The Trail of the Ragged Robin

By

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OTHER
FLOWER-PATCH BOOKS

Flower-Patch Neighbours.
The Flower-Patch Among the Hills.
Between the Larch-woods and the Weir.

OF ALL BOOKSELLERS

The Trail of the Ragged Robin

By
FLORA KLICKMANN

Editor of "The Woman's Magazine"

Author of
"The Flower-Patch Among the Hills"
"Between the Larch-woods and the Weir"
"The Lure of the Pen," etc.

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Dedicated to
My Father

These are as the Waters of Shiloah
that go Softly.

The Trail of the Ragged Robin

The Plash of the Plover's Brook

If you have ever wandered in the Valley of the Wye, you will know something of its straggling hillside paths—always steep, always stony, always beautiful, and always calculated to reduce any boots to a condition of hopeless disrepair. Those paths are among the characteristics of the romantic region where the oaks and birches on the Gloucestershire hills wave greetings to the firs and larches that crown the Monmouthshire heights, but are cut off from closer companionship by the water that rushes between. Yet so narrow is the river gorge, that the birds nesting in one county can feed in the other.

In many cases the paths lie between rough walls of grey stone that would represent a mint of money were they to be assessed according to present-day labour charges! But they were built generations ago by the original settlers on the land, who erected them, not so much with the idea of keeping the strangers out and the cattle in, as to clear the land of the all-pervading rock in order to get together a little soil for cultivation. And because rock is more plentiful than earth in this district, it takes an enormous amount of digging-out, and clearing, to get any depth at all worth tilling; and the stone thus excavated must be put somewhere.

Hence, you will find massive walls, from two to three feet thick, bordering a path so diminutive that it can soon be lost sight of entirely beneath the fern and bramble and wild roses and bryony that clamber about the stones, and stretch out arms to each other from across the way. I know paths that have become indistinguishable and almost impassable in one season, when no one has chanced to pass along them.

But whether they are traversed or neglected, these paths are invariably lovely; and they lead the wanderer to unsuspected nooks of fairy-like charm, or reveal at intervals, between the trees, views of such grandeur and magnitude, that the beholder is almost bewildered in the endeavour to take mental cognizance of range beyond range of forest-darkened hills, and height above height of purple-blue mountains.

The diversity of scenery to which these paths will introduce the pilgrim is remarkable; but truth compels me to add that they seldom take him to his desired haven. For it is one of their peculiarities that, after enticing the unwary on and on, and up and up, through miles of overhanging trees, with masses of wood sorrel, primroses, violets, ground ivy, and veronica at his feet, then out into open space, where the lane is teeming with alkanet, stitchwort, bluebells, campions, foxgloves, harebells, heather, whinberries, or blackberries—according to the season, the chances are all in favour of a path finally ending at a blank wall that shows nothing but dense, uncharted forest beyond. Or it may prove to be only a "skidway," one of the paths made by the woodmen, down which they slide the great trunks of felled timber, till they reach some road where it is possible to induce a lorry, or a trolley, to stand long enough on all fours without careering downhill, to enable them to load up. Or perhaps the lane terminates at a derelict cow-house—smothered on the shady side with the little English maiden-hair fern, no doubt, and dripping with honeysuckle in the sun, but a cow-house all the same, and a disused tumbled-down one at that; and such an architectural find at the end of a long, tiring climb, is not always worth the perspiration expended on the quest, in the eyes of the climber—more especially if he had been under delusion that he had lighted on a short cut to the next town!

On several occasions I have rescued, from lonely lanes that led nowhere, breathless, agitated, footsore wayfarers, who, by the time I found them, had become so entangled, topographically, that they saw no prospect ahead of them, for the rest of their natural lives, but an endless climbing up steep, stony paths which would forever lead them farther and farther from a cup of tea. And when at length, having calmed them, I have placed them safely beside a finger-post on the firm, broad, county road, they have gazed upon its smooth, tarry surface, its whirring motorbikes and hooting char-à-bancs, with looks of such unbounded affection, that I have ceased pointing out to them the natural beauties of the countryside.

Nevertheless, the more grassy and unfrequented a lane, the more eagerly, as a rule, does the pedestrian pursue it. There is something particularly beguiling in the sight of a narrow, straggly by-path that seems to be doing its best to avoid the eye of authority, in order to slip off quietly and have a good time, no one knows where.

But beautiful as are the footways that wind up and across the forests and the fields, still more beautiful are the waterways, where streams ripple

down, always talking, and forever clothing the earth with flowers and ferns and the greenest of carpets, as they journey from the very tops of the hills to the river at the bottom of the valley. And those rare souls who try to follow the trail of the Ragged Robin, that gay, fluttering flower, that haunts the banks of the brook in June, find it indeed an adventure in beauty. For these streams are something more than mere watercourses; they are part of the indefinable glamour of the hills.

They have so many different phases, and arrest one in so many different ways. There is the rush and clamour of the full winter torrent; the mist-wraith that so often haunts the brooks at sundown; the crooning note of the summer water among the cresses in the shallows; the clear slide of the stream over ledges and broad rocks; the delight of tiny cascades dripping over steps made by the roots of ancient trees; the cool sound of the running water on a hot August day.

But above all these, and many other lovable characteristics, there stands out the wild, haunting, never-to-be-forgotten song of the stream as heard through the stillness of the night, when shimmering, golden moonlight seems to mingle with the sighing of the pines, and the night scents of honeysuckle and dew-damped fern; when the dark outlines of the high, wooded hills convey a curious sense of brooding loneliness. Then it is that a Voice, like nothing else in Nature, sings of mysteries that seem at times so near; and again, so far to reach!

