From where I sit, I can see Georgina and I know by her face that he is singing out of tune. My own ear tells me of it too. But nothing jars me when the birds sing in our garden; there is not one note but which adds to the glad beauty of it all.

And yet, this morning, as I stood there by the open window with the doctor in silence beside me, the beauty had all gone from their voices; their

gladness hurt me. A fear that Georgina might not live was disquieting all my mind. I wanted them to sing in tune with my dejection and there they trilled their voices in sheer joyousness of heart.

"Do you hear the birds?" said I at last.

"I hear them," said he  
—"They must be a joy to you after London and the East End."

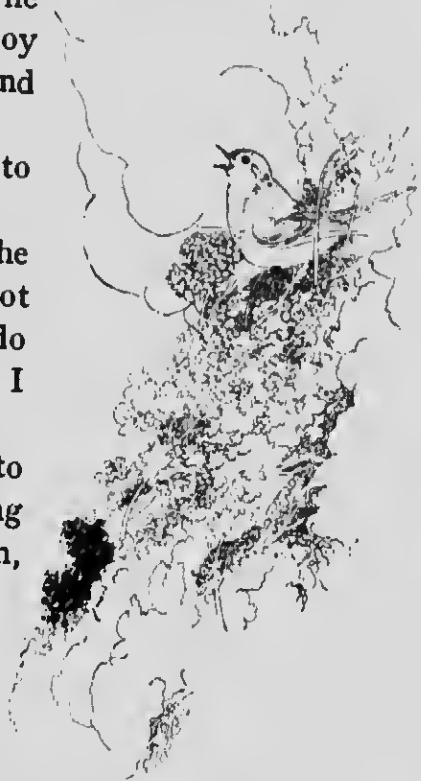
"Are they a joy to you?" I asked.

"Why, yes—," said he  
—"I don't know a lot about them like you do—but, my goodness, I should miss 'em."

I had it on my lips to say they sung of nothing but sadness to me then, but just kept back the words.

"If I find them sad," I said to myself  
—"it is not their trouble of which they sing—but mine. Why then should I cast down the heart of anyone because my own has fallen low?"

It is not our duty to make the world. Our duty should be to find it as it is. Only the bravest and



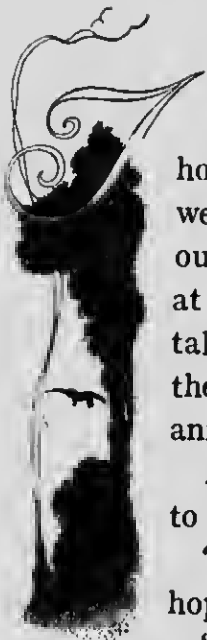
the brightest heart can make such discovery as that.

I will just creep upstairs and see whether Georgina is asleep. If she is, I shall drive myself to meet Diana.

*JUNE 8*







HE last few days have been days of silence. Diana and I creep about the house, speaking only in whispers when we meet in the passages, talking below our breath when occasionally we meet at meals. Alternately by night, we take our watch in the sickroom and, by the dim light of a bed-side lamp, wait anxiously for the first glimmer of dawn.

At breakfast yesterday, Diana said to me—

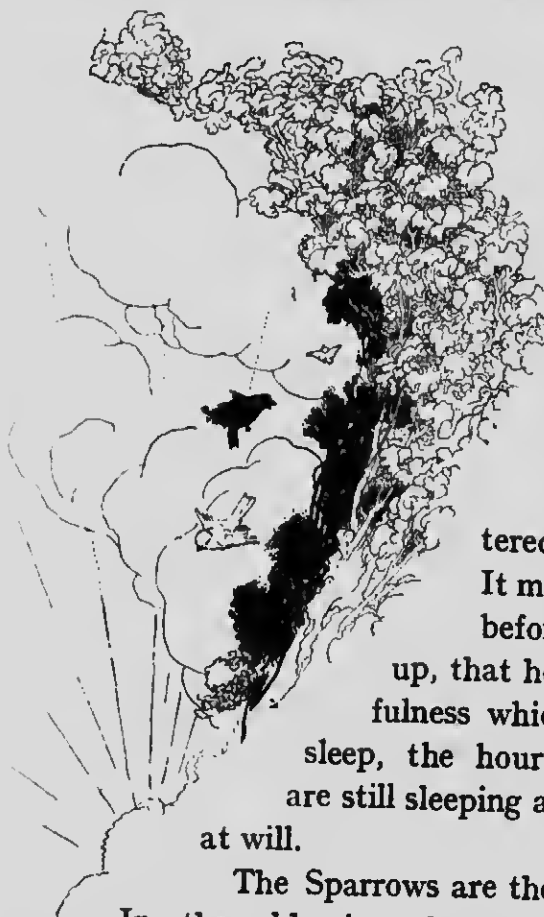
“Why is it that everything seems so hopeless in the middle of the night?”

“Does it to you too?” said I.

“Yes—I sit there by the side of mother’s bed wondering if she will ever be well again and then, as soon as the daylight comes, it seems all different. I feel sure she’ll get all right again.”

It is the same with me. The light of the bed-side lamp is not sufficient to keep alive any promise of hope in my heart. For those few hours of feebly-lighted darkness, I am as one struggling in a subterranean stream. Some instinct of self-preservation keeps despair at arm’s length, but I am not

master of my hope again until the day is lit and the dawn sweeps fast across the sky.



And how wonderfully the dawn does come these early summer mornings. Before you could tell that the blue of night has changed to grey, the birds have turned in bed and twittered in their sleep. It may be still an hour before they will get up, that hour of semi-wakefulness which is the best of sleep, the hour you know you are still sleeping and yet can wake at will.

The Sparrows are the first to chatter. In the old vine that grows outside the window of Georgina's bed-room they build and raise their three and four broods every year.

There is much abuse to be heard concerning this rapacious creature; but I for one would stand in his defence.



*Dava*



In harvest time no doubt his only food is corn and in the corn-fields he can effect no little harm. But who counts all the gardening work he does in winter when the fields are bare. His only feeding then is the seed of weeds combined with caterpillars, worms and every grub which he can find. I always think of that when I see him busily engaged upon my raspberry canes. Would they be so good if he had not eaten the wire-worms in the winter? The labourer is worthy of his hire.

And for their quarrels too, the Sparrows are abused. Those sudden, noisy bickerings in the hedges are always Sparrows settling their disputes. But I have known men and women—and do they make it up so soon?

Yet for all that abuse of him, the Sparrow still confides and trusts in man. In waste places, he will never build his nest, but wherever a man has set his habitation, there a Sparrow chooses his abode. I like this trustfulness and would not kill a Sparrow if he sat and eat my raspberries before my eyes—and he does.

I have just put down as they came to me my thoughts of the other morning, when I sat by Georgina's bed-side watching the dawn creeping up out of the East. That despair of which Diana spoke to me must be close akin to the note of pessimism which runs through the minds of many people now. I wonder how much light has got to do with it.

All thought to-day comes out of cities—for that is where all people congregate. Can it be their thoughts are pessimistic because they know so little of sunshine where the houses lie close together? Can it be because their day is most-times lit by the bed-side lamp? Is pessimism darkness, or is it a natural state of mind? Is optimism light or just pure sentiment?

I wish some-one from the heart of the country where, at the first sign of darkness, like the birds, a man goes to sleep and at the first light of dawn turns restfully in his bed, I wish such a man would write us his philosophy; I wish he would tell us whether he can find most of beauty or most of ugliness in the world.

It is when I sit by Georgina's bed-side through those long hours before morning, listening, only listening to the fitfulness of her breathing, that my thoughts are lame and trembling in despair. Like Diana, when the daylight comes, I feel most certain that God will spare her to me.

This morning early, she woke out of a state, half unconsciousness, half asleep.

"Is that you?" she whispered.

I took her hand.

"What time is it?"

I told her.

"Why aren't there any birds singing?"

"They are," said I.

"Then why don't I hear them?"

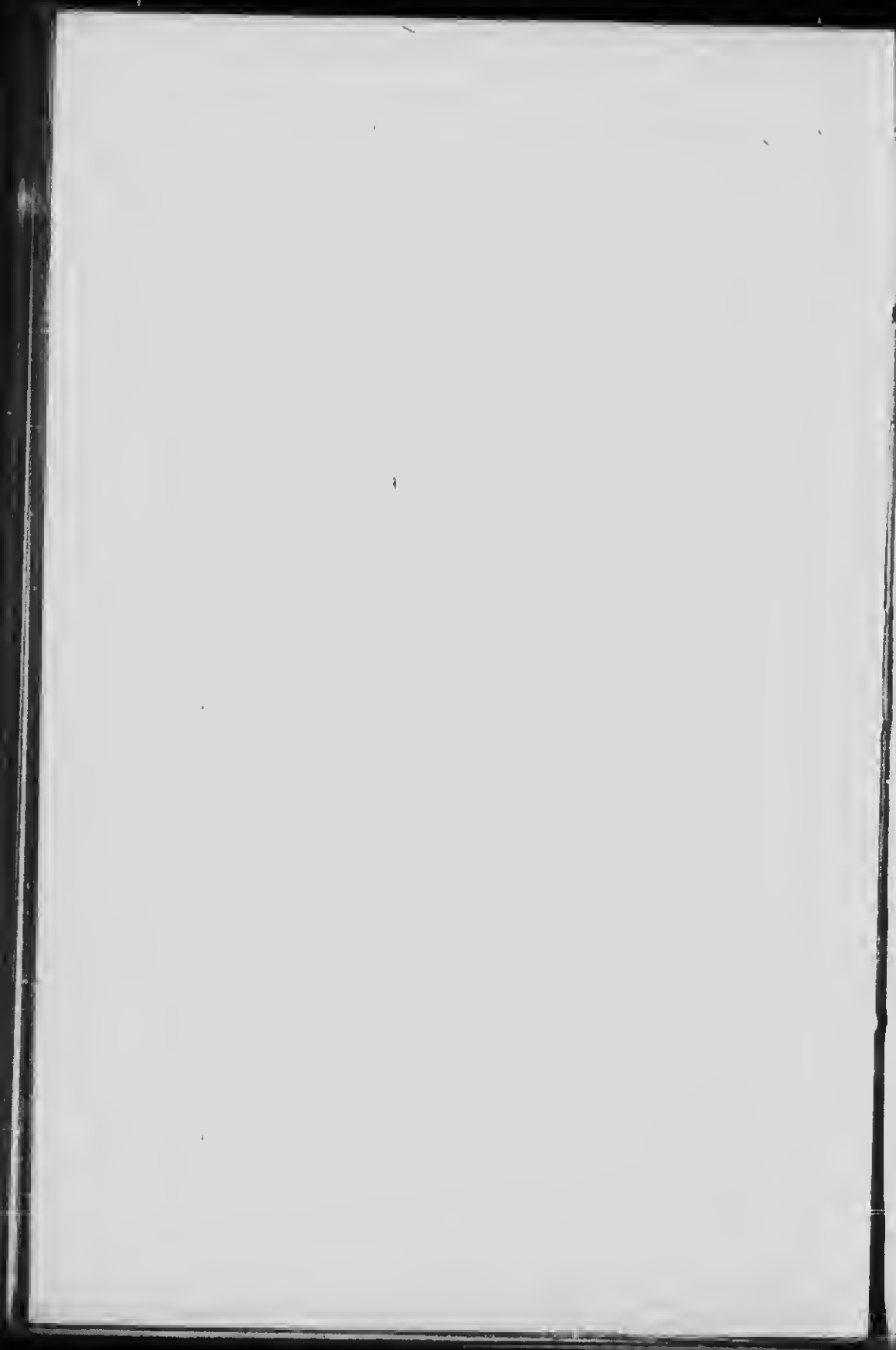
I told her it was because the window was shut and then she begged me to open it.

"Just for one moment," she pleaded—"One moment couldn't do any harm."

I gratified her wish. How could I refuse? For that moment the songs of all the birds in the garden trembled in the darkened room. I walked to the bed-side to ask her if she heard them then. Her head was turned from me on the pillow and I saw a big tear rolling down her cheek.

"Are you unhappy?" I whispered.

"Oh—my dear——" said she.



*JUNE 10*







At seven o'clock this morning, Georgina died. I cannot write anything. About an hour before, we knew it must be the end.

Almost until the last she was unconscious. Then a minute before she died, she stirred. Her eyes opened and rested first on Diana's face and then on mine.

I saw her lips moving as she tried to speak. Quickly I leant across the bed to hear what she had to say.

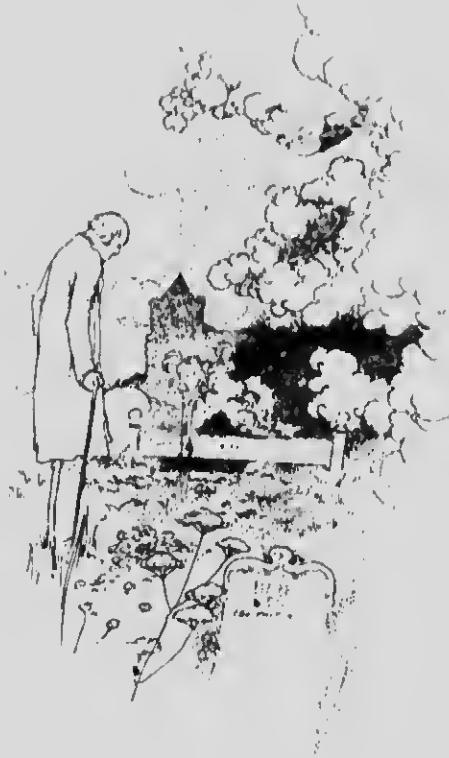
"Open the window, my dear," she breathed.

I obeyed at once and when I turned back to the bed-side, she had gone. The look of gratitude was still there in her face. For one instant she had heard the birds at their singing. I am glad she heard them once more before she died.





*APRIL 8*







HAD thought I should never open this note book again. Something in the spirit of it and its making seemed so closely connected with Georgina when she was alive that with her death, I felt it to be a closed book.

When they lowered the coffin into the grave and as one by one the shovel-fulls of earth were heaped upon it, I said to myself that there my life had ended also. Something of me was buried too that day. If I were master of my pen I might attempt to explain it. Doubtless when greatly you receive, you greatly give; and from Georgina I had received so much. Women are no less wonderful because a man does not understand them. I have never understood them at all, perhaps because they know so little about themselves. But Georgina had been very wonderful to me. So much had she made herself one with the interests of my life, that at times I would feel as if in her, I were looking on at myself; could almost criticise my actions, passing judgment upon them from those very things she did herself.

"My dear," she has sometimes said to me—"I have done such and such a thing."

"How did you do it?" I would ask and, in her answer, see myself as clearly as if it had been a mirror to my mind.

"There you are, my friend," I have often said to myself—"that is you, whether you like it or not—now what do you think of yourself?"

Over the matter of Hodgins, the gardener, I learnt a thousand times how small and petty my prejudices were. When she did not give way to hers, I could see how miserably I had given way to mine myself. This is the miracle which Love can make between a man and a woman. God is Love—it were the same to say that God is Understanding. We often knew, each of us, what the other was going to say. I know she read my thoughts as easily as I could think them. Some little weakness—and how many we all of us have—and I would see her eyes turn away rather than look at me, rather than let me know she had seen. A thousand times I have not recognised it was a weakness until the moment when I saw the turning of her head.

There, you see, I have tried; you see also how completely I have failed. I cannot explain what it was that was taken from me on the day that Georgina died, but something of me was laid at rest when they threw those spade-fulls of earth into her grave.

Now all that remains of me, I see in Diana's eyes. Slowly through these long days of winter we have

just left behind, she has begun to be my mirror too. I am finding again my little weaknesses as a father where before I found my weaknesses as a man. Diana is almost nineteen now and already, I know, she feels I am merely a child.

Only the other morning she reproved me for the untidiness of my study.

"I use it more than I did," I explained in my defence — "Your mother used to keep it tidy before; but then she occupied it more than I did."

"Is that a good excuse, Daddy?" said she.

I sat down in the chair in which Georgina was wont to sit and then Diana put her arms round my neck and kissed me. I felt she was calling me a child then and indeed I am sure she is older and wiser than I. She tells me things about people in the parish which I am certain are quite true and would never have come to me of my own accord.

I suppose it is that as we grow older we live the more in the past. Our judgments are of the past;



our wisdom an accumulation of experience. The new generation is always looking forward; their eyes are forever staring outward and onward. We only look within. They are wiser in the present than we, for we have the wisdom as of little children, the sum of whose expression is in the past.

Surely it is only speech and expression that a baby needs to make it tell the wonders of the ages through which it has come. A man grows from infancy to youth and all his wisdom comes from that which lies before him. He nears old age and wisdom is for him in that which lies behind. Then he is a child once more with speech at will to give expression to the generation he has passed.

Without doubt it is the child who is the wisest of us all, next the youth and last of all the man of years, the man who has lost his sight of the ages which have gone, is blind to all the ages yet to come and has but the little span of his three score years and ten from which to gather wisdom.

Yes—I am sure of it now—Diana is wiser than I. Sometimes I see her grey eyes looking out across the garden to the wide acres of corn-field just beyond. She does not see, as I, how much better the hollyhocks have done this year than last; she does not compare, as I compare, the coming harvest with the wealth of last year's yield. Her eyes are set upon a

great futurity which mine have grown too old to see.  
And one of these days—if God wills it—when her  
eyes too are growing dim, she will have put forth  
another life to see yet further towards the great  
beyond.



APRIL 9







HIS month has opened sadly in our part of the world. The grey days have followed each other in procession. Scarcely one has gone by without the low clouds breaking in some shower of rain. The first Swallow which, in an hour of sunshine, I saw the day before yesterday, has found a shelter somewhere and will not venture out. I wonder where he has gone. He must regret the blue skies of Africa he has left behind.