Yet this is no sad-souled Undine mourning a lost lover. The song is always happy, lilting, and hopeful. Freed from the over-riding sounds of the day that gave it but little chance to be heard, the stream seems to have gained new powers, and to sing aloud with sheer abandon of joy, especially when the springs are full; and it calls to others near and far, who add their music as they hasten on to the river.

To some it may seem a misnomer, or at least only a poetic fancy, to apply the word music to the sounds made by rushing water. Yet it is music—a weird, fascinating, extraordinary music, and something quite distinct from noise.

The night-song of a mountain stream stands alone in the world of sound, and admits of no classification. Unless you have heard it, with drowsy ears, singing outside your bedroom window the whole night long, you can form no idea of its peculiar charm; and once you have heard it, you realize that it is useless to attempt to describe it by means of the ordinary alphabet.

Unlike the river in the valley—which is often restless and petulant, rushing one way or another with the tide, torrenting over the weirs, foaming against the mid-stream boulders, swirling madly round any obstruction—the streams from the uplands are, as a rule, gentle, almost caressing in their movements, providing music, motion, and colour, but always with a soothing sense of calm and peace.

These springs—as wonderful to-day as was the stream that flowed from Horeb—burst forth from what is little more than a rock, at a height where only the Hand of God could place them and keep them in touch with His mighty reservoirs. For the stream is, in most cases, never failing; in the hottest weather many will still flow steadily on, watering a very thirsty land, not only keeping plant and tree and wild-wood creature alive, but liberally supplying human needs, since on these mountain springs every household relies—from the smallest cottage to the biggest mansion. And nothing is guarded more zealously, both by peasant and peer, than the "rights" of the burbling brooks that murmur dreamily all the summer long, and make the dullest winter day throb with their ceaseless singing.

Unfortunately, you can seldom know one of these hillside streams as a whole; at best you can only love it in fragments. You may think you are in for a lengthy acquaintance, when it appears, chatty and friendly, making its way down the side of a lane; you walk interestedly at its side discoursing on the weather and the prospects of rain (a subject of unfailing interest to a brook), when suddenly, without warning or farewell, it dives beneath a rock at the roadside and is seen no more; or it loses itself in the depths of an adjoining coppice; or it silently vanishes underground at your very feet apparently without reason. Whoever was the first person to voice the old-world idea that mischievous nixies and water-sprites continually play pranks with the streams, would find unlimited material in support of his theories on our hills, for the streams are most capricious, and altogether unexpected in the tricks they play, and in the way they elude observation.

And even the most enterprising explorer cannot follow them on their travels. Unlike the paths, which are public property and open to all comers, the streams spend most of their existence on private territory; and the outsider, no matter how he may pant after the water-brooks, is not welcomed in fields that are up for hay, or in woods where the nation's much-needed timber is in course of growing. Hence the passing tourist seldom sees them in their free, untended state, left as Nature decks them, and unspoilt by man. The brook that comes into touch with civilization is apt, alas, to show a bigger crop of old tin cans and broken crockery, than flowers and aquatic

plants; and to study the little torrent that will be found rushing through many of our riverside villages, is not necessarily to know our streams at their best!

Near my own particular Flower-Patch, high up on the sunny side of one of these hills, there happen to be several rivulets with whom I am on visiting terms. One of these not only supplies my own house and garden with all the water needed, but also a near-by cottage and several wells *en route*. In the longest drought these streams never fail; even when the whole earth has been baked to an Egyptian brick, one of these streams has yielded at least one and a quarter gallons of water per minute in the hottest part of the hottest day on record.

These streams are typical of hundreds that course down the hills, and the Plover's Brook, as we call the one near which some plovers nest, will serve to convey a general idea of the lovely characteristics of them all.

It starts life in a rock-strewn wood, near the top of the hill, where it bubbles out from among a confusion of great, mossy boulders, unseen in summer until you search for it, being heavily shadowed by long fern fronds that bend over it protectingly, with an almost human intuition of the need to shield this baby-brooklet from the fierce, absorbing heat of the sun. Life in the quietudes, however, accustoms one to utilize hearing as well as sight, and a stream is bound to sing, or at any rate to prattle, as it passes on its pleasant way; thus it invariably betrays its whereabouts, no matter how closely the fern may endeavour to hide it.

Seeing that the earth's surface, in every direction, seems to be composed entirely of stones of all shapes and sizes, only held in place by the roots of the trees, cables of ivy, and long stems of clematis, woodbine, and wild rose, it is little short of a miracle that the water remains above ground; one would expect it to drop into one of the hundreds of openings between the rocks and return to its original home; but water seems, in a curious way, to be much more human than are the rocks around. At times it appears to have a living intelligence, to know what it is doing, and to have a purpose in so doing! This spring, like thousands of other mountain runnels, carefully avoids the gaping crevices, skirts its way around the cavernous hollows, and manages, with some intuition beyond human comprehension, to find a safe way on the surface, with solid ground beneath; and it keeps strictly to this course for some distance, as it journeys valleywards, with very little deviation from the straight line.