Until a few days ago the catkins on the nut trees were still hanging to the branches. Diana said they looked like tassels on a mid-Victorian antimacassar. It will be Diana's grandchildren who will speak of the mid-Victorian era with respect. There is no romance in it to her. Georgina and I both liked antimacassars. We used to have them on all the chairs in the drawing-room. Then one day Diana came back for her holidays from school and told us they would never do. I remember the day when Georgina packed them all away into an old chest on the landing. They are there still.

But Diana was quite right. A few weeks later,

Mrs. Smith—the wealthiest of our parishioners, who is generous too—came to pay a call.

“I’m glad,” said she—“to see you’ve got rid of your antimacassars—they give such an old-fashioned air to a room. I hope you *have* got rid of them—” she added—“they haven’t gone to the wash—have they?”

We assured her they were no more. But I am certain it was just that old-fashioned air which Georgina loved. It was not old-fashioned really to us. To Diana it was not old-fashioned enough. Anyhow her simile was quite good. The catkins did look just like tassels. It was the tone of voice in which she said it.

But the Spring this year is very backward. The last year’s blossom of clematis is even now still clinging to the hedges. It has grown grey and dusty and spiders’ webs are all spun across the flowers. It reminded me in some way when I saw it of Miss Haversham’s wedding breakfast that had waited and waited in vain.

I cannot forget that Swallow which I saw three days ago. If I had it in my power I would give such a welcome of sunshine to these intrepid little birds, that face the dangers of their thousand miles to reach once more the home they left last year.

The idea of that Swallow, driven into hiding, compelled to shelter from the cheerless skies directly it arrived, has grown so much in my mind

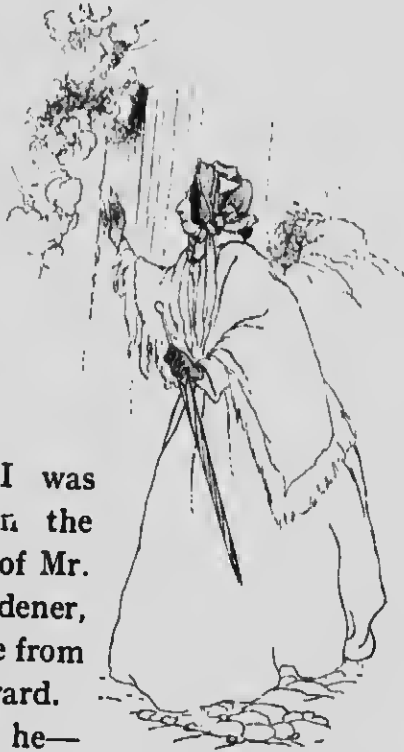
that at morning service to-day I read the prayer for fair weather. I was sure the farmers would welcome it and one day of sunshine would mean a lot to the Swallow that has come so many miles to its old nesting place beneath my eaves.

And so I read the prayer that God would send us such weather as that we might receive the fruits of the earth in due season, wondering as I read it, whether the thoughts which were in my mind could justify the use of such words as those.

After service, while I was changing my surplice in the vestry, I heard the voice of Mr. Bumstead, our market gardener, as he was on his way home from church through the graveyard.

"Blame parson," said he—

"What's 'e want to go prayin' for fine weather when those fields of mine be fair dried wi' all the gravel underneath 'em. I never said Amen to anythin' he asked for but I just whips out my prayer-book and while he was readin' the prayer for fine weather, danged if I didn't read the prayer



for rain. An' what's more, I got it finished and had my Amen out afore his'n."

I told Diana about this at dinner. I told it her in all seriousness because it seemed perhaps to me that in the selfishness of my thoughts I had not been guided to the right.

She looked at me for a moment and then, with a twinkle in her eye, she leant across the table and held my hand as I was helping myself to salt.


"Say a prayer for local showers, Daddy," said she.

Now can there be any doubt about it? Diana is wiser than I.

*APRIL 11*







TO-DAY there were new-comers to Bramlingham. The Orchard Farm next to us has been sold and this morning the new-arrivals took possession. They are named Tregenna and must be of the west country—Cornish most probably. There is a father and mother, a son and daughter. The daughter is pretty, but not well-dressed. The son is to farm the two hundred acres in training for greater ventures in California where his uncle has large property. The mother is dowdy and wears black. I have heard nothing of the father. My informant in all these matters is Diana. She has been in the garden most of the morning and our wall, facing the south, overlooks a portion of the garden of the Orchard Farm.

Feeling afraid that she might have been inquisitive, I asked her how she had learnt all these things so soon.

"I was pruning the ramblers, Daddy," said she—"on the south wall. I saw them in their garden."

"But the ramblers should have been pruned last month," said I.

"They were," she replied—"I was only pretending—they didn't know. I kept getting down and moving the ladder. Their furniture's all modern. It must look awful in that lovely old house. I don't like people without taste—it's as necessary as good manners. Little Miss Chester down in the village with her old china and those Chippendale things she has makes up for all her abruptness. She's really nice at heart—that's what you are if you have good taste. People with good manners and bad taste are only superficially nice. One day you'll find out they're horrid at heart."

I am sure I don't know where Diana has learnt all this. She evidently has made up her mind to disapprove of the Tregennas.

Now I am wondering if there is any truth in what she says. Has taste really become as essential as good manners? When first Georgina and I were married, I am afraid we thought more of the comfort of our little house; comfort that was not luxury, but certainly comfort that was ease. It was only after Diana had been to school in the south that we first heard any mention of this word taste.

In this, I have no doubt, Diana and her generation will find that they are wrong. Mrs. Tregenna for all her dowdiness will prove to be a generous and good-hearted soul; the modern furniture too will

be comfortable and homely enough when Diana discovers a friendship with the pretty but ill-dressed daughter.

In the high trees beyond the spinney, while I was



out for my walk this morning, I heard the Hay-bird for the first time this year. In the text books they call it the Willow-warbler, but the popular name of Hay-bird seems far more suitable to me. In the first place I have never seen this little creature in a

willow tree in my life. His hunting ground for those insects which make his daily food is in the trees that border on the edge of the meadows and corn-fields and then again his nest is built of hay.

When therefore Diana, who had accompanied me, stopped, listening to his song and asked me what bird it was, I told her it was the Hay-bird.

"Listen carefully," said I—"He always sings the same twenty or thirty notes over and over again but you never get tired of hearing them. There is a new freshness to them every time."

We could see him, high above us, flying from one branch to another, the olive-green of his plumage making it somewhat difficult for us sometimes to distinguish him amongst the leaves.

"It sounds," said Diana presently—"it sounds just as if he were going to begin a story—a once-upon-a-time story and then when he gets as far as telling where the Princess lives, he stops."

No-one could have described the song of the Hay-bird better than that. I looked at her and smiled at the fertility of her imagination.

"Don't you like his song then?" I asked.

"Love it," said she—"I think it's sweet."

"But doesn't it annoy you when he stops?"

"No."

"It must be his manner then," said I—"He has the bad taste not to finish his story but he does it

with such good-manners that you like him in spite of it all."

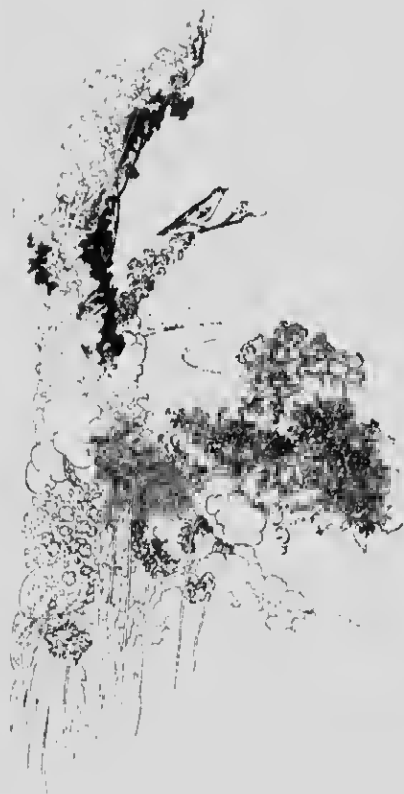
She twisted me round and made me look her in the face.

"Daddy," said she—"I'm not going to like the Tregennas."

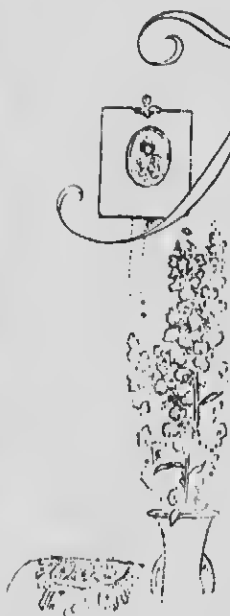




APRIL 17







HIS was Georgina's birthday. Had she lived, she would have been fifty-one to-day. After breakfast this morning I went up to the bed-room where she died. We keep the room locked up. No-one has used it since her death. Turning the key as quietly as I could for I did not wish Diana to know that I was there, I entered and closed the door after me.

Nothing had been said at breakfast with reference to what day it was. I almost hoped that perhaps Diana had forgotten. It would not exactly be like her to do so. There is a very gentle side of her nature which does not admit of forgetfulness in such things as this. But this gentleness is only to be seen occasionally. In general you would confess her worthy of her name. There is all the element of adventure in her soul.

This morning however, I noticed that gentleness and thought how like Georgina she had grown. She had seen to it that we had a fish-pie for breakfast and

this is a dish I like as well as any. There were hot rolls too and when she handed me my tea she smiled and said —“ God bless you.”

Yet nothing was said of Georgina's birthday. I made sure she had forgotten it and once, as I looked at the chair my wife was wont to occupy at meals, I turned away quickly with the feeling that Diana's eyes were watching me. This was not so— in fact her eyes, completely in the opposite direction, were gazing far across the broad fields of the Orchard Farm.



So I felt confident that I would not be disturbed and, having listened for a moment at the door to make certain that she was downstairs, I went across to the window, drew aside the curtains and raised it as high as it would go.

With the sound of all the birds in the garden, with the song of a lark lifted high above the meadows, sprinkling its music which fell like tinkling bells into the silence of the room, it was indeed as if with the opening of that window I had let the spirit of Georgina come back, just as on that day in summer of last year I had opened the window to let it speed away to God.

It must have been an hour I sat there, thinking most-times of her, of our days together in Bramling-

ham, our years together at St. Margaret's in the East End. Sometimes the voice of a Chiff-chaff trilling his two unvaried notes, sometimes the song of a White-throat in the garden would distract my mind. I have loved these birds from childhood, longer even than I have loved Georgina but what I wrote of them in this note book last year, I would still maintain to be true. I should miss the song of the Blackcap were he never to return to our garden, but in time the prolongation of his absence would diminish my regret. This will never be so with the absence of Georgina. My heart grows fonder of her as the days go by and there is no certain promise of her return.

Yet perhaps this is because there are times and often when it seems to me she has never really gone at all. A feeling of her presence still remains. I think that that is why I close this room, to foster some half-formed belief that she is with us now. As I entered the room this morning and saw the bed on which she had died, it came back swiftly to my mind that she was dead; but when I opened the window to the world outside and let the singing of the birds and all the air of Spring come in once more, she came to life again. That hour it seemed I sat and talked with her.

And then at last the door opened and she was gone again. I turned round. It was Diana. She came across the room at once and knelt beside my chair.

"Daddy," she said—"you're only making yourself unhappy."

I shook my head, but she would have it so.

"You're only allowing yourself to remember things," she went on. "Don't! I knew you would because to-day was mother's birthday."

So she *had* remembered. Perhaps she *was* looking at me after all.

Then she put both hands on my shoulders and, as is her habit when she needs my full attention, turned me round to face her eyes.

"Aren't I any good?" she asked—"Don't I help at all? Tell me if there's anything in which I'm lacking and I'll try to make it good."

"Just be yourself, my dear," said I—that was the first time I had called her so—"I wouldn't have you changed for the ransom of a king. I'm not unhappy so long as I've got you."

"Very well, then, Daddy—listen," said she—"I promise you that I'll never leave you—no—you're not to say a word—" and she put her hand across my mouth and I remember now it was verbenas she had been picking it—"I'm never going to leave you—never!"

And I have written this in my note book so that it may remind me in her wildest moments how gentle Diana can be.

APRIL 18







AN unfortunate incident has occurred, one which I fear will embarrass the relationship with our next-door neighbours. If we had already called and shown the friendliness of our disposition, which I certainly feel, it would not have been so difficult. But intentionally I have deferred our first visit until such time as I thought they would be comfortably settled. Now this unfortunate affair has happened to strain the making of friendly relations and instead of calling as a visitor, my first intentions must be those of a peacemaker.

It appears they have employed a boy to frighten away the birds in the cherry orchard by tapping on the back of an old tea-tray. He sits on the ground beneath one of the trees in the middle of the orchard and, with the tray between his legs, pursues the monotonous beating of his drum from early morning until the evening comes when no bird will search for food.

It annoyed me a little at first, the sound was so persistent and so unvaried. But after a time, I think both Diana and I began to like it. There

was something primitive in the sight of that boy, seated beneath the cherry trees over-burdened with the weight of their snow, rattling this barbaric tune on his old kettledrum. We both agreed that it was the most humane method of keeping the birds away.

I think Diana was even favourably impressed with the Tregennas on this account, but the impression did not last for long. This morning, as I was in the garden, I heard the sound of voices in heated altercation. At that distance I could not distinguish what was being said but I made sure at least that one voice was Diana's. Accordingly I walked down the little lane between the nut-hedges and looked over the five-barred gate that gave entrance to the cherry orchard.

By then the voices had ceased and, as I came within sight, I saw the young Mr. Tregenna raising his hat as he walked away from Diana who was standing by the boy who beats the tea-tray under the trees. He was holding the tray in one hand and, with the knuckles of the other, was rubbing first one eye and then the next.

I called to Diana. She came across to the gate carrying a dead Bullfinch in the palm of her open hand. I half guessed what had happened. These little birds rapaciously devour the blossom of the cherry trees in Spring. So far from being uncommon in this country, they are to be found in all fruit districts in great numbers. With their strong beaks,

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GEORGE H. BROWN.

*The Dead Bullfinch.*



they nip off the flower buds and will destroy a whole crop in embryo if left unmolested. This makes cause enough against them for the farmer, but I know well-enough the feelings of Diana at the sight of that little creature in its glorious red, grey and purple-black plumage. She cannot bear to see any animal dead. I remember the tears coming thickly into her eyes when she saw a swallow that had beaten itself to death against a window pane in the garden-ing shed.

"What has happened?" I asked as she came up.

It appeared to be much as I had expected. The boy had brought a catapult with him, concealed in his pocket. To vary the monotony of beating on his tray, he had taken shots at the birds which came within reach of his aim. By some mischance this Bullfinch had been hit and fell wounded to the ground.

When Diana found him, it was lying on the grass by his side still alive. I can imagine the torrent of her anger at such a sight as that. Without the slightest hesitation she set to and gave that boy as many sound blows across the head as I have no



doubt he will remember for a few weeks; and was thus engaged when young Mr. Tregenna came up.

"You must excuse my interruption," said he—"but may I ask what you're doing?"

"I'm giving this boy a beating," said Diana—"for shooting that Bullfinch."

"Then possibly you don't know," replied Mr. Tregenna—and I am sure it must have been his quietness of voice which irritated Diana the more—"but this boy is employed by me to keep away the birds from the cherry blossom. He's only doing the duty he's paid for. Of course he's not expected to kill the birds, but personally I quite approve of his having killed a Bullfinch—a dozen of those little beggars would strip this orchard bare."

"But he hasn't killed it!" explained Diana—"that's the brutality of it! It's quivering still and if you had any feeling for animals at all, you'd kill it at once."

I suppose he must have smiled at the intensity of her feelings, for here, as she recounted it to me, Diana became almost incoherent with anger at the remembrance of it all.

"Did he kill it?" I asked.

"Yes—after I'd said that if he didn't do it I should have to do it myself. I told him too that he ought to get rid of the boy at once; that if I had anybody in my service who was cruel to animals I should dismiss them at a moment's notice."

"But you had no right to tell him what he ought to do, Diana."

"I can't help that!" she exclaimed—"I'd dismiss the little brute at once. I hope I hurt him."

It was no good trying then to persuade her to a more charitable frame of mind. In fact I must admit that when I saw the dead Bullfinch lying in her hand, I felt greatly in sympathy with all she had said. Georgina would have done just the same. And for myself, I would never kill a bird. They have plenty of dangers to threaten them without the hand of man. There are the long cold days of winter when all their food is covered by the snow. A man it seems only notices the habits of birds when they affect his crops. He never thinks of the inestimable service they are to him when the ground is barren and the harvest has been gathered in.