All down the rocky gulley through which it flows, ferns of various kinds grow in profusion—the Male Fern, Mountain Buckler Fern, Harts-tongue, Lady Fern, and very noticeable are the clumps of Blechnum or Hard Fern, with their long, shiny, evenly-toothed fronds; while every crevice in the rocks seems to support a cushion of the common Polypody or Wall Fern. Fortunately, this wood lies behind a farm, and is protected by its fields (which include a most conscientious bull); therefore it has escaped the ravages of the worthless, the wicked, and the wanton, who spread desolation wherever they go, by digging up and stealing any interesting plant that takes their fancy!

May the bull continue to enjoy vigorous health for years and years to come!

On reaching the edge of the wood, the brook enters a field, and, as the hill heaves over a trifle, setting the field at a slightly different angle, the stream no longer runs in the same straight line, but branches off across the field, cutting it diagonally from corner to corner. Once in the open, and clear of the rocks and overhanging trees, it enters upon a new phase of existence. No longer shadowy and demure, reflecting only the grey of the stones and the dark green of its leafy roof, out in the sunshine it throws off its sombre garb, and puts on the gayest of dress—light, airy, and exceedingly decorative.

At each season in turn, it makes some special appeal; but at the end of May the brook in the meadow is probably at its loveliest. Being full after the winter rains, and no longer kept to a rigid course by rocky walls, it spreads itself lavishly beyond its proper channel, distributing favours in all directions. You may not detect its ever-rippling waters, so luxuriant are the grasses, so high the moon daisies and the gleaming buttercups, so thickly strewn the crimson-purple orchises and their pale heliotrope cousins with the spotted leaves, with here and there a spike of the fragile white Butterfly Orchis; but you may read an announcement of its presence, written in clear, unmistakable lettering, if you have learnt the language of the open—for hundreds of rosy-pink petals are fluttering all over the meadow, like crowds of bright-winged butterflies; and where the Ragged Robin dances in the wind you may know for a certainty that there is running water somewhere in the neighbourhood.

There are other signs by which you may detect the course of the stream, such as the regiments of bright green rushes, with their tufts of brown blossoms; but at a little distance these are easily lost sight of in the grasses, whereas the Ragged Robin, when it is in bloom, is like nothing else in the

fields, though they be crowded with other equally beautiful blossoms. Later on the marsh mint will be in flower; its clumps of blue-mauve blooms being quite a feature of the brook's progress.

But so many flowers love this meadow, and one can't name a half of them—though I think yellows and pinks predominate; it is not so much the flowers one knows, as the flowers one does not know, that give such charm to a little-cultivated meadow that is well supplied with water; there is such a wealth of blossom, such opulence, and so many surprises; from the tiniest flowers in the rich under-carpet, to the gossamer heads of the finest grasses, it is one wide array of beauty, with colours that are a real refreshment to eyes and brain.

After a brief, inconsequent youth spent in roaming down the meadow, the stream starts to take things seriously as it enters a field of oats, and proceeds decorously down by the side of the wall. No vagaries are permitted here; the farmer, knowing the ways of the local water-sprites, has seen to it that it has a good deep channel to accommodate it and keep it within bounds; he has no desire to have his oat-crop washed into the larch wood a little lower down the hill the first time there is a sudden freshet, or a special line in thunderstorms.

Land with these steep gradients is only suitable for grass or trees whose roots will help to keep the soil and rocks together; ploughed fields stand an excellent chance of being cleared a foot deep with the winter rains, when they lean so much to the upright! But it is not Mr. Farmer's fault that oats are here. That crop is only one among many evidences of the intelligence that was kindly bestowed upon the district, by one Ministry or another, during the war. And although our village had not millions of the taxpayer's money dumped into the river at its front door, like our more favoured neighbour Chepstow (where, as you may recall, some master-spendthrift started that National Shipyard, of more than blessed memory!), at least the authorities sent us some highly salaried officials to supervise our agriculture.

Thus it happened that a dapper young man appeared one day, and made a tour of inspection round the first of Mr. Farmer's fields that he walked into. It was moderately good for grazing purposes, and yielded a fair hay crop considering its poor soil and its position; you can't expect the rough, rocky hillside, near the very summit, too, to produce as much as the deep-red soil of rich, well-farmed acres at a lower level. But the dapper personage waved

a governmental cane in an impressive manner over the grass, and announced:

"Now, my man, we shall require you to plough this at once and plant it with oats."

Mr. Farmer, who had three sons in the fighting zone, and was trying his hardest to do the work of all three as well as his own accustomed duties—minus his horses that had been commandeered the first month of the war, and minus men—asked the Stranger if the War Office couldn't manage to find him a useful little job at the front, since he seemed hard up for employment. He also reminded him that he wasn't *his* man; and added, that if the dapper personage had ever encountered an oat in his past history, he would have known that it would be hopeless to plant it in that particular field.

But Mr. Farmer had to learn what most of us had to learn during the war, viz., that little jumped-up Jacks-in-office must not be spoken to in any but a reverential manner! Besides, Mr. Farmer was doing the D.P. an injustice; he *did* know something about oats; he had served in a grocery store before the war, and had often handled Quaker Oats in packets. Obviously he was well-equipped for the post of a sub-advisor to the Ministry of Fishing (or whatever he called himself). At any rate, he sent Mr. Farmer a long document demanding oats in that field, with horrid penalties attached if they were not forthcoming. So oats it had to be; though by the time they reared their puny heads, and returned the farmer about half a bushel of grain for every bushel he had planted, the D.P., who by this time was an O.B.E., had been promoted to another, and still better-paid, sphere of public service, as sub-advisor, or something like that, in connection with the India Office—I think it was—and who could have been better fitted for the appointment? Hadn't he come across rice—and even curry powder occasionally—in his pre-war activities?