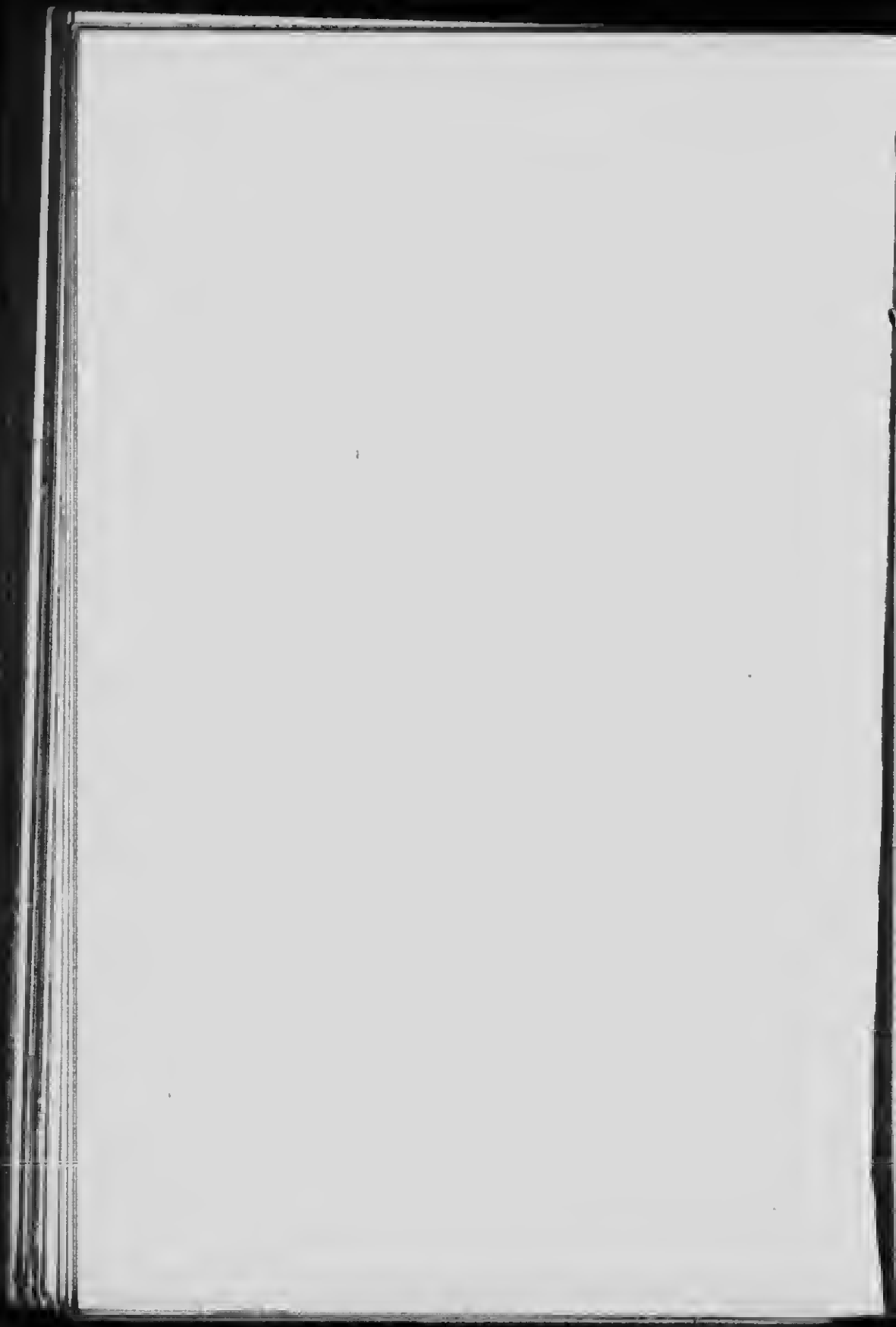
I said nothing, therefore, but took her arm and we walked back to the house. Just as we reached the summer house, she stopped and her fingers tightened on my hand as she listened. The boy had begun beating on his tea-tray once more. I saw a look in her face.

"I shall bury the Bullfinch in the garden," said she—"and put up a little gravestone to remember it by."



*APRIL 21*







AFTER this incident in the cherry orchard, I thought it best to call upon the Tregennas as soon as possible and this morning told Diana that I thought we had better go. She said nothing.

"You'll come—won't you?" said I.

"I can't," she replied—"I'm going into the village to see Miss Chester. She's in bed with a cold."

There was time no doubt for her to have performed both duties but having seen this very morning a small wooden cross under one of the apple trees in the kitchen garden and guessing the memory of that to which it was raised, I did not press her to accompany me. At half past four then I went alone.

The low-ceilinged drawing-room of the old Orchard Farm house certainly does not look well with modern furniture. Up to a certain point, Diana and her generation are quite right, good taste is a pleasant characteristic. I think perhaps the father and the mother are responsible for the modernity of the furniture. He has been a brewer, now retired and

devoted to the future interests of his son. But he has ideas of his own, and those ideas he evidently insists on seeing carried out. Mrs. Tregenna is silent and obedient to all his wishes. They are both most estimable people.

We sat over tea and talked. Mr. Tregenna told me how his son was managing the farm for three years in preparation for his greater venture the other side of the world. In three years' time he was to set off for California and then they would let the land, remaining in the farmhouse themselves and retaining such acres of land as was required for their own needs.

Young Mr. Tregenna has been through one of the agricultural colleges. This is his first attempt at the actual management of a farm.

I gathered all this throughout the conversation during which nothing was mentioned of his encounter with Diana.

It was just as I had risen to my feet, saying that I must go, that the door of the drawing-room opened and he entered. His face is open and honest. I liked the grip of his hand.

"Must you go now?" said he.

I said I had been there for full an hour.

"Well—I'll walk to the gate with you," said he, and in the definite tone of his voice, I felt that his intention was other than mere politeness. He had something to say to me and it needed no

very shrewd guess of mine to imagine what it was.

For the first few steps we walked in silence and then he came out with it.

"I hope your daughter didn't think me rude," said he—"over that little affair of the Bullfinch. To tell you the truth, until I saw you at the gate, I didn't realise who she was."

"Oh no," said I at once—"she didn't think you rude."

"But she thought me cruel."

I smiled. He would have it that she thought him something. So then I explained how fond we both are of birds.

"Not too fond," I added—"but perhaps a little foolishly so. Bullfinches are great pets of ours."

"You haven't a cherry orchard," said he.

"No," said I—"but we make red and black currant jam every year from the fruit out of our garden."

"Then how do you manage?" he asked.

I told him how I tied straw ropes round the gooseberry and the currant bushes to alter their appearance, at the same time having strings across the garden with little pieces of paper attached that twirled around with the breath of the slightest wind.

"Then," I added—"I put some peas in the little lane next to your orchard. I find they are sufficient attraction for the Bullfinches and served to satisfy

their appetites before ever they get into the garden. They used to disbud my fruit trees terribly until I did that."

We had passed the gate by this time and he still walked on by my side towards the Vicarage.

"I'm afraid a farmer can't waste time over such elaborate precautions as those," he said presently—"but your daughter was quite right to smack the boy's head if he was torturing the bird. I have no actual evidence that he was and so I could scarcely adopt the extreme measure she suggested."

"You mean of dismissing him?"

"Yes."

"Oh—you mustn't take any notice of that," I said at once—"Diana's very impulsive. She didn't stop to think what she was saying."

"Diana's her name," said he.

I nodded and he repeated it. He probably knew some-one so called.

"And now I suppose," he went on with a smile—"she thinks me the villain in the piece."

"She'll tell you that she doesn't herself," said I laughing—"here she comes along the road now—" and wishing that peace should be made with our neighbours, we passed by the Vicarage gate to meet her as she returned from her visit to Miss Chester.

I could not help smiling as I saw Diana's cheeks grow red when she realised the inevitable meeting.

"Mr. Tregenna imagines," said I—"that you

think him a villain because of what happened the other morning."

"I don't think I have thought about it at all," said Diana and there came a look into her face which I had never seen before. It must have been because that was not quite the truth. That little cross of wood under the apple tree was proof of it. But women often say things like this. I have never discovered why, yet often I have noticed it.

Still, whether it were the truth or not, it had a peculiar effect upon the young man beside me. He held out his hand to me and saying something to the effect that he must not intrude further upon my time, he raised his hat to Diana and set back down the road.

"You have offended him, Diana," said I.

"Have I," she replied.

"And it was not quite the truth," I added—"surely you must have thought about it when you put that little wooden cross under the apple tree."

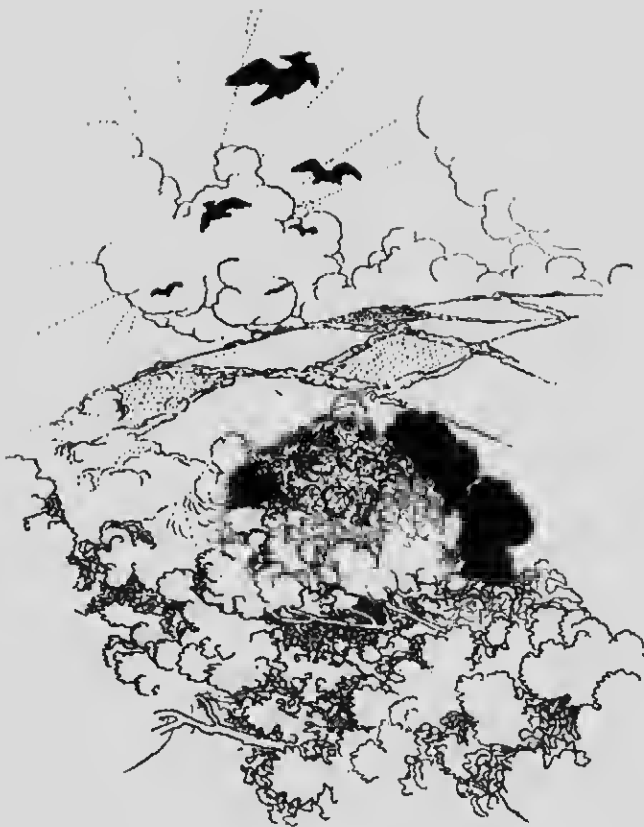
"Well—I shan't think about it any more," said she.

I have put all this into my note book, because it has seemed to me a strange example of how women form hasty dislikes and for such slight reasons. I think myself that he is a nice, honest fellow. But this was not really what I had intended to write about. I wanted to record the fact that I heard a Wren this morning singing as brave a song as I have

ever listened to. Looking out into the garden, I saw him seated on a low branch of the quickset hedge, while on a branch near by his mate sat listening enraptured.


I wish it were always Spring.

APRIL 25



L





THIS morning I rose early and went for a walk into the woods. Certain things there are, which are characteristic of certain days, which strike the note of the seasons. There was a sharp frost last night. When I set out the ground was white but in less than half an hour a warm sun had melted it. Only the spiders' webs, spun in the gaps of the hedges, retained the white spangling of the hoar. If I had been asked then what were the characteristics of that morning at that time of Spring, I should have said—the tumbling flight of the Peewit and the smell of a woodsman's fire.

For a long while I stood at the edge of the wood watching these birds as with winnowing wings they circled about the fields, uttering that unmusical cry which has given them the name of Peewit by which most commonly they are known. Lapwing is the name I like better, for it seems to me that their peculiar flight is more characteristic of them than their cry; and Plover, which is the more generic

term, I like not at all. The delicacy of the Plover's egg, demanding as it does that nests should be rifled year after year appeals to me only in the sense of its cruelty. It is only once a year that they attempt to raise a brood, and because the egg is a delicacy makes no excuse in my mind for its destruction.

I remember a man once saying to me—

"Cricket may be an excellent game, but you have to be a first class player to enjoy it. If my side goes in first and I make a duck, the rest of the day is spoilt for me so far as any enjoyment goes."

Now if a man feels that for one day about a sport, what must a bird feel for the rest of the year when one of the first instincts of its nature has been frustrated? The bird doesn't feel, is the answer of the man as he dips his Plover's egg in celery salt and carries it to his mouth.

But this is a theory I most vigorously would deny. If you can prove that a bird, or any animal has feelings at all, you must admit that in elemental matters where the first instincts of its nature are concerned, those feelings will most be seen. Now it is not good enough to say that a bird has feelings of hunger. These may be merely physical, conveying no impression to the brain. But you must confess that a bird has feelings of fear. It can be frightened, and fright is less connected with the body than the mind. So, if the instinct of self-preservation, which I am prepared to admit is the strongest with

which Nature has provided Her creatures, gives rise to feelings of fear in the mind, then must not the instinct of reproduction which is nearly as great, be accountable for feelings almost as strong as fear. But a bird will even conquer fear for the preservation of its young. Larks and Thrushes are well known in this respect and so I argue that it must be higher mental activity which rises to such an effort and as such should be respected.

This is no sentimental notion in my mind, but a decision arrived at by logical processes alone. Therefore, believing that birds do feel and suffer at the deprivation of their young, how could I with complacency eat a Plover's egg? How could anyone if they believed the same as I? The luxury of food is the last necessity for which a man should seek. Yet luxury, now-a-days, for many is the only necessity they know.

One of these days, perhaps, it will occur to the King to refuse the first Plover's egg that the Spring-time brings him and then the fancied delicacy which it is no longer the fashion to enjoy will become a



tasteless thing. The gentleman who is so expert at argument, will cork up the bottle of his celery salt and, as he helps himself to *foie gras*, will say that after all it was rather hard on the Plover.

It was the smell of the woodsman's fire that drew me on further in my walk. At last by the pale blue mist of the smoke and the damp, burnt smell of the crackling faggots, I found him in a little hollow waiting for his morning meal. His wife was with him. They had both slept under the shelter of a great beech tree that night and now she was cooking his breakfast.

I stood by and talked to him about the weather and the prospects of the year, watching her as she chopped up onions and shallots, putting them one by one as she prepared them into the pot that simmered appetisingly on the fire. The smell of the stew reached my nostrils. It made me feel so hungry that at last I asked him what it contained.

"A few bits of bacon, sir—a little potato—onions—shallots——"

He paused trying to think what else.

"And little bits of all sorts, sir," said his wife looking up.

"Well," said I—"I've never smelt anything that gave me a better appetite."

"You're hungry for your breakfast, sir—no doubt," suggested the woodsman. "There's nothing

like an appetite to make the simplest things seem tasty."

In a way it was an obvious remark, yet it brought new things to my mind when I thought back to the Plover's eggs.

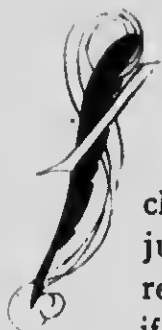
Perhaps one day the first Plover's egg will arrive for the King when he has an appetite—then, instead of accepting it, he will order some little bits of all sorts.



MAY 27







HAVE always thought that Diana was no ordinary girl and have as often rebuked myself for so thinking. With an only child, parents are apt to be warped in judgment, eager to find some virtue which redounds to the credit of themselves. Yet if to the third and fourth generation the sins of the fathers descend upon the children, then perhaps it is excusable in a parent when he is quick to find a virtue in his child.

Nevertheless, I have guarded well against my pride in this matter and, this morning, was rewarded by the discovery of a talent in my daughter which fills me with such feelings of pleasure as I can make no effort to disguise.

Diana has taken to writing verses.

The sense of poetry in her, I feel sure, she must inherit from Georgina. True, in the keeping of this little note book, I have made use of my pen; but it has been no more than in record of the daily thoughts and observations which all this wonderful countryside has brought me. I can claim no virtue of expression in these; for though Georgina never used her pen at all—even in writing letters she found it

difficult to apply her mind—yet she spoke of such thoughts to me as could only have come from one deeply sensitive to the beauty of life about her.

How strange then it is that Diana should have inherited this from her mother when, ever since I was a young man up at Oxford, it has been my ambition to make some slight contribution to the literature of the country in which I was born. The need of patient application, a certain characteristic dilatoriness too, perhaps, has always stood in the way of the accomplishment of my desire. I am now fifty-nine and I suppose my pen will scarcely ever do more for me than make these occasional idle jottings in an idle book.

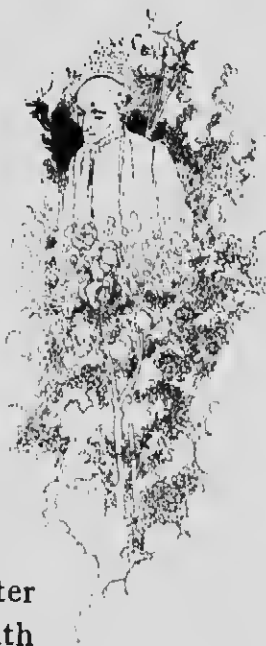
It is left to Diana with the inheritance of her mother's gift of seeing the beauty in life about her, it is left to her to make that contribution to literature to which I shall never attain. This is no idle supposition. From the verses I saw this morning and, judging them with such impartiality as a father is capable of towards his child, I am certain that she will create something of repute in the world of letters, something that cannot be entirely overlooked by even the severest judges.

I came across these verses by chance. In her bed-room she has a small, old oak bureau, ostensibly, so she has informed me, at which to write her letters. It was there I found the paper on which the verses were written. Soon after breakfast, whilst she was

attending to household duties in the kitchen, I had occasion to go up to her room.

I have discovered during the last few days, the presence of a Leaf-cutter bee in the garden and have been curious to find its nest. Leaf after leaf on the flowers in our borders has shown me that semi-circular excision, so clearly cut as to be unmistakably the work of this inimitable craftsman. Some days went by before I succeeded in catching sight of the little creature at its work. Each morning when I went out into the garden after breakfast, there were fresh traces of its labour. To-day I had my reward. On a petal of one of the first early roses that are in bloom on the standards, I saw the Leaf-cutter bee making as neat a job of its task as any cutter in a Bond Street tailor's shop. With its scissor-like jaws it was snipping out the semi-circular pattern it needs from the centre of a gorgeous red petal. Until that moment I had thought the only material they used was leaves. But in the country there may well be something new to learn with every day that comes.

I stood perfectly still until the bee had finished. They are timid creatures—so unlike the Honey bee



in this—and dislike disturbance at their work. As soon as the last fraction was severed from the petal, it caught the piece in its mouth—or with its legs, at that distance I could not be certain which—and flew away to its nest. The heavy burden was so much an impediment that its flight was slow enough for me to follow it. Without hesitation, it made directly for a hole in the bricks below Diana's window. Without any delay I went back into the house and hurried up to her bed-room. Leaning far out, I could just see the little creature at work.

With infinite care, yet never pausing, the petal was bent into a curve, then passed into a burrow in such a manner as that the one to follow might fit into its proper place. As soon as this operation was finished, it flew away again. I waited at the window, timing it by my watch until it should return. In little more than three minutes it was back once more, this time with a piece of roseleaf. Already the nest was assuming its thimble-like shape and into this, when all is complete, the egg is dropped together with the bread of the bees, that mixture of pollen and honey which is their household food.