The main point, however, is that instead of old-fashioned grass such as our old-fashioned cows have been accustomed to ruminate upon at their ample leisure, that field now yields a magnificent crop of mauve scabious—some of the finest I have ever seen—with just an artistic sprinkling of oats here and there, to set them off (and certainly the blue-green of the oats against the unusual blue of the blossoms, forms a wonderful colour scheme); while the small, pink convolvulus creeps all over the ground, and carpets the field with its pretty, almond-scented flowers; the whole making the loveliest picture imaginable.

The only drawback is the unfortunate fact that our cows are not the least little bit artistic—they are just the plain sort; and they merely say that they don't find pictures particularly nourishing, and threaten to go on strike!

Speaking of Official Enterprise: among the many ways in which it assisted us in our corner of the world, during the war, was a self-imposed task, technically known as "testing the water." It was a most popular branch of service, though I hasten to add, it had nothing to do with Ragged Robins.

The method of procedure was simplicity itself. Three or four officers would detach themselves from one of the various Military or Admiralty Depôts within motor-reach of the valley. Hiring a car, they would proceed to some distant and secluded inn up the river, or among the hills, and once inside the doors it was understood that they were engaged on the necessary testing of the water. The car would wait for them; and as the car proprietor would be paid by the hour—and paid quite generously too, the bill being settled in the long run by the tax-payer—he could not object to his car earning a nice income by slumbering the whole day long beneath some spreading chestnut-tree—in fact, I don't suppose D.O.R.A. would have permitted him to object, had he desired to do so!

As for the chauffeur—his not to reason why! His but to do his best to get the officers home again at nightfall, and try to induce them to recognize their own headquarters when they reached them.

Sometimes it would transpire that another contingent from another Military Depôt would also arrive at the same wayside inn, on the same day, and bent on the same important errand. As will be readily understood, all this scientific investigation tended to make things very bright and sociable! Though, up to the present, I have never been able to trace any record of an innkeeper's unbottled water supply, whether pump, well, or hillside stream, having ever received even the most perfunctory glance of recognition!

But to return to the Plover's Brook. For the greater part of its journey down the field of oats, it is hidden by a tangle of hedgerow plants, including cow parsley, dog's mercury, hazel bushes, unlimited blackberries, straggling hawthorn bushes, wild roses, cuckoo pints, lush grass, and very tall spikes of the flowering rough cocksfoot grass, some of it over five feet in height,

while noble spikes of the ubiquitous foxglove give rich colour, at intervals, to the masses of green.

Scattered Ragged Robins are also to be seen, though these belong more strictly to the open than to the thick herbage on the bank, which is frequently cut back (when a careful farmer is in the offing), in order to keep it from monopolizing the whole field.

Ferns, as a matter of course, line the lower reaches of the banks; and where the field finally ends (with another strong wall to keep it from dropping down into the lane, which is several feet below the bottom of the field), ferns, large and small, make a translucent green grotto, with ivy and overhanging hazel boughs, through which the water gurgles as it slips down over stones and dark brown tree roots, till it finds a little wooden trough (merely two pieces of mossed wood, fastened together V-shaped), which catches the water as with grateful hands, when it comes tumbling down from the higher lands, and holds it out for people to help themselves, and then lets it drop, with a very pleasant sound, into another ferny hollow in the lane-side below the bank, where more twinkling Ragged Robins are firmly established. We call such a wayside pool a well, but it must not be confused with the species of well that needs a long winding chain and an oaken bucket.

These wells, in addition to being the local water supply, are the rallying points for local chat; and the town dweller never understands how much it means, in an isolated community, to have one spot to which the inhabitants are sure to gravitate at more or less regular hours. To know that Mrs. Spring Cottage will be filling her buckets for her washing, as soon as she has got the children off to school, on Monday morning, is a reasonable incentive to Mrs. Rose Cottage to do likewise; especially as she is anxious to tell Mrs. Spring Cottage about—— Oh! all sorts of interesting things are always happening in our district, and need to be talked over. I've seen many and many buckets and pitchers, full to overflowing, left to take care of themselves and run all down the lane, while their owners were deep in so earnest a conversational duet, that there was not even room for a comma!

And surely women who seldom see a shop from one week's end to another, are entitled to some meeting ground where they can stand and exchange a few sentences with a fellow-woman!

Yes, the ferny well is as necessary to the social life of our hills, as are the parks and local shops to the Londoner. And it links us up, in a very personal manner, with that far-off well by which a weary Traveller once rested, Who

amazed a woman, drawing water, with the words that are now numbered among the world's greatest treasures:

"Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into Everlasting Life."

After splashing down into the hollow at the lane-side, the brook, without more ado, vanishes! You can see no opening, no visible means of disappearance—though it actually slips away under the road. And it will take you a long search to rediscover it unaided.

We sometimes hear a stream described as "wandering aimlessly." Yet no lowland stream ever does any such thing, let alone the streams that flow down hillsides. These have a very definite aim in life, viz. to reach the lowest level by the shortest cut. And they proceed to do this from the moment they bubble out so mysteriously from the hill tops.

An old woodman once told me, when I was asking about the disappearance of a stream, "The paths'll wander round and about, all askewt maybe, and as crooked as a rainbow; but the water be like the birds, it do allus take the straightest line it can find. An' if you do want to know where the water be gone, follow 'un down, taking a straight line accordin' as the hill tips; you'll find 'un presently."

And in this case a few fields lower down the hill, a stream flows out from beneath an orchard wall—apparently having no connection whatever with any other firm of the same name! Nevertheless it is an old friend, the Plover's Brook, which has been touring underground. Why? who can say! Water can be quite as mysterious as wind!

Once within the orchard, it starts a new lease of life, with, apparently, an entirely fresh outlook. No longer the careless, gay, haphazard stream that roamed all over the meadow; nor the much-disciplined brook that was taught the way it should go, down the oat field. Now, it becomes a real water *garden*; edged with yellow irises, tall hemp agrimony and flowering rushes, and flowing under a natural pergola formed by the arched sprays that the wild roses love to fling abroad. In one spot, where the ground pauses for a moment in its steep descent, the brook broadens out into a fair-sized pond, crowded with irises, tall hemlock, the lovely comfry with its drooping pink and blue bells. Here the big water forget-me-nots send up a wonderful array of flowers of a colour that is rare in Nature; while red campions and ragged

robins squeeze in where they can find space. And as you tread the grass about the banks of the pool, the scent of mint mingles with the purling of the water, and seems strangely reminiscent of something intangible, but beautiful, in a far, dim past, before the age of smoke and petrol, when the earth forever offered wondrous incense to its Creator.

Among the loveliest of the plants in that wild water-garden, is the Marsh Ragwort, a flower that ought to be better known and cultivated as a garden gem. It has large, loose, graceful, flower sprays, bearing clusters of daisy-like blossoms of a lovely canary yellow; the petals being slightly curved back in an exceedingly pretty manner. The flower is delicately scented, and —like most of the members of the indefatigable daisy family—it is splendid for cutting, and lasts long in water.

On one occasion I gathered some seed from this plant, and took it back with me to London. I planted it in a pot in the greenhouse, and forgot it. Later, the gardener asked me if I had any special use for the pot of groundsel I had asked him to water?

I surveyed the crop of seedlings; they certainly looked remarkably like groundsel! Still, we agreed to give them a further chance to redeem their character; but as they continued to look like groundsel, I eventually gave it up as a bad job, and turned out the pot. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when the following summer I came upon several sturdy marsh ragwort plants, throwing up bunches of yellow stars, near the rubbish heap in a damp, shady corner of the garden! And though they are not as luxuriant as their relatives beside the Plover's Brook, they are quite creditable, and a valuable addition to a town garden. The only sorrow, in this connection, is the tendency of the many anonymous weeds which we now water and cherish tenderly, to develop into unadulterated groundsel, instead of the stray marsh ragwort seedlings for which we were fondly hoping.

On leaving the orchard, the brook enters a domain known to us as "The Tangle," though actually it is the place where we "untangle." It is the spot of all others where one's difficulties are smoothed out most easily, and where one's troubles are most likely to blow right away.

Picture to yourself a wide stretch of land, lying at a very steep angle around the elbow of a hill—by which I mean the land turns round a corner, part of it being on one side of the hill and looking up the river towards Monmouth, and part of it being the other side of the hill and looking down

the river towards Chepstow. The land is neither forest nor grass land nor bare hillside; it is a mixture. Locally we merely designate it "rough land," and shake our heads sadly over all degenerate landscapes of this particular pattern. It is useless for grazing; it would cost more in labour and dynamite to clear it than would ever be returned in veal or beef. It is equally hopeless as a building site; it would cost as much to haul up materials for a small dwelling as would build a church on level ground. Its only use is for timber-growing, according to material calculations. Nevertheless, I have found another use for it—a use that cannot easily be explained in words.

Coming upon "The Tangle" unexpectedly from the seclusion of the orchard, one has the sensation of suddenly stepping out into wide space and landing on territory which, long ago, was the playground of giants, who left great fragments of rock lying about in all directions, just where they tossed them in haphazard mood. And the spot is exceedingly lovely. Time and the kindly hand of Nature have removed all sharp edges from the stones; the storms have worn them wonderfully smooth; ivy, blackberries, wild roses, honeysuckle, and Traveller's-joy have swathed the scars and softened every harshness; with long green moss where it is too shady for anything else to grow.

More than this; great trees appear to have been dropped here and there among the rocks, as though placed as sentinels on this out-jutting spur of the hill-range, where they can gaze up and down the valley, and warn the forests of approaching storms. In winter they are lashed about with extraordinary fury, since they catch the onslaught of the wind from whichever direction it comes; you can read this in their twisted branches, and the boughs that have fallen and strew the ground beneath, or still hang on the parent tree creaking with an uncanny sound when a breeze passes that way.

In summer the duties of these trees are light—they give shelter to numerous little families; for "The Tangle" is a perpetual whirring of wings and a scurry of furry creatures. The trees also provide splashes of refreshing green shade on what would otherwise be a sun-scorched slope. With soft whisperings of leaves each tree contributes some special characteristic to the place, beginning with spring when the osiers are tufted with yellow, the blackthorns become snowdrifts, the bird-cherries break into clouds of white, followed by the bright pink-and-white blooms on the gnarled crab-apple trees. Mountain-ash trees load the air with scent; later, the limes fling abroad their unrivalled sweetness; the abele flutters leaves like silver-white moths. Later, oaks and beeches throw down acorns and nuts for squirrels and field mice; in November the birches hang out crowds of swinging catkins that

shake down the tiniest of cream-coloured petals, beloved of sparrows and chaffinches; while all the year round the pines add the throbbing mysterious music of wild æolian harps.