It was when I had concluded my observations and come back into the room that I saw the sheet of verses lying out on Diana's desk. It did not occur to me to regard them as private. I picked them up and read—

"Between the May and the Rose,  
With the Summer just begun,  
When the highest leaf on the poplar knows  
The warmth of the morning sun;

Between the May and the Rose,  
With the broken buds aglow,  
When the lark uplifted to Heaven knows  
The all that he'll ever know;

Between the May and the Rose,  
When our touching hands are one,  
We shall know what God in His Heaven knows,  
With the Summer just begun."

As soon as I had read them once, I read them again. "I must not," I said to myself—"I must not let my judgment be biassed because this is Diana's work. Pride is no critic and should have no say in a matter like this. Then what?" I asked myself—"would you think of it were you to hear that it had been copied from the work of a well-known poet?"

I was compelled to confess that I thought it really fine.

Surely it cannot be a copy of some poet she admires! Would she not have written his name below?



*MAY* 28



M





AM glad I was right. Diana wrote the verses. I spoke to her about them last evening at supper and, in the confusion of admitting their authorship, the blood came warmly into her cheeks as though she were ashamed of them.

"There is nothing to be ashamed of, my dear girl," said I.

"But I had not intended anyone to see them," she replied.

"Well, I'm very glad I did," I returned.

"I don't want to pretend that they're anything really wonderful, but they certainly show promise of your being able to write good poetry. They're simple; there's a certain amount of observation, a distinct feeling for the beauty of things about them. I'd even go so far as to say that it is a long time since I've read anything I liked better."

I said no more than that. It would be a pity, I thought, if I praised her so much as to give her too exalted a notion of what she had done. So I kept my feelings to myself.

"What made you think of writing them?" I asked.

She became confused once more and said something to the effect that she supposed they were very foolish; that she had been reading some poetry and had probably tried to imitate it.

I liked this modesty in her, and pursued the matter no farther.

"She'll write something else soon," I said to myself. A gift like that is not meant to lie idle because the owner of it is consumed with modesty.

We shall know what God in His Heaven knows  
With the Summer just begun.

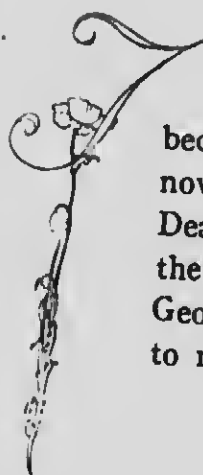
There is so much promise to me in those two lines that I have said them over and again to myself. I said them this morning as I looked out of my bedroom window. What a time of the year! Between the May and the Rose, with the Summer just begun. It was this time of all that Georgina loved the best. She was just beginning to see the fruits of her pruning—the roses were in bud.



JUNE 10







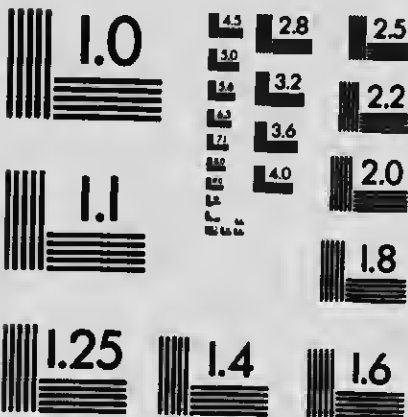
**HIS** is the day on which Georgina died.  
I have opened wide the window in her  
bed-room and all the sounds of Summer  
now come, are filling the silent room.  
Death cannot be the end. How could  
the Summer be with us again and  
Georgina really be gone? She was more  
to me than a thousand Summers.





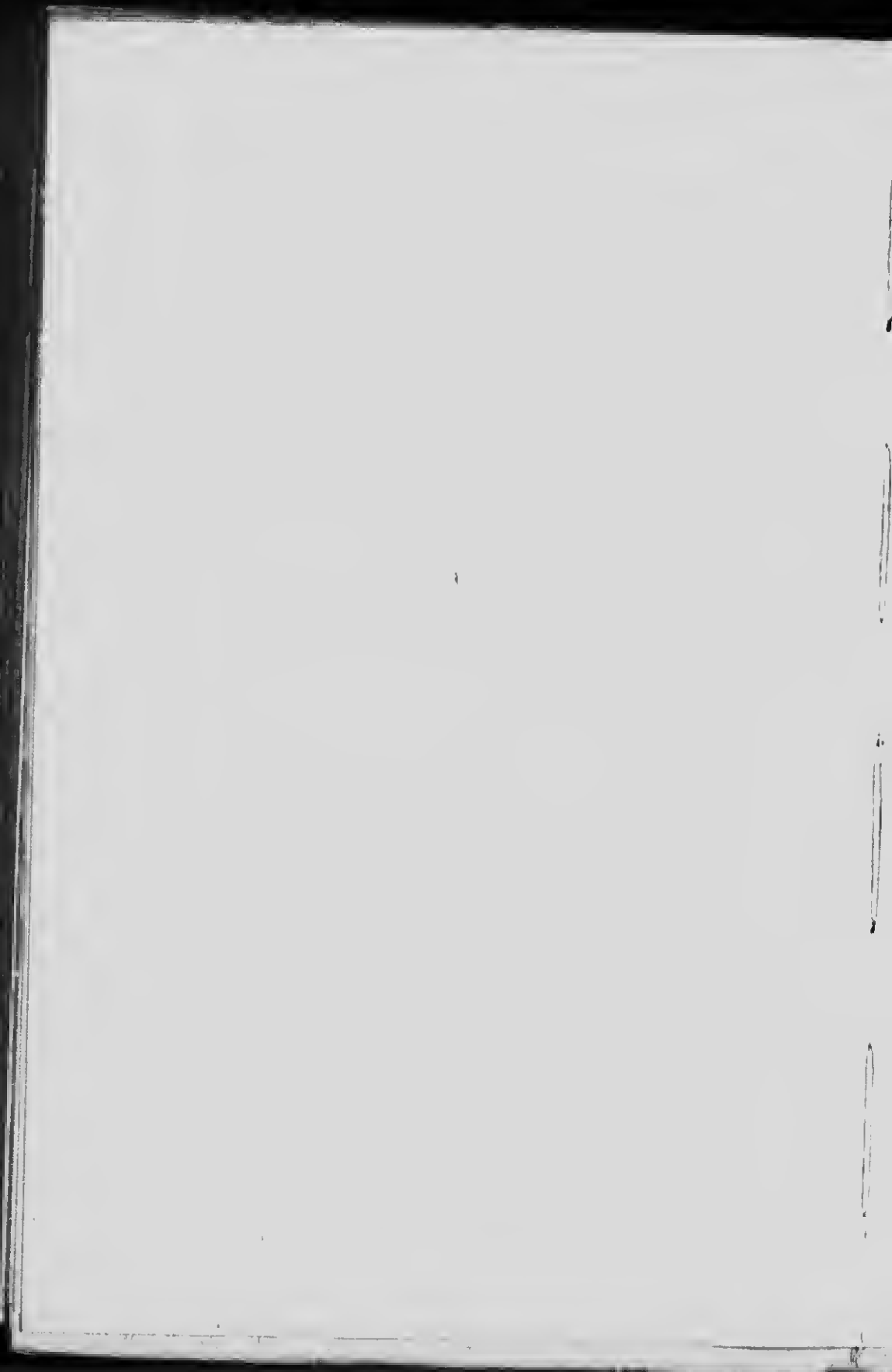
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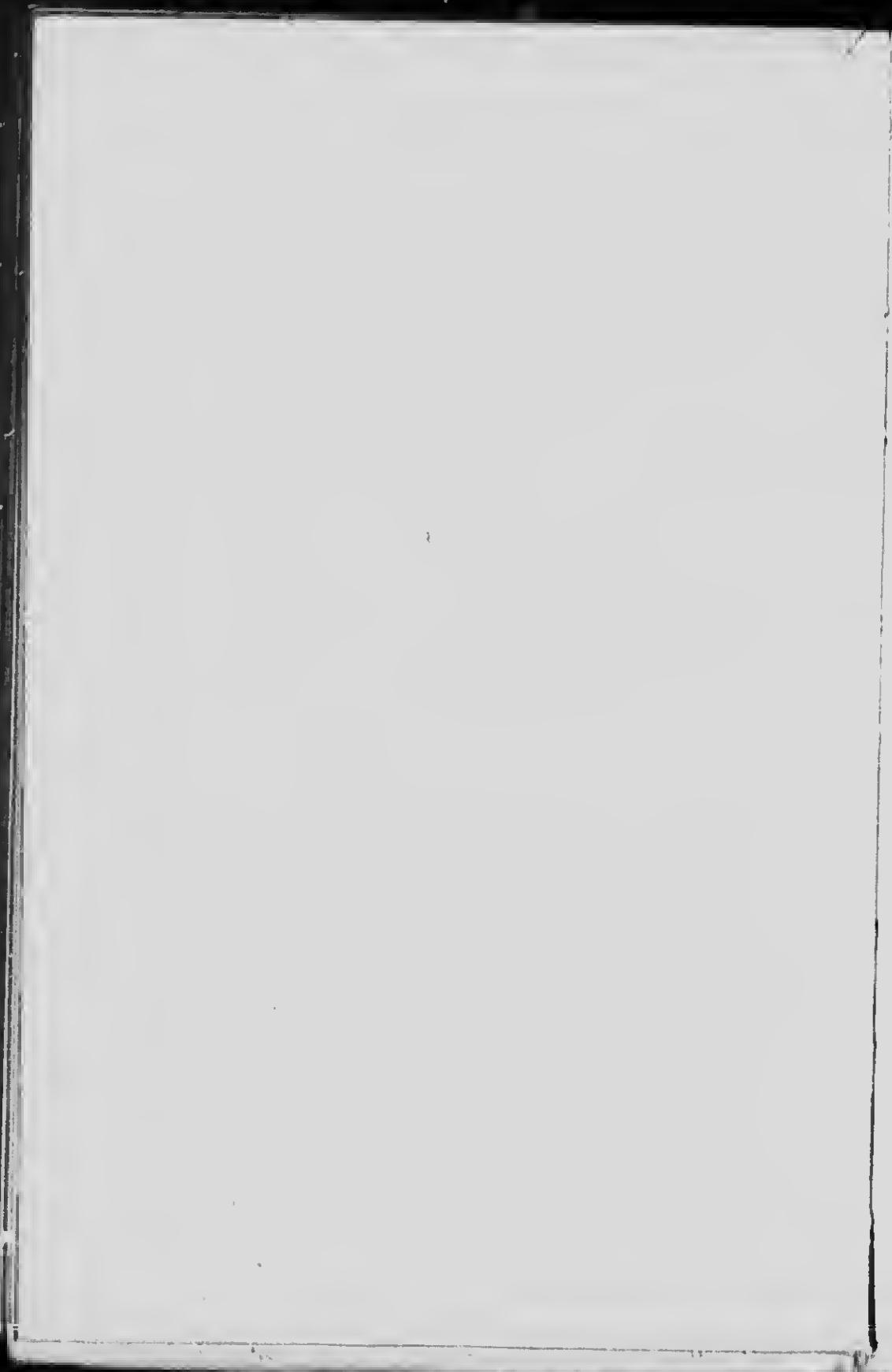
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JUNE 12







I CANNOT truthfully say that I believe in fairies, but the fairy story is a thing I feel sure the world could ill do without. On a shelf in the old nursery which has now become a sewing-room, stand all the books of fairy tales which Diana read when she was a child. I believe she sometimes reads them still.

I am no high-churchman, yet I have always believed in symbols, especially for the minds of children. Unless you train the eye to an ideal of beauty, it is apt to see nothing but ugliness when it comes to know the thing that is real. I cannot think why this should be so, and it is with much regret that I admit it. Perhaps it is the stain of the sin of origin left clinging in the mind, and if that be so, then doubly is it the duty of every parent to train in his child the power of seeing beauty everywhere. So, when it comes to the realities in life it will be able to see them in their true proportion.

I always used to tell Diana, as I myself and many another has been told, that when the birds lifted up their heads after drinking it was to give thanks to

the Almighty for the quenching of their thirst. For many, many years, I know she believed that this was true and then one day, when she was in her teens, she came to me and said—

“Daddy—when a bird puts back its head after it's been drinking, it's to let the water run down its throat.”

“Yes,” said I.

“You told me it was saying grace, Daddy.”

“Yes,” said I.

“Well—it isn't half so nice now that I know it's only the water running down its throat.”

“Would it have been nice at all if you'd known that all along?” I asked her.

She sat and looked at me for quite a long while, and then at last she put out both her hands.

“I believe old people are very wise,” said she. And I was only fifty then.

I have recalled this little fact because of something that occurred last evening. We have some ‘wealthy’ neighbours at Cawdlett Park. Young Mr. Fielding has just inherited through his father's death. We went there last night to dinner.

I knew the old gentleman quite well. He was a stern man; virtuous and just, honourable and good, but he found no beauty in life and therefore could not teach it to his son. The boy was sent out early into the world and, with little patrimony from his father, had to fight his own way. Two things he

did. He lost all touch with the religion in which he had been brought up and he became a socialist.

Now it seems you must be poor to be a socialist. He had often propounded his theories to me, for he had the honesty of his father and did not hesitate to tell me that religious worship no longer conveyed a meaning to his mind. I did not dislike him for that. I felt sorry—that was all.

Last evening then I had no little curiosity to see how the sudden change of fortune had operated upon his ideas. We were six at dinner. Young Mr. Tregenna and his sister were there. I know I concealed my smile when to him it was given the honour of taking in Diana. Probably no-one but I saw the faint flush in her cheeks as she laid her hand on his arm. I know she must have been thinking of the little wooden cross under the apple tree.

There was, too, it seemed to me, just a thought of victory in his eye. He looked proud to be himself, if I can put it in such a way, and indeed he had every good reason. Diana was looking most beautiful. I must not praise her; she is my own daughter. But never have I seen such fine, straight limbs or a head set so proudly on such shoulders as her evening dress displayed. I say never, yet there was Georgina as I knew Georgina first.

As we were all collected about the table, I began in silence to say my grace to myself when Mr. Fielding looked across at me and said—

"Vicar—will you say grace?"

I hope I did not show surprise and bending my head, I repeated the old form such as I have said from childhood—

*"For what we are going to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful, for Jesus Christ's sake—Amen."*

It was not until after dinner when the ladies had gone, that I had the opportunity of asking him why his ideas had changed.

"What ideas," said he.

"Your religious ideas."

"Oh—you mean my asking you to say grace. I always say it at meals myself now."

"Then they have changed?" I enquired.

"No—no—I think just the same, but you see our butler who was here nearly all through my father's time—he'd be horrified if we sat down to dinner without saying grace. I do it for him."

"Do you carry your socialism as far as that?" asked Tregenna.

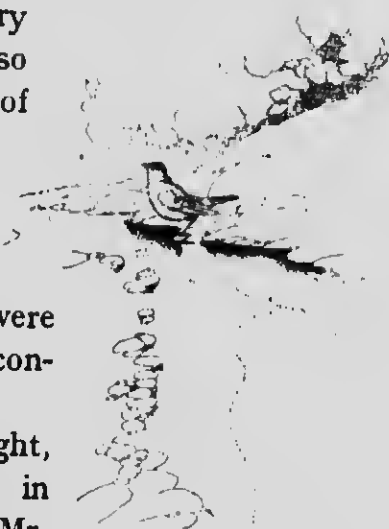
"Well—I don't think he would be so pleased if I raised his wages instead. You see, I find, now that I've inherited, that you only have real liberty when you're poor. A man struggles to get rich in order to gain or buy his independence, and the more money he gets, the more he lavishes it on convention. It's not liberty he's buying. With every fresh sovereign that he makes, he buys another link

in the chain of his own slavery. Wealth is the most overrated thing in the whole of this world—it's the most misunderstood. Once upon a time I'd have snapped my fingers in the face of that butler rather than have said grace. I was poor then and I was free."

Now all of this was very true. At least it seemed so to me. I record no more of what he said because from there he soared into the heights of his socialistic theories and, though no doubt they were interesting, they did not concern me.

"It all comes," I thought, "of the want of training in youth." Firmly as old Mr. Fielding believed in the forms of his religion, he never told his son that the birds were saying their grace when they lifted their heads. He had never thought that they do anything but let the water trickle down their throats."

No—I believe in fairy tales, and you will not find them in socialism. There must be a Prince and there must be a Beggar or you would never have a story to read.



" You all stayed a very long time in the dining-room," said Diana to me as we walked home.

" Did you find it long ? " said I.

" Oh no ! I didn't," she replied quickly, and then, taking my arm, she hummed a little tune as we walked along.