But perhaps the greatest charm of this wild land is the water that greets one at every turn. Of brooks alone, the place possesses three, each running down in a series of small waterfalls; sometimes lost sight of under a great rock, though you know it is there by its song; sometimes splashing down from a boulder into a tiny grotto below. And one of these is the Plover's Brook—the same flower-decked, gladsome friend of every living thing, as in the past; but with a difference.

Freed at last from the restraints of civilization, it careers impetuously downhill, with an exuberance of spirits as gay, in its way, as the scampering of the squirrels that nest in the overhanging trees. No obstacle daunts it; it finds a way around, or over, or under, the biggest boulders, always singing as it goes. The solid stone that now forms its channel, and the little caverns through which it flows, ring with the sound of its voice; while the fall and plash of the water from stony ledge to fern-rimmed grotto, make never-ceasing sound—in dry weather, a tinkle like distant bells, which grows to a rollicking rushing tune as the water increases with the autumn rains. And the music of it all echoes and reverberates from rock to rock, filling the air with a sense of happy life and joyous movement, that is never overpowering, never too obtrusive.

Here and there, where there is any level, the brook, after dropping over some large stones, makes a tiny pool, backed by a semicircle of the rock over which the stream has tumbled. Here the pebbles look like rare white gems as they lie among yellow sand.

Yet it is the flowers that hold one spellbound in the Tangle. Owing to its steep, rugged character, it is not safe grazing ground for sheep or cattle. Only an aged horse of thoughtful habits is allowed to pass a pleasant, restful old age in this quiet sanctuary. His movements are so slow and so circumspect, he could not come to harm. He makes a few paths here and there, from one plot of sweet thymy grass to another; and he is useful in keeping down the brambles. But his few remaining teeth could not cope with all the available herbage; hence the flowers bloom on undisturbed and seed and spread in all directions, while the course of the Plover's Brook is marked all down the hill by patches of lovely colour.

Here creeping jenny, and its cousin the yellow pimpernel, wander about the banks; cresses, forget-me-nots, and brooklime do their best to fill the bed

of the stream; water-loving mosses and tiny moss-like plants cover every stone the ripples touch. Foxgloves give the whole landscape a rosy glow; and this colour is repeated in various shades and tones by the tall flowering stems of the Great Hairy Willow Herb, the magenta spikes of the Rose Bay or French Willow; while the low-growing pink milk-wort, that looks so like heather at a little distance, grows thickly in the dry parts away from the water. But prettiest of all are the drifts of pink ragged robins growing in a sea of quaking grass, wherever there is open space near the brook's banks.

No painter, no writer could ever do justice to the picture as I have seen it many a time in June: the brooks splashing down the steep, over rocks, over massive tree roots, catching the cones from the pines in passing and tossing them about like balls; making bird baths innumerable but leaving the warm, flat stones where the woodpigeons and pheasants stand to drink, and the squirrels and rabbits sit awhile to wash their faces after a meal. And then the sweep of colour!—the bright green of the bracken; the darker tones of the thickets; the ruddy tints on the shoots of young oaks and maples; the flush of the wild roses; the cream of the elder blossoms; rank upon rank of foxgloves; dazzling sheets of ox-eye daisies; masses of rose-purple wood betony; shining yellow of trefoil, hawkweed and buttercups; and ever following the trail of the stream, the jaunty ragged robins in a mist of trembling grass.

The rest of the brook's journey riverward is through this wild, rock-strewn land, till at last it falls six feet, then ten feet, then twenty feet—a series of full cascades—and drops into a cool, dark, fern-draped cavern under the hill, beloved of the cattle, but far from the haunts of the motoring tourist. From here, it takes a quiet stroll across the level river meadows—just a moment's breathing space, and no more, before it joins the river, near the foaming, rushing turmoil of the weir that knows neither pause nor rest.

When a traveller from other lands visits our islands, or when a native returns after long absence, one of his earliest remarks is certain to be "How beautifully green everything is! so different from the brown fields and burnt grass of——" wherever he has resided.

But after the wanderer has been here a few weeks, and his friends and relations, ceasing to cluster round him, are resuming their normal occupation —when he has seen the sights, bought an umbrella, and discovered that the train marked on the time-table isn't running because the weather is foggy—

then, he is equally certain to remark that it isn't the cold he minds, nor the wind, nor even the retiring nature of most of our summers; but the all-pervading damp gets on his nerves. And he wonders how in the world we ever manage to live through it!

Yet the moisture of our climate is the secret of our green landscapes and flowery meadows, thanks to the streams that dapple our country with beauty. And the song of the brook may well be a song of gratitude for rain and fog and driving storms, which bring in their train so much of earth's loveliness.

More than this: surely the Voice that forever sings amid the silence of the sleeping hills—quieting the troubled soul and bringing healing to the sick at heart—proclaims a promise that extends beyond mere temporal needs, as it reminds us unceasingly: "The Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills."

Bella Introduces Herself

Spring was on the way, and we knew it, though according to all respectable poets it is only those leading the simple life and dwelling close to the heart of Nature who are able to detect her approach. But Londoners can tell the times and seasons by a dozen signs and tokens, more especially the arrival of the spring.