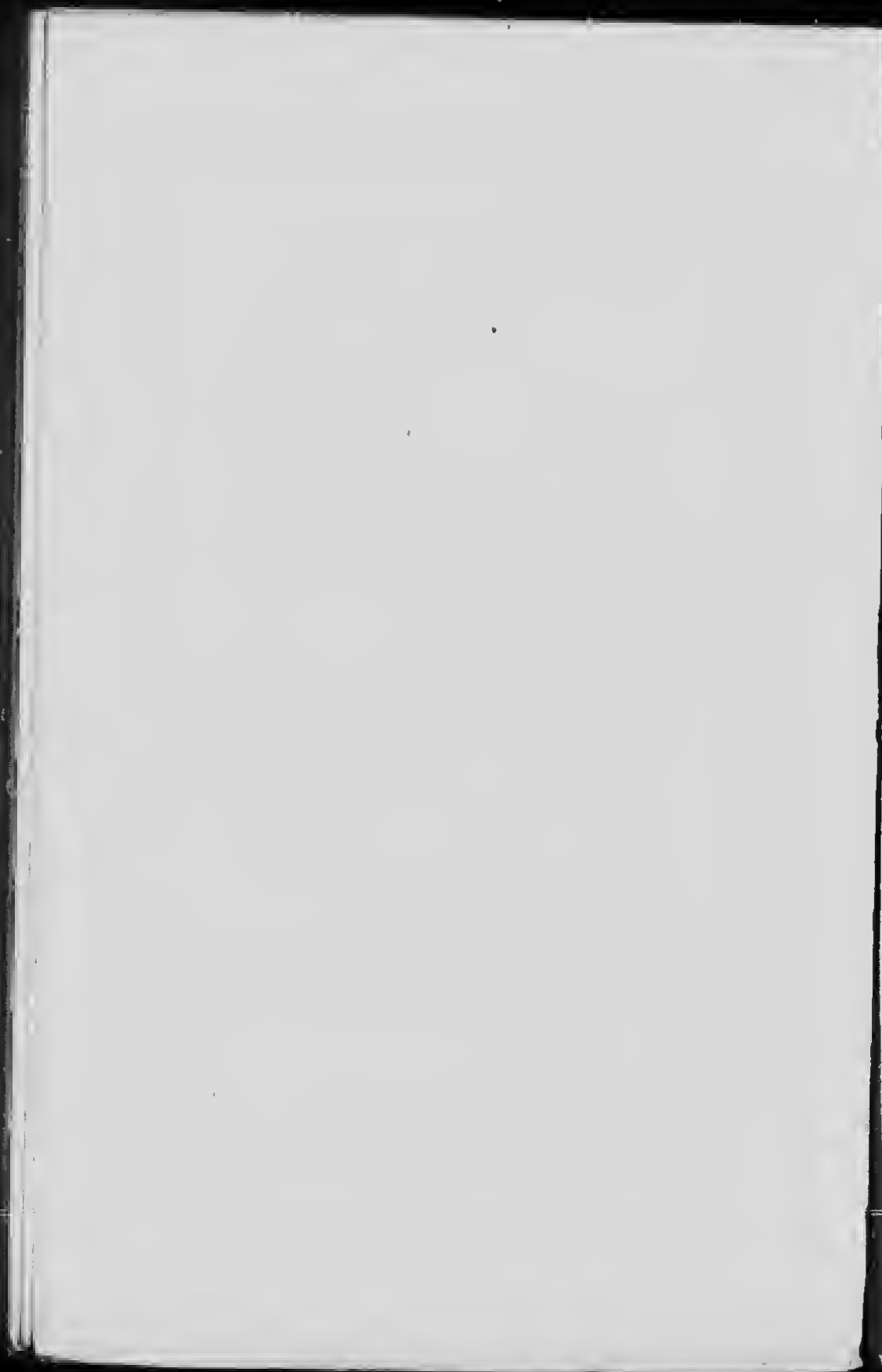
dining-

l then,  
as we

JUNE 14



N





HAVE often speculated on the fondness shown by Robins for the interiors of churches. Scarcely one of the books by the various authorities I have consulted even mention the fact. The Rev. C. A. Johns alludes to it and, with all that he says in a brief reference to the subject, I am in complete agreement. It is undoubtedly for the sake of company that they frequent our places of worship, for I have seldom heard of a Robin building its nest inside a church, and it is nearly always at the hour of service they are to be seen there.

Last evening, the one that has attached himself to our church, flew in through an open window in the chancel and, seating himself upon a pinnacle of the old choir screen, sang with us the *Nunc Dimittis*. All heads I know were raised from their books, all eyes were turned upon him as he sat there, his throat swelling, his beak wide open as he poured out his glorious notes. Everyone must have heard them above the organ, even above the voices in the choir, so shrill and sweet they were.

*"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in*

*peace, according to Thy word ; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of .ll people."*

It is my habit, well as I know the words of morning and evening prayer, never to look about me, lest my attention might stray. But on this occasion, I could not refrain from watching this little creature, or from listening to every note that he uttered. And as I listened, I suppose I must have stopped in my singing, the better to hear him perhaps ; perhaps because my voice, never at any time too tuneful, was disturbing in my ears to the beauty of his song. Whatever it was, I became silent and then was slowly made aware that everyone else had ceased from singing too. So intent was my mind upon the Robin, I was not fully conscious of it until the last voice had stopped and, to the soft notes of the organ, that little bird was singing alone.

It was only for a moment or so and then the chant was finished. As though suddenly we had all come to our senses, we joined again in singing—Amen—and, with the cessation of the music, the Robin flew up into the rafters and was hidden from sight.

I glanced at Diana, who sings close beside me in the choir and may be it was only the light of the dropping sun casting its rays through the West window in the nave, but I thought her eyes were glittering and bright.

When service was over, I found Diana outside

waiting for me and talking to the Tregennas. They were speaking of course about what had occurred. It was, in fact, I am sure, the topic of conversation round every supper table that evening. Young Allan Tregenna, who had come up to meet them as they filed out of church was being told all about it. We broke up into two parties as we started away from the door. Diana joined him and I came along behind them with the two ladies.

They asked me if I had ever known anything so strange happen at a service in church before and, as I thought over it, I was compelled to admit I had not.

"You must have been rather annoyed," said Mrs. Tregenna—"when everyone stopped singing."

"Why?" I asked her.

"Well—because it interfered with the service."

"I can't say I thought it did," said I—"I stopped singing myself—but then I don't sing well. Yet had everyone there been singing beautifully, I don't think I should have regretted their silence then."

Miss Tregenna looked up at me.

"I know what you mean," said she.

"Yes," I continued—"there is always the spirit of the thing and the thing itself." I often preach my little sermons after church. It is not truly the place for them I know; but sometimes when two or three of us are walking back together, I am drawn into talking and many times have found myself

giving better expression to things than ever I do in the pulpit. It is again the spirit of the thing, while often in the pulpit it is only the thing itself. I mean no irreverence to the church by that; but a sermon should be a conversation—one-sided I admit—and in the pulpit I often feel too far away to converse. As we walk home together, it is a different matter, yet it is frequently just as one-sided then. I am sure I talk too much.



"Well," I went on—"I know we were all singing the *Nunc Dimittis* and I know that all our hearts were in what we sang. But there was something spontaneous in the voice of that Robin, which none of us had got in ours. The habit of prayer, the habit of praise, we have become so used to them that often I must pull myself up when I am reading or singing to realise the meaning of the words. And in all the religious worship throughout the whole of our country and everywhere where the form of worship only faintly varies, how much of habit do you think there must be in the hymns that are sung and the prayers that are prayed?"

I looked at them both, at Mrs. Tregenna on my right—at her daughter on my left. They said

nothing, and I knew that I had brought to their minds the realisation of how their own prayers were often said.

"There was nothing of habit," I went on presently—"there was nothing of habit in the way that Robin sang. He has sung his song a thousand times, but that is ever the way with birds. A new day and they sing their song afresh as though it were for the first time in their lives. And that is worship—that is thankfulness. It must come more than from the ready obedience of the heart; it must come from the full energy of the spirit. You cannot praise God by rote, you must praise Him by inspiration."

This brought me to my door and I said how sorry I was to inflict another sermon upon them, and all in one evening.

Miss Tregenna shook my hand and said—

"I liked the second one best."

"Perhaps it was inspired," said I and then, looking about for Diana, I found that she had gone on down the road with her companion. It is a pity they are not friends.

This morning Diana came down to breakfast, when for some moments I stood looking at her in amazement. I would hardly have recognised her. She has put up her hair. She has become a woman.

"Oh, my dear," said I involuntarily, for a thousand times more than ever did she remind me of Georgina.

She stood there returning my look while many expressions passed across her eyes. Her cheeks grew pink and then grew pale again; her eyes kept shutting and opening. She smiled and then the smile would die away. At last she could bear my scrutiny no longer. She came and put her arms round my neck and hid my eyes from her.

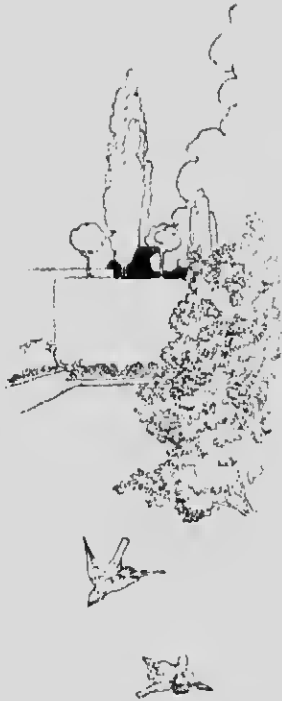
"Does it look horrid?" she asked.

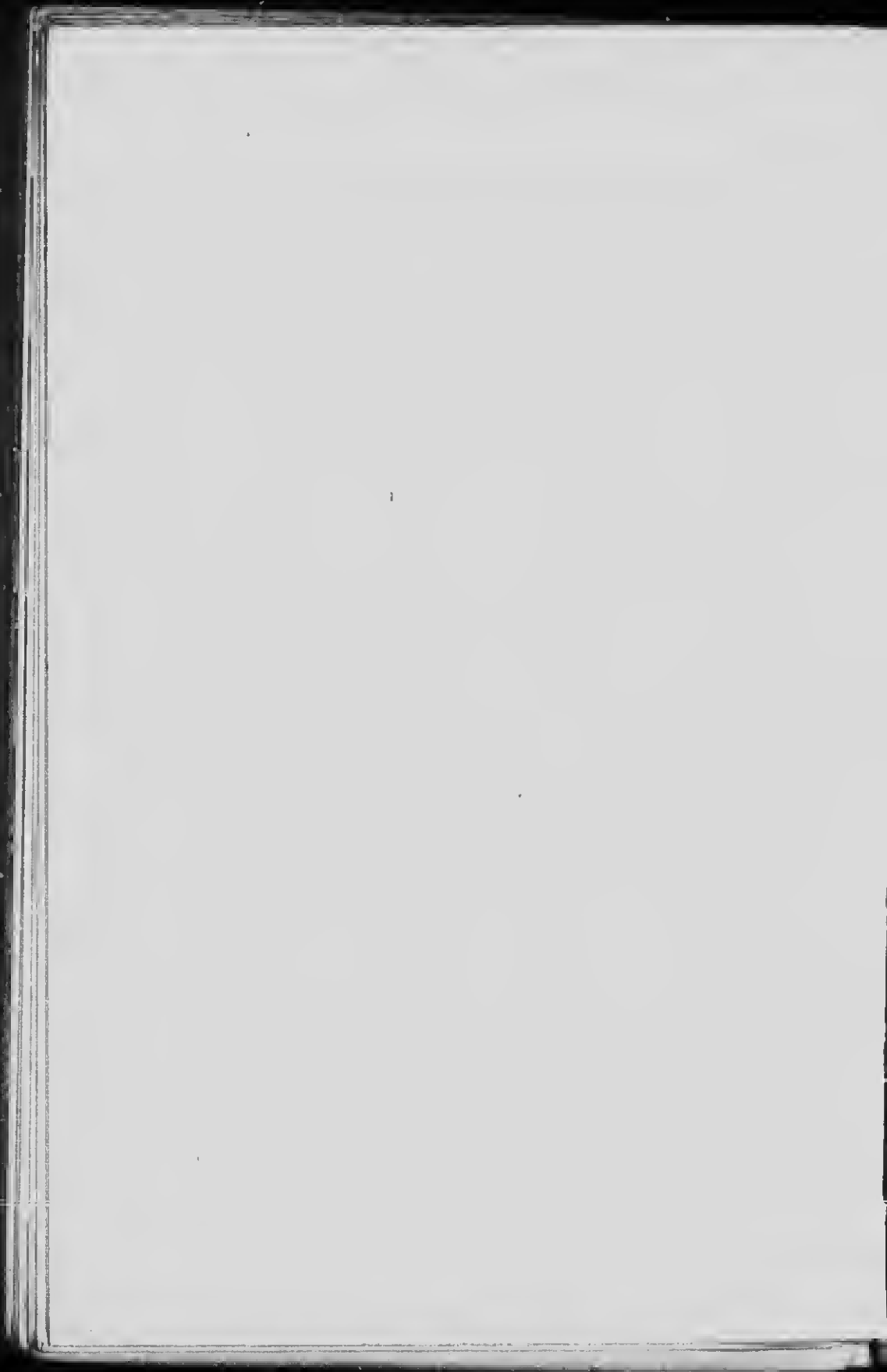
"My dear," said I, and at the back of her neck, which is like a baby's, I kissed her. Her head was hidden on my shoulder. There was no other place to kiss.

I had news this afternoon that distressed me. Allan Tregenna will have to go out to his uncle's farm in California in three months' time. I have liked that boy and shall miss him when he is gone.

I asked Diana had she heard of it. She nodded her head. He told her yesterday, it seemed, as they walked back from church.

JUNE 21







PAIR of Thrushes that mated last year and built their nest in the densest corner of the quickset hedge, have again mated this and set up house in the heart of a Portugal laurel on the lawn. I have no right to state this as a fact beyond my own convictions for, so far as I can make out, there is nothing to prove that the same birds do pair one season after another. In most cases, flocking as they do in the Winter, birds change their mates in the Spring. But these two Thrushes I make certain in my mind are the same. This is how I know.

Whenever after a shower I saw the female on the lawn last Summer, she limped, having at some time or another hurt her leg. I readily recognised her again. In a garden where the same birds stay year after year, I suppose anyone will accept that as proof conclusive. She at least is the same bird. And he—well, I am not quite so certain about him; but last year her mate when the sun was dropping had the habit of sitting on the topmost twig of a scarlet may tree and singing for half an hour together. Now he does just the same this year and so constantly do

you see the force of habits in birds that I make sure it is the identical couple come together once more to share the anxiety and responsibilities of the home.

It gives me no little pleasure, I must confess, to find this example of monogamy in birds. I should like to pursue the matter further, for it is my belief that it is far more commonly the case than most people suppose. But to do this, I must in some way catch and mark my birds and I can imagine little sympathy from Diana in the process.

We have both been engaged during the last few weeks in a most engrossing study—the songs of all the different birds in the garden. In the evenings we sit out on the lawn in the seat under the mulberry tree, listening for the last note of the Blackcap until the sun sets and the first notes of the Nightingale begin.

Every stave of their song we whistle over again. It is astonishing how well girls whistle now-a-days. Diana is much surer of her notes than am I. Georgina could never make a sound between her lips at all.

When, then, we have repeated it two or three times until she is certain of it, Diana writes down the notes in a note book ruled with lines for music and later renders them with their proper harmonies into a series of—I cannot describe them better than—Preludes. Chopin I believe wrote many Preludes—a couple of lines of music, the brief records of



*The War*

THE WAR



thoughts that flashed across his brain. But these to my mind are better than that. They are Nature's Preludes to eternity. I cannot bring myself to think of a world where birds will never sing. Diana plays them to me in the evenings when all the birds are silent. Our piano is tinkly perhaps, but it has a sweetness when the soft pedal is down and I would not have one of your Bluthners or Bechsteins in place of it. So far, in our repertoire, we have the Blackcap and the Nightingale—the Thrush, the Blackbird and the Hay-bird. In time we shall collect them all.

The other evening as we sat out there, trying to follow the phrases of a Robin's song as he sat singing in the lilac tree, Allan Tregenna came across the orchard and looked over our wicket gate. Diana was whistling a stave she had just heard and did not hear him approach, so, for a moment or two, I saw him stand there listening until it was finished.

"Well done," he said when it came to an end.

She turned quickly and her cheeks grew scarlet. Women are mysterious creatures to me; they will acquire a masculine trick such as this, but when caught at it, will be covered with confusion. Besides, what did it matter if he heard her? Most girls can whistle now-a-days and I should have thought Diana would have been the last to be ashamed of the accomplishment.

"Come and sit down here," said I. "We're only trying to catch the song of a Robin. We're just stenographers, amanuenses, whatever you like to call us. We're trying to take it down in shorthand. He's the composer."

I got up from the seat under the mulberry tree, and gave him my place.

"You can whistle better than I can," said I—"besides, I must go in and write some letters."

And I left them there, never thinking until it was too late whether I were wise in doing so. I should have felt sorry indeed had there been a repetition of their disagreements; for there is a hot temper I know in Diana and I am sure she has not yet forgotten the Bullfinch buried under the apple tree in the kitchen garden.

No doubt my thoughts were over-concerned about it, for I found it difficult to concentrate my attention upon my letters. All through the writing of them, I heard the song of that Robin loud above my thoughts.

"We shall have another Prelude added to our repertoire," said I, and as soon as my last letter was sealed and stamped, I went out into the garden to see how Diana had progressed.

She had done nothing. The book lay open on her lap and never a note was written there.

"Oh—why?" said I.

"He hasn't been singing just lately—has he?" said young Allan.

"Singing!" I replied—"I could hardly write my letters for his interruptions."

Diana closed the book on her lap.

"Yes—I think I heard him," said she.

"You do understand what we're doing don't you?" said I. He shook his head. I told him then how Diana was collecting the songs of all the birds about us and setting them into what it pleased us to call Preludes.

"Am I to hear them?" he asked.

I suggested to Diana that she should go and play them to him then. The windows of the drawing-room open on to the lawn. I could hear the music from where I was. The sun had just gone down and the whole garden was warm with the light of the glorious clouds. They burnt like a bonfire through the trees in the orchard.

"Go and play them to him now," said I—"I'll sit here and listen."

Without a word she picked up her book and walked across to the drawing-room. Without a word, he followed her.

I waited a little while in the silence, thinking of these two; then, as the first gently tinkling notes of the piano crept out into the garden, stealing through the bushes and across the scented stocks to my ears, all thoughts of them vanished. I was alone with  
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Georgina. So she used to play to me in the days of our courting; so she often played to me through the years we were married.

I suppose I do not really care for music, for it was not the harmonies or the melodies that my ears listened to with such intent. It was just the impression and the memories which the sounds were bringing me.

All the house was in twilight. In no room had they yet lit the lamps. But in the drawing-room, through the open window, I could see the figure and the head of Diana, her profile just outlined in the darkness of the room by the light of the two candles that were burning in their sconces on the piano.

It brought me back the whole of twenty years. There she was playing Georgina to my memories. I must have been lost in a reverie, thinking almost that she was Georgina herself, when some shadow moved in the room. I saw the silhouette of a head as it leant forward against the candle-light; I saw the dark line of an arm stretched across to turn the pages of the music. It was young Allan. For all those wonderful moments of my reverie, I had forgotten him. At last it broke out upon me with a sudden rush—I must not call it fear. She was playing not to my memories, but to him; and there was I, with all the years behind me, watching my own story being told to me again. With an over-

whelming conviction, I knew in that moment the story was the same.

What man I thought could sit there and listen to my Diana playing, without knowing the same love that I had known for Georgina? A thousand little proofs came readily to my mind—the empty page of the note book, the flush upon her cheeks, the verses of poetry, the expressions which passed across her face that morning after she had put up her hair.

Yes—I know now Diana is in love. And he, of course, must be. I dared not let my mind run into speculations then upon what all of it would mean. I have wished often that they should be friends; how could I be sorry to find that they are lovers now.

Yet a feeling of loneliness came over me and, try how I might, I could not drive it away. At last I knew I could not stay and watch them any longer. I left my seat in the garden and, creeping past the window of the drawing-room, I entered the house by another way and went up to Georgina's room.

Pulling the blinds and opening the window, I could still hear the sounds of the piano. I felt more comfortable there. For some little while they continued. Diana would play a Prelude, then play it again and then again. But at last the music stopped. The whole evening was steeped in silence.

What were they doing then? I felt his lips on the smooth, cool skin of Diana's cheeks.

" I know I kissed Georgina," thought I.

At ten o'clock when Diana went to bed, I kissed her first on the left cheek, which is my custom. She was just about to turn away when I caught her head in my hands and kissed her on the other cheek as well.

How was I to know which cheek it was ?



*JUNE 25*







HE last entry I made in this note book began with reference to a pair of Thrushes that had mated again this year, and now there comes to my notice an incident in the parish, bearing some similarity it seems to me to the case of the birds I have quoted.

Diana brought me word of it. All the things that happen in the village come quickly to her ears. She spoke of it this morning at breakfast.

"Do you remember Eliza Selby?" she asked me.

I thought awhile; I can remember well enough the names of birds, but the names of people often escape me. "Who was she?" I asked.

"Don't worry," she replied. "You never knew her. Years and years before you came here, she married a man named Fuel and went to live at Long Lillingham. But you know Fastnedge, don't you?"

I nodded my head. I was glad I did know him.

"The poor old fellow," said I—"who lives down in that cottage near the Mill."

"Do you know how old he is?" she asked.

"He was seventy when his wife died," said I—"that was five years ago—wasn't it?"

"Yes—he's seventy-five—and do you know what's happened?"

All that she said, suggested to me that the poor old man had died suddenly, yet that was not in the tone of her voice.

"What has happened?" I asked—"Am I wanted there now?" I was beginning to fold my serviette. I felt sure there was something for me to do.

"There's no hurry," said Diana, smiling—"there's more to tell yet. It appears that nearly fifty—well, I suppose forty-five years ago, he and Eliza Selby were engaged to be married. Then they fell out over something or other and she married Fuel, and went to Long Allingham. I forget who Fastnedge married, but he stayed on here."

"Well?" said I. She was taking so long over the telling of it that by now my curiosity was well aroused.

"Well—now his wife and her husband are dead, and it seems they've been fond of each other all the time, because she's come over from Long Allingham and she's living with him in his little cottage."

"But she must be nearly seventy," said I.

"I know; that's the funny part of it."

"Where were they married?" I enquired.

"They're not married," said Diana, and I knew

she was closely watching my face. I rolled up my serviette and fitted it through the silver ring which was one of our wedding presents when Georgina and I were married. I did not know what to say. For the moment it bewildered me, yet I cannot admit that I felt anything more than that. I do not know what I felt.

"I shall go down and see them now," said I, and straightway I went.

The cottage in which Fastnedge has lived for these last thirty years is just beside Horlock's Mill. The sound of the water turning the old wooden wheel continues there like a song, never variant yet never monotonous, night and day. The stream supplying it, sets off through an avenue of willow trees out into the broad country, beside meadows that grow such a variety of wild flowers as I have ever seen. There on the banks of it the Sedge-Warbler and the Reed-Warbler, the Buntings and Moor-hens build their nests and bring up their young in perfect peace and absolute seclusion. Wild mint and forget-me-nots grow thick together there. At places it tunnels its way beneath the trees and the water rats swim fearlessly in the shadows.

There is an old green punt on the open stretch of water near the wheel. It belongs to Horlock the miller. He kindly gives me the free use of it, but I have not been in it for more than a twelvemonth. Yet many were the days when Georgina and I drove

it up those murmuring waters, under the willows and the oak trees, for ever turning the countless bends and corners when the meadows and the country opened wide between a break of the trees and then was lost again.

Until he was well-nigh seventy, Fastnedge worked



in the Mill and then, as a kind of pension, young Horlock, who had taken on the work after his father, allowed him to stay on at a reduced rent which Fastnedge pays out of the odd jobs he does about the place. Rheumatism has set his bones—for I fancy it must be a damp spot to live in. He walks with the aid of a stick and is a shadow of the man he was. I have

a great affection for him. Often Georgina and I had tea in that little cottage as we returned from our expeditions up the stream. I had no misgiving therefore on my way down to see him. I knew that he would listen quietly and reasonably to all I had to say. He was standing at his cottage door, for the day was fine and the sun was hot, as I came up.

"Good-morning, Fastnedge," I said cheerfully.

I did not wish him to think that I was concerned in any way.

"Good-morning, sur," he replied—but he made no movement for me to step inside. I understood. "He's not quite proud of himself," thought I—"that's half the battle fought already."

But I was wrong when I imagined that, for though, when I said I wanted a talk with him, he suggested we should sit together on the weir by the side of the water, it was not really that he was ashamed to ask me within. I shall try to put down exactly what we said.

I informed him I was not going to beat about the bush. I told him then what I had heard.

"That's true enough," said he—"I've been expecting 'ee round this way for the last two days."

"Well, Fastnedge," I replied—"you can't persist in this. You can't go on living here with Mrs. Fuel, just as if you were married."

"Why not, sur?" he asked.

"Well—plainly," said I—"because it would be a scandal in the village."

"Do 'ee know how old I be?" he asked.

"Yes," said I—"you're exactly seventy-five or thereabouts."

"Do 'ee know how old she be?"

"I've heard she's about seventy."

"Well?" said he—and he planted out his stick

firmly on the ground at arm's length and he looked me honestly in the face.

"Yes—I know all that," said I—"but you must remember Fastnedge, that marriage is a sacrament without which no two people can be joined together. To ignore it, to avoid it, is to live in sin."

"Would 'ee mind tellin' me, sur," he replied, "what sin there be left in the world for an old man of seventy-five and an old woman of seventy to do? They do say as how one goes back to second childhood when 'ee be my age. And indeedie with my rheumatiz I might be a babe in arms. What sin is there in two old folks like us comin' together for company so as we mayn't die lonesome like?"

The picture of these two which those simple words brought to my mind was such, that for the moment I could not answer him in justice to myself. Children indeed they were and, as when they are little, we have no thought to see our children sleeping side by side for company through the night, so why should there be any shame to these two old people? When he spoke of dying lonesome, I could imagine them side by side in the bed which Fastnedge has slept in for so long alone—in which I have seen him so many times bearing the pains of all he suffers without comfort or complaint—and I could not but feel that there was no sin in such a simple union.

"Do you object to being married then, Fastnedge?" I asked at length.

"No, sur," said he—" 't isn't as if I object. I reads my Bible just the same as ever I did, and I reads how St. Paul said it's better not to be married same as he was, but that if a man can't abide it so to speak then he might as well be married rather'n be burnt. But what's that got to do wi' me, sur, now? There's no call for to burn me—my old bones wouldn't make much of a bonfire for no-one. No, sur, I don't object, but it seems to me, what's the good. T' agin with, look you, I can't afford it, and then it ain't goin' to make no better o' us, 'cos there ain't no bad in us. We're a pair of old children, sur, that's what it comes to, and wouldn't you pop your bairns in a bed and not think one way or t'other about it? "

He stopped a moment and looked at me squarely again. Then he pulled off the seeded head of a dandelion and, putting it up to his lips, he blew it into the wind. I could not help thinking what a child indeed he was.

"You see, sur," he went on—" If we two were to go up to the church together we should have the whole village on our heels laughing at us—and though, mind you, I'd laugh wi' 'em, 'cos I'd know what a fool I'd look, yet I'm sure she'd feel it a bit. She'd set her cap straight now, look you, if you was to step inside—'cos as I sees it a woman dies a woman. There's no making no child out of her."

There was so much truth in all he said and yet,

convention I suppose it was, made me feel it my bounden duty to press my point.

"So far as the matter of money goes, Fastnedge," said I, "let me make you a wedding present."

"What's that, sur?"

"Let me marry you for nothing."

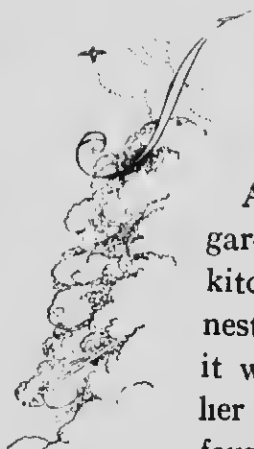
He sat there in silence for a long while, then with difficulty he helped himself to his feet.

"I'll go and ask her," said he and I went away not altogether happy in my mind. It seemed to me he had a broader view of life than have I.

*JUNE 28*







OY must be in the heart of praise.  
I would preach happiness before I  
thought of cleanliness in despite of  
any proverb in the world.

A Robin was killed yesterday in the garden by the cat they feed in the kitchen. The bird was sitting on her nest and the mother instinct I suppose it was, bid her stay there in defence of her young. So the cat caught her. We found the nest scattered across the grass, the young fledglings dead in the midst of it and only a few grey feathers were all that remained of the mother.

I have kept the news of it successfully from Diana, and now I see the male bird moping out his heart on the hedge near by where the nest was built—for he helped, too, in the building of it. He is sitting there with his head a little on one side, silent and songless. It is almost heart-rending to watch him. Death is never so cruel as life can sometimes be.

He will get over it, I know. If he lives until next Spring, perhaps even before this Summer is out, he will choose another mate and sing his songs again.

But now all joy has left him. He cannot praise the day. What folly it is to say birds do not suffer !

When I thought of this, I chose the sixty-third Psalm to read before prayers this morning. I had given it out and was waiting for them to find their places when I looked up and saw that Rachel, the cook, was not there.



I asked Alice, the housemaid, where she was. She told me that Rachel was cleaning out my study.

"Tell her that we are ready for prayers," said I.

Alice looked uncomfortable and she glanced at Diana.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I told her it was prayers, sir," said Alice—"And she said she was not coming in."

"Why not?"

"Said she'd got her work to do, sir."

"Go out," said I—"at once and tell her we're waiting."

As soon as the door had closed, Diana looked up at me.

"She won't come, Daddy," she remarked.

"But she must," I replied—"I won't have any servant in my house staying away from prayers."

And then I am afraid that pride must in some way have blinded my proper sense of vision. I felt more annoyed at being disobeyed, than grieved at Rachel's behaviour. As Diana put it to me afterwards, I lost my sense of humour.

I have never heard so much importance given to this sense of humour as lately, since Diana came back from school, but am now beginning to believe that there is something in it. It even seems to me sometimes that God Himself must appreciate it and indeed must feel the want of it in many.

Perhaps I did lose my sense of humour then, for when Alice returned and said that Rachel still refused to come and was persisting in cleaning out my study, I felt my cheeks get hot and I declared that Rachel would have to find another situation.

"Well—read prayers now, Daddy," said Diana quietly—"We can talk about that after breakfast."

With my cheeks still burning then I changed the reading I had chosen.

"I will not read the sixty-third Psalm," said I—"you can turn instead to the second chapter of the Epistle of Peter—beginning at the eleventh verse."

When the rustle of the leaves of their Bibles was silent, I began and as I came to the eighteenth verse—"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle but also to the froward"—I looked up to make sure that Alice

was listening or following the words and then I caught sight of Diana's face. Her head was bent rather lower than usual over her book. I could not see her eyes, but I knew from the expression of her lips that they were twinkling. I don't know why exactly, but I wished then that I had continued with the sixty-third Psalm.

After prayers were over, we began breakfast in silence, which Diana was the first to break as she passed me my tea.

"You're not going to send Rachel away, Daddy," she said quietly.

"I certainly shall," said I.

Somehow or other I felt that my case was a poor one. I knew that somewhere I was in the wrong, but pride would give me no license to admit it.

"No you won't," she repeated—"You don't understand yet."

"What is there to understand?" I demanded—"Rachel refuses to come in to prayers—and it is a condition I enforce amongst my servants in this household, as indeed should be enforced in every household, that they should attend prayers."

Never a smile passed across Diana's face, yet it annoyed me the more because I knew she wanted to.

"You'd better hear what's happened first," said she gently. How like Georgina she was then! It recalled the many times to my mind when the gentle

answers of Georgina had turned away my wrath. But I was not ready for it to be turned away just then. I suppose I thought it maintained my dignity for me. What poor creatures we are !

"What has happened ?" I asked.

"Well," she replied—"for the last few months Rachel has had a young man. She's been walking out with him and I believe had every intention of marrying him. Now he's transferred his affections to Alice. They fell out over it rather badly at first—I'm not surprised—but I think she and Alice are friends again now. Rachel realises that it can't be helped, but that doesn't make her any the less miserable. And last evening he gave Alice a ring. I don't wonder she wants to work."

I looked out of the window. There was the Robin still sitting songless where his nest had been. With my mind accusing me of all my folly, I came across to Diana and laid my hand on her shoulder.

"Your father's a fool, my dear," said I.

"My father's a dear, my dear," said she.

Oh yes—joy must be in the heart of praise. I would preach happiness before I thought of cleanliness. I would much sooner that my study were untidy and undusted. Happiness is better than that.



JULY 21







THE Swallow that builds every year in our potting shed has just brought forth her brood the beginning of this week. Diana called me round to see the four bald heads peering over the edge of the nest. She gets used to our visits after a while and flies in to feed her young, well knowing I suppose by this that we are friends. She comes in by the door or the window whenever they are open; when they are closed, she enters through any one of the four small square holes over the door which I expect were cut in the boarding to afford ventilation.

Sometimes I find myself stopping in my work as I sit in my study to watch the marvellous speed and accuracy with which she effects her entrances and exits through those tiny apertures. Until the very moment it seems when she reaches her narrow doorway, her wings are beating fast and not one whit in her pace is slackened. Then her wings fall together and through she goes—a twinkle of light on her breast as she half turns to get through and she is

gone. Barely one instant and she is out again; in that moment her children have been fed.

If I were satisfied with watching one of these visits, it might not be a waste of time; but involuntarily I find myself waiting the two minutes—it is not more—until she returns once more. In those two minutes she has been many times round the meadow and up and down the stream, never resting, never still; doubtless mindful all the time of those four craning heads with mouths always open to be filled.

It is a busy, an untiring life. From early morning until the sun has dropped before the pale grey twilight, she ceaselessly pursues these brilliant flights, now high up in the heavens, now skimming the water down the stream. I have wished often I were as diligent as she. And then, not content with the cares and troubles of raising one brood, she is ready to undertake another as soon as the first family can fly.

Sometimes this is as late as August or even the beginning of September and then I have known the young to be left behind, so deep, so strong is that instinct of migration.

I have often thought about this, wondering why a bird that shows such devotion to its young throughout the whole summer, should lose all that devotion to such a call as this, leaving its children which it has striven so patiently and so affectionately to rear,

that it may start upon its hazardous journey to the south. Hundreds of swallows die every year in that process of migration. On the south coast of France and on the northern coast of Africa, numbers of them every year are found washed up by the sea. Yet once the north-east wind has sung its song around the house there is no interest can hold them. The word is sent forth. They collect in their numbers upon the telegraph wires, looking like crotchets on a stave and then, after some chattering and commotion, they are gone. When once that has happened, instinctively I find my mind turning from the old year, inevitably looking already towards the new.

We had often watched this Swallow, Diana and I, for by reason of its yearly visits to the potting shed, it has become a looked-for friend.

It was on the 15th of April this year, that she burst into my study and exclaimed—

"Who do you think has come?"

"Come where?" said I.

"Here!"



"To call do you mean?"

"No—to stay."

"My dear child," said I in some nervousness—  
"I hope the spare room is ready."

"Oh—yes—it's ready," she replied laughing.

"Well—who is it?" I asked—"Surely it's not  
your aunt Edith?"

She turned my head towards the window and bid  
me look out and then I guessed and knew the days  
of waiting were all over. I am afraid I count my  
year by the birds. That is why I am so fond of the  
Robin. He keeps in song when all the rest are silent.  
The winter would be voiceless but for him.

We stayed for ten minutes this morning watching  
this Swallow come in and out to feed her young.  
I remarked upon her untiring industry and then  
it occurred to me again how strong the instinct  
of migration must be, from which my mind turned,  
I cannot say how or why to a thought of Diana's  
poetry.

"Have you written any more verses, my dear?"  
I asked her—"since those ones—'Between the May  
and the Rose?'"

She continued looking up at the nest.

"That little beggar'll fall out if he's not careful,"  
said she.

"Have you?" I repeated.

"Why do you ask?"

I knew then that she had, but was too reticent

to tell me. I did not press the matter further, because that was not the point which I was at. I wanted to suggest to her that she should write something on the migration of the Swallow. If I could write verse, this would be just such a theme as I should certainly choose myself. But I do not think I could write two lines of poetry, so I proposed it to her then.

She looked at me very intently for a minute and then, as though the inspiration had suddenly come to her she said—"I'll go and do it now, Daddy—I'll write it specially for you—" and she went off into the house singing with that strong, young voice of hers, her head thrown back, her body swinging to every step. She is another songster whom the winter cannot silence. I wonder, sometimes in fear, if she may not prove migratory too.