For instance: that industrious elderly gentleman living at Balham, writes his annual letter to the Press to record the arrival on February 29 of a pair of cuckoos who are building in the waterspout; while on March 1 an equally patriotic person at Pinner, having shot a wood pigeon (which probably did not belong to him), makes the shocking discovery that its crop contains 134 grains of corn, half a pound of strawberries, the only vegetable marrow that was showing on his allotment, and an advertisement for some one's memory course. And ought not something to be done?

Then there is the sweep. No matter how deferentially you approach him, he is as detached and as already full-up with important engagements as an M.P., *after* a general election.

Ditto the carpet-beating fraternity, and the house decorators, and the charwoman.

Moreover, at the approach of spring, one's cushions and general upholstery take on a jaundiced, morbid hue—pure jealousy of course, but none the less upsetting. Every house-mistress knows the tint, and hies her straightway to the West End—another seasonal sign!

Those of us who live on the edge of London, gazing at its chimneys, but doing our best to avoid being engulfed in its conglomeration of smuts, watch the buds, like tiny pearls, appearing on the hawthorns, while the brown, bare branches of winter turn to purple, and then are lost in a mist of green. And somehow, the sight fills one with a strange longing that is almost pain.

May that year was an ideal month—the type of weather one always has in mind when buying summer frocks, but which so seldom materializes when one actually wears the frocks.

It really started in April, when a sudden blaze of sunshine sent barometer and thermometer nearly off their heads. We hastily got out the tent; the Head of Affairs repainted the garden seats with some green fluid he found in a tin; we demobilized the pieces of glass from the home-made garden frame (supposed to raise a purely mythical war-emergency ridge cucumber), and reunited them with the various pictures from whom they had been parted during the war; and we wondered how many new water-spouts the garden-hose had developed during hibernation. If only the garden-hose would kindly look upon its winter sojourn in the out-house as a rest-*cure*, what pages of the dictionary would be saved later on!

Of course, we knew such weather wouldn't last, and, of course, we all assured each other that we should suffer for it later on. That is where our British temperament is so foresighted, well-balanced, and prepared for any emergency; we never forget that—be the day cheery or be the day long—a tax collector, in one guise or another, is always waiting in the offing.

But, despite all our prognostications and earnest advice to fellow-women not to be led astray by the lure of flowered voiles, the sun persisted in shining with increasing vigour; and we basked on the garden seats as though it were August—*i.e.* until we discovered that the green fluid was distemper of a most flighty character.

On the 30th of April one of the extra ladies who had been called in to assist the regular ones in spring-cleaning our offices, suddenly noticing the date on my tear-off calendar, exclaimed—

"You don't mean that this is the last day of April; or is there thirty-one days this month?"

"This is the last day," I replied. "Isn't it lovely to feel that the winter is gone?" (anxious to voice a beautiful and original thought that was within me.)

"The last day of April? The *last* day? Gracious me! And I haven't changed me winter vest yet! I must run home and do it now, for I simply can't go on a-stewing like this till June." And she set down clankingly a pail of water just where it would be kicked over by the next person who entered the room, and dropped wet wash-leather and rags on my office table, preparatory to running.

"But why not change it to-morrow morning?" I asked, as I removed the soggy mass from somebody's valuable MS. (though it was pleasant to think

I might be relieved of her society for a little while). “You will only tire yourself out if you go home now in this heat.”

“To-morrow won’t do,” she said firmly. “To-morrow’s *May*! And it’s ten to one you ketch yer death o’ cold if you thin down in May. Me mother was most pertickler about it—told us a nice bit o’ po’try to make us remember. It goes something like this—

“ ‘Till May is out
Don’t cast off nothin’ you’ve got on.’

“And I never don’t. Why, I wouldn’t change me vest in May, no, not was it ever so! April’s all right, and ’tsall right in June; but May’s awful dangerous. And I don’t want to be took ill till I’ve moved neither; because where I’m living now I’m in St. John’s borough, and at the St. John’s Infirmary no one ever gets better. That’s why I’m waiting for the chance of a house acrost the road; that ’d be in St. Peter’s borough, and at the St. Peter’s Workhouse they don’t let you go off *too* sudden-like; and I’ve even known one or two people who’ve come out again alive. So I *must* change to-day, you see. I’ll be back in half-an-hour.”

And she and the water from the pail hurried out of the door together.

Thus it came about, as I said before, that May was an ideal month. There was no frost to speak of, no heavy rains, no cold, grey days that always spell blight on the rose trees. Everything in the garden had the chance of a lifetime, and was making the best of it.

Whereupon Virginia, Ursula, and I began to talk of my far-away Flower-Patch in tones of home-sick longing. Only those who know what it is to ache, both mentally and spiritually, with the unending weariness and monotony of great cities, can understand the nostalgia that overtakes the London-bound Nature-lover when the first south winds of spring blow over the miles of sordidness that stretch between the hills of Sydenham and the Hampstead Heights.

Virginia and Ursula, my most intimate friends, were only just recovering strength after an influenza duet. I myself was feeling very tired—tired of the endless worry caused by labour troubles; and one only left those connected with one’s business to be met by another crop of problems affecting one’s household. Coal was short, gas was dear and dreadful, and the ton of logs I had been beguiled into buying—at a fabulous price—were so young and so

juicy that I wrote to the dealer pointing out to him that I had ordered wood and not rhubarb! It made me long to be within hatchet distance of our own hillside acres, where at least I could get something with enough "burn" in it to boil a kettle!