This afternoon at tea, she brought her verses to me. I transcribe them into this note book with more right than I did the last. These are my very own—

"You can hear the South Winds calling,  
And the Swallow hears them too—  
'Cross the hills and down the heather  
There they ride and who cares whether  
North and East Winds ride together,  
For the South Wind's calling you.

You can hear the South Winds whisp'ring,  
And the Swallow hears them too—

## THE OPEN WINDOW

All the heather bells are dinging  
To the magic of their ringing  
And your heart is up and singing,  
For the South Wind's calling you.

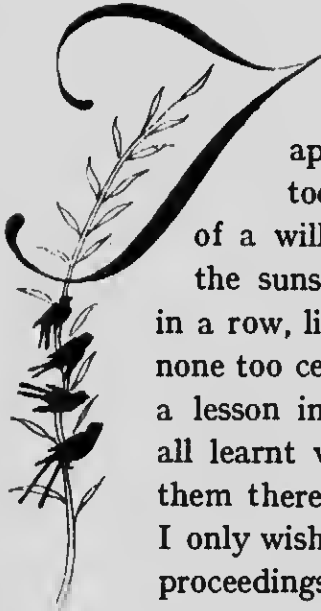
You can hear the South Winds saying,  
And the Swallow hears them too—  
That the world is full of wonder  
All the burning blue skies under;  
Yet you break your lives asunder,  
Though the South Wind's calling you."

Am I really to believe that this was specially  
written for me ?

*JULY* 29







THE process of education and enlightenment is going on apace. This morning our Swallow took her brood out on to the branch of a willow tree and there fed them in the sunshine. They sat close together in a row, like children on a form in school, none too certain of their foothold. It was a lesson in balancing which it seems they all learnt without mishap. How she got them there is more than I can understand. I only wish I had been present to watch the proceedings, for they cannot fly ; at least, none of them have attempted to do so all this morning.

In the intervals of feeding them, she still flies in and out of the potting shed. I suppose she is putting her house in order for the new brood that is to come. There cannot be so much to do, for they are cleanly creatures and all the time that the young are fledging, clean out the nest every day until, as Alice the housemaid would say—it is as bright as a new pin. After a time, before even they can fly, the young birds are able to look after themselves.

I have no doubt it is she who teaches them how best they may perform their duties of the day. She is a careful housewife.

Apparently some part of the nest needs mending for I see her now gathering mud at the edge of our little pond. She has mixed it well and taken it into the potting shed.

Now she comes out once more and flies backwards and forwards across the water dipping again and again, breaking the surface as she goes. She is taking her bath, washing away the remains of the mud from her throat with which she does all the work of plastering.

What a cleanly creature she is!

In a day or two I suppose will begin the lessons in flying and that is a perilous business, for the wings of the young Swallow are almost disproportion-

tionate in length. If once they fall to the ground, like the full-grown Swift, they cannot rise again.

I have told Diana and we are both determined to keep a good watch against such accidents when once the lessons begin. I hinted to her that the kitchen



cat was fond of catching birds, but told her nothing of the Robin.

"I suppose they *must* learn to fly," said she—"they must migrate. Why can't they stay on in England? We could heat the potting shed. They wouldn't find it cold then."

I laughed at her simplicity and then answered her with her very own words.

"You can hear the South Winds calling," said I—"And the Swallow hears them too."

She took my arm tightly in hers.

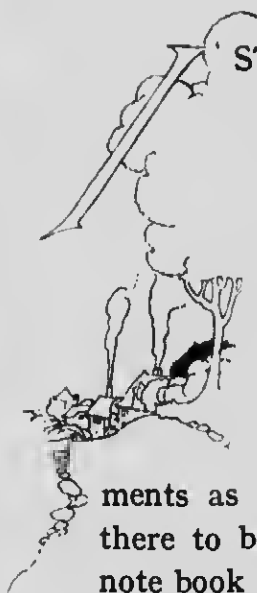
"I don't hear them, Daddy," she replied very firmly—so firmly that I looked at her and wondered what she meant.



*AUGUST 2*







STAND accused of my own narrow-mindedness. A thing has happened for which I think I would have thrown all convention upon one side to have avoided. The laws of Fate are greater than the laws of man. That is all I can find to say when I look back upon it from the beginning.

I would not preach such sentiments as these in any pulpit. It is so easy there to be misunderstood. But here in my note book and to myself, I say again—the laws of Fate are greater than the laws of man.

Fastnedge, who lives down at the Mill, more I am sure to gratify me than from any wish of it himself, consented to be married. For three Sundays, I read the banns and the first time, thinking I saw a smile on Suskind's face, I looked at him sternly as I concluded my reading. The next Sunday at evening service, seeing that neither Fastnedge nor Mrs. Fuel were there, I spoke in my service of the honour due to those who observed the rites of the Church.

"It is becoming the habit of many," said I—

"to take a pride in thinking for themselves—but there is a discipline of mind as well as of body. We cannot all take the wheel; we cannot all steer the ship. There must be one to command while there are many to obey and obedience can be as great a virtue as authority."

When I read the banns for the last time, Suskind's face was as solemn as a judge.

Now they are married and retribution has fallen upon me. All that I said to Fastnedge, all that I said in my sermon comes back to make me feel ashamed. What sin indeed could there have been for them? I ask myself. Why did I not leave them like children as they were?

On the day that they were married, Spencer, the man who looks after the Church, did not think it necessary to light the fire, heating the water in the pipes that run down the chancel. I did not even think to tell him to do it myself. Certainly it was a colder day than we had expected. An East wind got up in the night and was still blowing in gusts, rattling the windows of the Vicarage all that morning.

At eleven o'clock I had to drive over to Morton to see a builder about some parochial matter. I thought as I came back how cold it was and, looking at my watch, when I was still some three miles from Bramlingham, I found that it wanted half an hour to the moment when I was due at the church for the wedding. Making all the speed I could, I was

still a quarter of an hour late and found the two old people there waiting for me.

We had kept the day of the wedding a secret, so that there was no-one to laugh at them as they came away and when the service was over, they went off arm in arm, she leaning on him on one side, he leaning on his stick on the other. I smiled then at the pleasure that it gave me to see them man and wife. It flattered my vanity I suppose to think I had got my way.

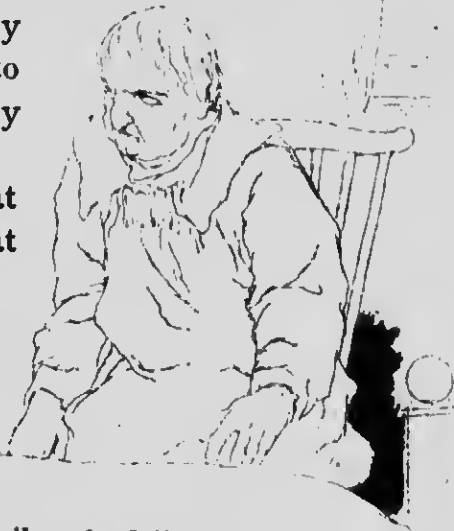
I remember what Diana said to me that day at lunch.

"I wonder if they'll be any happier now," she said.

I remember my reply.

"How could they fail to be?" said I.

Now all these things come back to me. In that cold church, perhaps in those very moments while they waited for my arrival, Mrs. Fastnedge caught a chill. In a few days it had developed to pneumonia and two days later than that, she died. It was almost too swift and sudden to believe. For a whole day the poor old man sat beside



the bed, staring at her, unable to realise the truth.

I went down to see him and for a long while he sat there saying nothing, then at last he looked up at me and he said—"She was such a child, surr—that's what beats me."

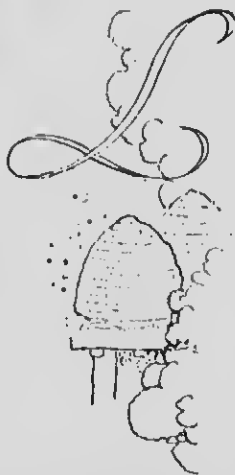
I do not think he even meant it in reproach, yet it came home to me more than anything else he could have said. She was such a child—why could I not have left her so?

The laws of Fate are greater than the laws of man. That is all I can say.

AUGUST 4







LAST evening Allan Tregenna brought me round an old book on birds, published in 1743, which he had found amongst the volumes in his father's study. It was greatly interesting in that it showed me how much was known of our British birds before Gilbert White wrote his famous letters from Selborne. There was not much in it that was accurate but a great deal that was fanciful. The author was prone to the superstitions of those days. He speaks quite seriously in a chapter on bees of the effect upon them brought about by the death of their owner and is assured in such a case that the death of the whole hive is bound to follow. He did not go so far as to advocate the message being conveyed to them that their owner was dead or that they would in future have to work for some-one else. I think however that this is mentioned in a letter of Gilbert White's upon the superstitions of Selborne.

When I thought how soon young Allan would be gone away to his uncle's farm in California and de-

spite the fear of all I had imagined when he was with us last time, I asked him to stay on for our high tea. It needed no pressure to persuade him. After this meal, which, in the summer months, we have at eight in order to prolong the evening, we sat out with Diana in the garden talking of his future, of many things beside.

The candles in the drawing-room had been lighted and the number of moths drawn towards the glow was astonishing.<sup>1</sup> I do not think I have ever seen so many or such a variety before. Diana closed the window so that they could not fly into the room drawn towards their own destruction. We sat there watching them as they beat in vain against the glass.

It occurred to me at last what an excellent opportunity it was to make some observations and I went into the house to get my jar of rum and treacle, which every Spring I have prepared and corked down in readiness for just such an occasion as this.

They still sat there under the mulberry tree while I went round with my pot and brush to all the trees in the garden. This painting of the bark is a simple method of baiting and does no harm to the moth. To the smell of the spirit it comes very swiftly; then from the stupor from the rum and the stickiness of the treacle it remains upon the tree an excellent object for observation. To set it free is the work of a moment. I have often taken them into the

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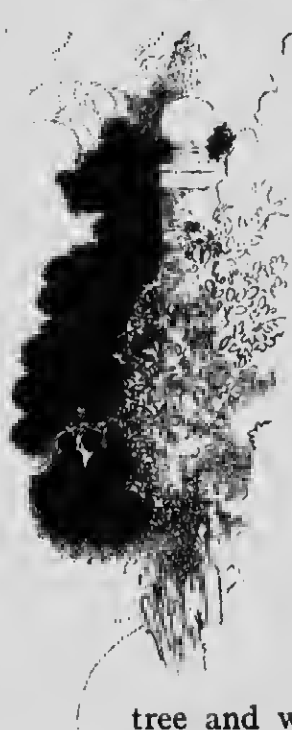


house with me and have found them recover from the effects of the alcohol in a very short time.

These expeditions always bring back to me the days when I was a boy at school. I experience the same sensations of excitement as I approach each tree to see what fortune is in store for me. Diana has but little sympathy with it, though I have assured her there is no cruelty in the process. It was for this reason that last evening I went alone.

As I had anticipated the result was most satisfactory. I found moths upon every patch of bark I had painted. On some of the trees, there were as many as a dozen clinging to the same place. Of Tiger-moths and Yellow-underwings there must have been a score. Three Humming-bird Hawk-moths I counted. These creatures I have a great affection for. They fly mostly by day as well as night and true to the name that has been given them, their flight is much more like that of a bird than an insect. I always stop to watch them in the garden when, with that invisible movement of their wings—it is so swift—they visit nearly all the flowers we grow. Over the blossoms of the honeysuckle and the lilac, they hover like any bird. I set them all free, putting them in some safe place where they might recover from their torpor. One interesting fact about these moths is that you may see them at almost any time of the year. The *imagines* appear in August or September and hiber-

nate all the winter through. Any warm day will bring them out and I have seen them upon the wing in December and January, on one of those days when a blue sky and a bright sun deceives you and them into the belief that the Spring is close at hand.



One moth I discovered on my treacle patches last evening which is new to me. The fore wings were pale reddish-brown, dusted with white in the centre. The hind wings were white or grey, dusted with pale brown. I think it must be the Pebble Prominent moth. In any case it is a new species to me.

I found it on an espalier apple tree in the kitchen garden and it was while examining it that I heard the voices of Diana and young Allan. They had left their seat under the mulberry tree and were walking up and down the path between the currant bushes. There is the border where we grow our flowers for cutting, our stocks and mignonette, our red and white cloves and our cabbage roses. On a still summer evening, the air is laden with the scent of them. It brought back to my mind the days when Georgina and I

walked up and down the paths of the garden at their house; how Acres, the gardener, would rest upon his spade and talk to us until we heartily wished he would have the sense to know that we would sooner be alone, yet had not the courage to interrupt his talk and leave him.

I would not have joined them then and made a third, for all that I could see, yet perhaps it was curiosity—but not of an idle nature I would swear—that made me strain my ears to listen as I heard the sound of Allan's voice. If this was eavesdropping, still, I excuse myself without hesitation. There was no suspicion in my mind as I listened, only that anxiety which surely every father must feel for his only child. It was her happiness I desired before any thought or consideration of my own. It was for the sound of her happiness I listened and, with the first words of his that reached my ears, I knew that happiness it was of which they talked.

"At least you'll let me speak to your father," said he.

The beating of my heart seemed to wait for her answer.

"It's no good, my dear," she said—and in her voice I heard Georgina speaking across the thin veil that separates us now. "You mustn't say a word to him. It's I who say it can't be, and you wonder how I can care when I say it. But just be

him for a moment and think. He's been everything to me. When mother died, I suppose I became everything to him. Now think what it would be if I went away all those thousands of miles and he was left here—alone."

"Must the young live for the old?" said Allan.

Nearly I cried out—"No!" It was the true, the honest thing to say. I felt no thought against him in my heart as I heard the words. I should have said them myself in such a case. Yet apprehension—eagerness, I suppose if I were honest I should call it hope, all crowded into my mind as I listened for her reply.

"I don't know how to answer that," she said after a long pause. "Perhaps they shouldn't. One is only young once I know and you could go on talking of the rights of youth till you were tired. But there's always something which just alters your own case and puts it outside the general rule. First and perhaps biggest of all, I promised Daddy, soon after mother died, I promised him I'd never leave him. That was a promise made very solemnly in a very solemn moment. How could I break it? Then think of him alone here. He's lost mother—how would he bear it if he had to lose me? I can see him, just as he was after mother died. He loves his birds, but he never wrote once in his note book for nearly a whole year. He used to go and sit in the room where mother died, creep up there when

he thought I didn't know. It was in that room I promised him. And I know just what he'd say if you spoke to him. He'd never stand in our way for a moment. He'd let me go right away to California with you and do you know what that would be? "

" No."

" It 'ud be the end of his life—just the end of it."

I waited for his answer, but he seemingly had no word to say. I heard their footsteps dying away as they walked out of the kitchen garden on the lawn beyond.

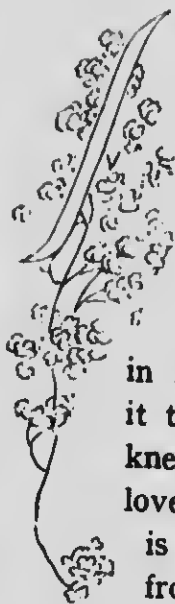
Then I set free my little moth and followed them into the house.



AUGUST 5







**SAID** nothing to them that evening, but when Alan was going I asked Diana to see that the door into the hen-house was locked. There have been foxes in our neighbourhood lately and we have lost some chickens by them. I thought of the hen-house because only half an hour before it had been in my mind. I had gone specially to see it then myself. So they went together. I knew they must wish to say good-night as lovers do. I knew too what a moment it is with those long hours of the night in front of them before they can meet again.

It took her twenty minutes to see whether the hen-house was locked. I even wonder it had not taken more. And while she was gone, I sat in my study and thought of what it would be best to do. From the tone of her voice in the garden, from my knowledge of her character as well, I knew that Diana would be faithful to her promise. No persuasion of mine would have been strong enough to make her break it; no assurance of mine would ever induce in her the belief that I should

not be lonely. She knows me too well. By subterfuge and strategy alone could I succeed in bringing her to her happiness and so I sat there then planning what I should do.

I found a way to it at last.

"In such a case as this," said I—"deception is no deceit."

It was at that moment, Diana opened the door of my study.

"The hen-house was locked, Daddy," said she and I scarcely heard the words. My mind was all attracted to a lock of hair that had slipped loose upon her shoulder.

"He's kissed her hair," I said to myself and when I bid her good-night it occurred to me to kiss it too.

AUGUST 8







HE Swallows have learnt to fly against the day of their migration. I pointed them out this morning to Diana as we stood on the lawn together ready to go to church. They were chasing each other with short uncertain flights across the paddock, returning every moment to the branch of a willow hanging over the little pond on which the mother bird sat in readiness to help them.

Her cream white breast and ruddy throat glittered in the sunshine. Only a Grebe's feathers it seems to me are more silky than a Swallow's and I know of no bird that can compare with the gloss of her wing. She sat singing there her tireless song, a trilling twitter of delight and with it the willow leaves trembled and whispered with every breath of wind. They shivered and murmured with her song—now they were pale green, now they were pale silver. She sat there on her branch shining like a deep blue sapphire in a glitter of light.

"They're ready to leave us now," said I, as we watched the young birds come back to their branch.

"I wish they never learnt to fly," said Diana.

"I could look after them so well if they stayed here."

"Why wish to alter the ways of life, my dear?"

I replied. "Do you think you could have conceived them with greater wisdom than as they are? We must all go forth into the world; we all have our duties to do and our better instincts to obey. I regret it as much as any when the Swallows go away; but how much more should I not regret it if in feebleness they had failed to learn to fly? I might as well regret that you are young and strong. I might grudge you that colour in your cheeks—might as well wish your body were not straight or your limbs supple as wish that the Swallows had never learnt to fly."

I felt then that I was drifting into my sermon, before even I had got to church, so, taking her arm, I led her away out of the garden.

"You're very wise, Daddy," said she.

"There are things better than wisdom," said I—  
"I would sooner be strong to fly."

I don't know whether she quite knew what I meant but, casting a glance at her as she walked beside me, I saw that there were deep thoughts in her mind.

In the three days that had passed since their conversation which I had overheard in the garden,

I had said nothing. I had done nothing. This was Sunday and I was going to take my first step in the strategy I had determined to pursue.

I had made sure that Allan would be there for morning service and when I got up into the pulpit I gave out my text from the eleventh chapter of Ecclesiastes and the ninth verse—

*"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes."*

I am almost tempted to transcribe the whole of my sermon here, and this, merely, I suppose, because I was pleased with it. It had been a pleasure, perhaps a bitter pleasure to me to write and I had taken great pains with it.

There is something poignant, a greater depth I sometimes think, in pleasure that is bitter. For much as I suffered when I thought what the result of my sermon might be, yet I would not have forgone that suffering for a world of pleasure that was sweet.

I will not transcribe all that I prepared here.



I know it is only vanity which tempts me to do so, that same vanity which makes me dream at times of a day when I might contribute something to the literature of my country. No-one will ever see these notes and so I can, without fear of misunderstanding, say how proud I should be even to see a book of my sermons reach the dignity of print. But this is idle vanity too. I can only quiet my conscience with the thought that it is not often I give way to it.

After I had made some reference to the actual subject of the text, I turned into the wider and truer motive of my discourse.

"Energy," said I—"is the gift of God—" and this I transcribe, just as I had written it. "It is with energy a man obeys the word of God; it is in sloth and laziness that he disregards it. Now sloth and laziness, these are subtle things. I have known the most noble sacrifice lead to idleness and to the disregarding of the highest laws of God.

"It is to young men and to young women I am speaking, those who, in their youth have all that energy which is meant for great and high endeavour."

I looked, as I said this, at young Allan and from him my eyes turned to Diana in the choir. The seeds of thought were already planted in their minds. I knew even then that I had chosen right, that in the end I should succeed. He was steadily watching me from the pew where he sat and her eyes were fixed upon a distance I have seen so often in Diana's

face. It is where all her deepest thoughts are treasured.

"Procrastination," I went on—"that is the sin of the youth of the age; indeed perhaps it is the sin of youth in every age. Yet youth is the time for doing. In youth you give your energy that fresh energy may come forth. In youth are your children given you to keep alive the energy that was yours.

*"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes."*

"For it is in youth that the heart beats strong, that the sight of the eyes is clear. I am not speaking now of the strength of virtue. At all times shall a man be strong in that but in youth alone it is given to him to be strong in doing. Therefore I would say to all you young men and all you young women, lose none of the moments of your young days. Sacrifice nothing but to that which is vigorous, to that which calls for the energy of life which God in your youth has given you."

Possibly my voice trembled as I said this, but I know it was not the trembling of pain at the thought of Diana's migration. She will go too with the Swallows. Her wings are ready; she is strong in the energy of youth. How could I dare to regret it?

She was silent all the way back from church. It was a silence I thought better not to disturb. Except for her casual remarks, it was not until

we were half way through dinner that she spoke at all of what was in her mind.

"Were you thinking of your sermon," she asked me—"when you said that about the Swallows this morning?"

"Very probably it was there in my thoughts," said I—"Why do you ask?"

She shook her head and said no more.

Poor Diana! She is touching life for the first time and, with the gentleness of women is sore at heart because she learns that in life there is always some-one who must be hurt and she it is must hurt them.

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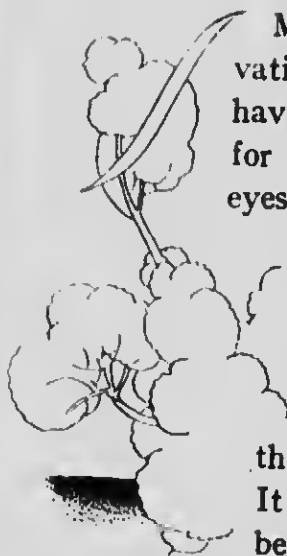
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*AUGUST 18*





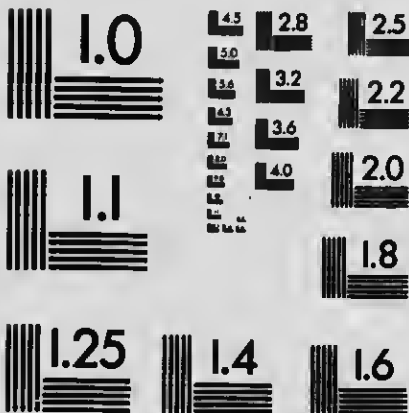


**MUST** not let it hinder my observations when Diana is gone. Indeed I have begun already to prepare myself for her going. Half the joy of having eyes to see the beauties of Nature, lies in showing them to some-one else. That much of the child lives on in all of us. When I was a boy, I would show everything to my mother. My father, doubtless, I thought had seen them for himself. It is always the women a man would be teaching. It is always the woman by whom he is taught.

The other day a most unusual incident came to my notice. I have been too busy with a visit from the Bishop to record it in my note book before. In a deep ditch that separates the land of two farmers more than a mile from here, I heard the reeling note of the Grasshopper-Warbler, a bird not often seen in these parts. The peculiarity of this was the lateness of the year. I have never heard the note of this bird—a note so like the trilling of a fisherman's reel, that here and in many parts of the country



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they call it the Reel Bird—I have never heard it before, later than May or the utmost the beginning of June.

If it may be called singing, then he sings when they are building their nest together. Timid little creatures though they are, I have sometimes been able to watch them so engaged, when with short and apprehensive flights they traverse the whole length of the hedges, keeping just the safe distance from their observer and hiding in such a way as makes it almost impossible to see them. But the sound of his reeling will easily tell you of their whereabouts, for he and his mate fly always close together at the time of nesting.

He was alone when I saw him the other day and I can only account for the sound of his voice by the supposition that they were late in building and his mate was still sitting on the eggs. They should have been hatched some time ago.

Naturally enough when I came home it was the first thing I thought of saying to Diana, that I had heard a Grasshopper-Warbler and so late as in the month of August. The words were almost on my lips, when I thought of how soon there would be a time when upon my return, I must keep such things to myself.

"I will begin here and at once," I said to myself and now, until I have had the opportunity of recording it in my note book, I have felt as though

I were shielding some secret from her and have feared lest she should steal it away from me.

But to-day I have taken still another step. All this week, her thoughts, I know, have been upon the ideas generated in her mind by my sermon of last Sunday. Half with pleasure, often with no little sadness, I have watched in her the ripening of the seeds which I have sown. She says things sometimes, sometimes asks me questions which show me, more plainly than any confession she could make, the unsettled condition of her mind.

The other morning when we rose from prayers and the servants had gone out of the room, she said—

“What would you think of a woman who had no children?”

She often asks me questions like this, which makes me think that Georgina must have found out much of the woman in me and left it there when she died.

“It may not be her fault,” said I.

“No—but if it is.”

“There may be pressing reasons,” I replied—  
“she may be so poor that it would be hard to give her children a fair chance in the world.”

“You wouldn’t blame her then?”

“No—I shouldn’t blame her. But the mercy of God is always the wisdom of Nature. I should try to make her see them as one and cultivate a faith in them both.”

Diana stirred her coffee round and round. At last she looked up at me—

“Supposing she were not poor?” she asked.

“I’m old fashioned, my dear,” said I—“as no doubt you know. In London and the big cities, I believe, it is becoming fashionable to have no children. They take up a woman’s time. She has other things to do. The need for amusement is growing every day. The supply is increasing with the demands. They tell me the Earl’s Court Exhibition in London is drawing hundreds of people there every night. New theatres are being built. I wonder sometimes when I hear these things how long it will be before there is scarcely a home left in England. Life does not amuse people so much as it did. In time the only things that will amuse them will be amusements. In time we shall come to be a great congregation of people, struggling, fighting, straining to forget we are alive. Not many women will care to have children then. That indeed would remind them too much of life.”

“Don’t you think there is any excuse,” she asked

“for a woman who chooses to go without them?”

I looked across the table at her, knowing then all she meant.

“None,” I said quietly—“I could think of none. As I said just now, there is a growing desire to manufacture, to invent pleasures in life. But I am sure that life contains enough pleasures already

made. To me, as you know, there are such pleasures in Nature and in my work as make the days well worth the living. And when you think of the countless things in life besides just the birds and this garden here in which I am interested, doesn't it make you wonder why people should strain and strive to manufacture interests for themselves?"

"Are you absolutely satisfied with the pleasures that just the birds and the garden give you?" she asked.

There was a note of intensity in her voice and I knew quite well what was her meaning.

"Why yes—absolutely," said I.

"Don't *I* mean anything?" she asked.

I must admit that I was hard put to it then to give such an answer as would not undo all the good I had done. But I had no time to think. I must say and at once, the first thing that came into my mind.

"You mean, my dear," said I—"all the youth and energy that I have left behind me."

It may not have been the answer that she wanted, but it set her thinking once more and so I left her until this evening when I took the last step in the course I had laid out for myself.

The darkness had set in with such a chilly wind that we had the fire lighted in the drawing-room, a thing I only remember doing once before at this time of the year. When we were seated there after

our tea, I asked Diana to play the Preludes to me. I shall not hear them many more times now.

There was one new one she had got, in which I had had no hand in acquiring.

"When did you do that one?" I asked.

"About a week ago. Mr. Tregenna whistled it for me while I took it down."

"I thought he didn't care for birds," said I.

"Oh yes," she replied—"I think he does now. He's caught it from you I expect."

"Well—isn't that one a slight variation of the Blackcap?"

She shook her head.

"We saw the bird," she said—

"it was a grey-green colour, with a whitish breast—not quite white; there was a sort of touch of rust about it."

"The Garden-Warbler," said I—"it does sing very like the Blackcap too. Play it again, my dear."

She played it again.

"And now play them all again."

And she played them all again.

When she had finished, I bid her come and sit beside me, for that there was something which I had to say.



"I've been thinking," I began—"of what you are going to do with yourself."

"Do with myself?" she repeated.

"Yes—you've left school, but there is a great deal more education you might learn. I'm not going to flatter you, my dear, but your intelligence is well above the ordinary. Look at those verses you have written—these Preludes you have done, all by yourself. Are you going to let your youth go by without using the talents you have got?"

"Is that what you meant in your sermon?" she asked—"when you said that youth was the time for doing."

"Quite possibly it was," said I. "Now what I'm going to suggest is this, that you go abroad for some good time to finish your education; then, if you should never marry—which my dear, I hope one day perhaps you will—then you too will have interests in life when the energy of your youth is gone."

She looked at me steadily for a while.

"How about you, Daddy?" she asked—"What are you going to do here all alone?"

"All alone!" I exclaimed—"with nearly seven hundred people in the parish and more than a hundred different sorts of birds in the woods. All alone!"

"But I promised I'd never leave you," said she.

"You were only nineteen then," I reminded her.

"I'm only twenty now," said she.

"Yes, my dear—but in that one year you've become a woman."

She looked at me as though she were frightened, then suddenly she rose and left the room.

*AUGUST* 20

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Y subterfuge has taken effect so soon as this. While I was preparing an address this morning, I heard a sound out in the garden and, looking up, I saw Allan outside the window.

"Could you spare me a few moments?" he asked and I knew then that for me the days of Diana's companionship were numbered. I smiled when I thought how that she had been unable to tell me herself and, from the look in his face, I knew that Allan was trembling at the thought of all that lay before him.

"Come inside," said I—"or would you sooner that we talked out there?"

"I think out here," said he, and I came out into the garden where we sat beneath the mulberry tree.

For some moments he worked with his fingers, pulling to pieces a blade of corn that he had picked on his way up to the Vicarage.

"I don't quite know how to begin," said he.

"Begin anywhere," said I.

"Well," he continued—"In your sermon the

Sunday before last, you talked about youth. Perhaps I didn't rightly gather what you meant, but it seemed to me that you suggested a man should marry when he was young; that—that when she was young—"he had destroyed the blade of corn; now he was pulling nervously at the empty husks. And how I liked him for his timidity!" that when she was young a woman should—should have children."

"I did mean that," said I.

He jumped at my admission.

"Well don't you think," he went on and without hesitation now—"don't you thin' that besides youth and the children she has in youth, a woman should love and be loved in her youth?"

I thought of Georgina.

"A man may love when he is old," said I.

"Yes—yes—I know—but when he's young, surely love is more—more wonderful then?"

I shook my head.

"Some things can be always wonderful," I replied—"But I know well my dear boy what you mean. In youth, love is a budding tree—the sap is alive in all its branches—it stretches out its arms to the sun. That's what you mean. But the tree bears fruit as time goes on and that is wonderful too; and in the autumn we shall see such colours on that beech tree as will fill your eyes with wonder. But I know well what you mean. With you it is the bud-

ding time, and all the blood is warm and tingling in your veins. And every time you see my Diana, you feel like the tree stretching out its arms to the sun."

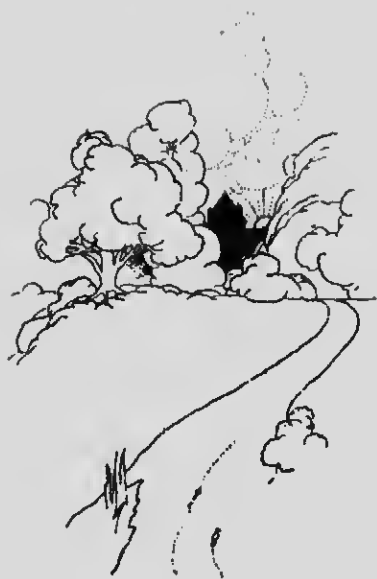
In complete amazement, he asked me how I knew.

"Turn your head slowly," said I—"and look up at that window above the porch."


Notwithstanding my warning, he turned it far too swift and all that we saw was the flutter of a curtain as it fell back into place.



*SEPTEMBER 27*







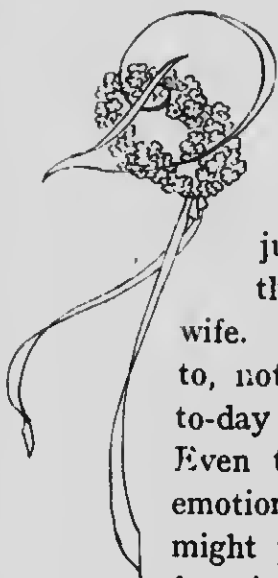
THE Swallows are congregating  
on the ridge tiles. Early next  
month Diana will be gone.



OCTOBER 7







IANA was married this morning. I think my voice was quite steady as I read the service ; perhaps it was not quite so steady as I spoke just those few words to them from the altar when they were man and wife. This is a custom I always adhere to, notwithstanding that there are some to-day who ask me to dispense with it. Even this morning when an excusable emotion made me fear that my voice might play me false, I would not depart from it.

" My dear children," I said—and I addressed them as though they were both standing beside me in my study—" You are going to a far country, but you are taking with you that love and affection which is the certain message of God. And so long as you hold faithfully and in all happiness to the one, no power on earth can make you forget the other."

I had meant to say more than this but something that was not tears, for my eyes were dry, swelled in my throat and all the words I had to say were choked

by it. So I just laid my hands on their heads and in my heart I said—" *May the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord—Amen.*"

Before they took their final departure, Diana put her hand in my arm and asked me to come round the garden with her for the last time. The tears were falling fast from her eyes as we walked. I think they must have been perilously near my eyes too, but when we came to the little cross under the apple tree where the Bullfinch was buried, I could not help smiling as I stopped and, in silence pointed it out to her.

"Love begins in strange ways, my dear," said I. And then, as I said that, a House-Martin flew over our heads—that agitated flight which comes to all the birds just previous to migration. It is the same agitation, I suppose, as was drawing the tears from Diana's eyes. I turned her round that she might see it before it wheeled away over the house-top.

"You can hear the South Winds calling," said I—"and the Swallow hears them too."

Then she looked up at me and, with her eyes still full of tears—"Daddy—did you guess?" said she.

"It's all guessing when it's a woman," said I.

I did not tell her how soon I had guessed. I did not tell her how much sooner I might have guessed than I did. We just walked then in silence through

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the garden, visiting every corner we knew well, recalling, as though by tacit understanding, all the memories which they contained. At last I led her back to the house, it was more than I could bear. Every moment cried out to me that this was the last and almost in bitterness, there came into my mind the wish that it was all over, that I were alone to face the empty rooms, the empty garden by myself.

When finally they set off in the chaise to meet the coach where it halts on the main road some four miles south of Bramlingham, I stood at the gate with the rest of our wedding guests, waving my handkerchief as though it were the most ordinary wedding in the world.

As soon as in common politeness I could leave them, I returned to the house. Everywhere there were the signs of the festivities that had taken place but the house itself was silent and empty. The servants were now making a holiday of the occasion and I was quite alone.

First one room I looked into and then another. Everywhere it was silent. The piano was still open in the drawing-room where the evening before, Diana had played the Preludes to me for the last time. Upstairs in her bed-room was a satin bow which she had left behind. I picked it up and put it in my pocket.

Because of the excitement of that day I suppose, her bed had not been made. The clothes were

thrown back as she had left them in the morning when she rose. Her room is next to mine. I have often heard her singing in the morning as she dressed her hair. Shall I ever hear her sing again? They have promised to return. But I have looked often at the atlas and California is a long way away.

I did not touch the bed-clothes. I left them as they were and, crossing the landing, I opened the door of the room where Georgina died.

"Death cannot be the end," said I and I closed the door behind me.

Everything was in darkness for the curtains were drawn. I walked across the room and pulled them; then I undid the catch and threw open the window wide. The warm sunshine beat down upon my face, the far country was pale in a haze of Autumn heat but the birds were silent. There was not even the voice of a Robin to break the stillness of the countryside. But they will sing again. They will sing again next year.

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