Then my home neighbourhood had been even more active than usual, and that is saying a good deal. It is strange how deceptive appearances can be! If you passed along the road in which I live, you would probably exclaim, "How peaceful! How rural! What a sleepy hollow!" (only it's on a hill-top!) "Fancy bracken, and hawthorn hedges, and grass for a curb in a London street! *How* restful!"

But it is not nearly so restful as it looks, simply because in this particular district we specialize on philanthropy. I am inclined to think that every other person walking along the road is bent on alleviating some ill—real or imaginary.

Don't think I am belittling such work; certainly not! It is indeed a blessing that there are so many whole-hearted workers in the cause of charity, for charity needs them. Only—I do wish I could afford to keep *two* footmen, and thus have one always ready to answer the front door when his colleague collapses and is taken away to rest and recuperate. Whereas I do not keep even one; and Abigail, the housemaid, had been declaring that the visitors' bell was undermining her nerves.

I asked her: What about mine?

That particular week had started with a morning call from Mrs. Blank, of Ivy Grange, to announce that she would be giving a garden fête in aid of a new church spire, and of course I would take tickets?

She was followed, after lunch, by Mrs. Dash from Geranium Towers, who asked me to subscribe to the "Guild for providing Footwarmers for the Navy," which she was organizing, and even offered me a place on the Committee.

Another ring at the bell—this time it was an At Home card dropped into the letter-box by Mrs. Stroke of the Moorlands, announcing a *Thé dansant* in aid of the Boy Scouts.

Mrs. Griggles, from round the corner, happened along about teatime, with details of the sad needs of an out-of-work young woman in whom she was interested—an absolute genius who had only an unwholesome garret and the unemployment dole between her and starvation, because she could not get anything to do; and when she had employment, she had to work

sixteen hours a day, and seven days a week, to keep the skin over her bones; meat she seldom saw, and as for soles, she hadn't a vestige to her boots!

I immediately offered this sad case a beautiful and wholesome bedroom, meat twice a day, whatever wages she wanted, and a forty-four hour week, if she would only come and assist in answering my door bell.

But Mrs. Griggles looked at me reprovingly, explaining, "She couldn't possibly waste her talent in such a way. She is an elocutionist of great promise. You surely wouldn't doom her to domestic work!"

And of course I didn't! I could only leave her in the meatless garret, as we were fully equipped with elocutionists, judging by the sounds that came from the servants' hall.

Next day Miss Breezy called from No. 92 to beg some books for her stall at the sale of work.

As Miss Breezy departed out of one gate, Miss Quirker entered by the other—likewise bent on doing her kind act for the day. She explained that she had been turning out boxes and drawers (prior to the usual after-war removal, that was the order of the day), and destroying those things that were *quite* worthless. But coming on a photo of myself, she had decided not to destroy it without first asking if I would like to have it back?

I was thinking this over when Mrs. New Gilt was announced. She has recently bought The Pinnacles, and seemed much surprised when I said I had only a ten-shilling note left, and couldn't possibly make it more for the Pound Day she was patronizing for the hospital. After looking me over, she said, "Well, at least you could give me something for the Jumble Sale."

I decided, there and then, that if charity was going to claim my few remaining garments as well as all my cash, it was high time I went away for a little change!

I admit that May is not usually considered a wise time for the person in the City to jaunt off on a holiday; but several circumstances combined to make it expedient that month. In the first place, there was no war on just then—not in England, at any rate.

Secondly, I had heard from Mrs. Farmer that Clover (who often lives in my fields) would be embarking on maternal duties in April, which would ensure a good supply of milk.

Thirdly, the railway was not striking that particular week—important to me for several reasons! Not only did this mean that there would be some chance of getting out of town, but it also indicated that work would proceed as per normal while I was away. A railway strike being one of the most sociable events known to the City of London, and provocative of the maximum of pleasant, friendly intercourse, naturally means also a minimum output. You see, those who do eventually arrive in town during such spells of national festivity, have to spend what little of the day there remains in running round and explaining to everyone else exactly how they managed it. Obviously it makes life very bright and sunny, even if it doesn't produce much work.

As a nation we may take our pleasures sadly, but at any rate we get a deal of enjoyment out of our misfortunes, and count a host of mercies, one by one, where less enlightened peoples might fancy they saw drawbacks. And if by chance we can't find a solitary mercy, only a variety of grievances, we still manage to enjoy them. Different people may have different ideas as to the *rôle* in which they are most calculated to shine, but every one of us positively revels in playing the part of the blessed martyr.

I broached the subject of a holiday to Virginia, and asked her if she would mind hunting up the trains. But Virginia dismissed trains with a wave of her hand. She had returned to her pre-war scientific interests, and was intent on devising a scheme for wireless travelling, that would non-plus the railway strikers for ever and anon. And she pointed out what a great save of this, that, and the other it would be if one could go through the air minus the necessity for even the airship—and wouldn't I like it if we could travel that way?

Being a cautious person, and anxious not to commit myself to anything that could be used as an advertisement or a testimonial in years to come, I said I thought I would rather send my luggage in advance first, and find out what its nerves were like when it got there, before I was "wirelessed" myself.

But she protested that would not be a fair test, since all luggage in advance (even from well-brought-up families like our own) was bound to go

astray *en route*, and arrive at the farther end in an intoxicated condition. Had I ever known it otherwise?

Though I still felt I must decline her kind offer, I promised her that, when she herself made the first experimental journey, she should have the loveliest funeral at the other end, and a sweet monument quite as tasteful as a war memorial—if not worse.

Ursula, however, accepted the suggestion of a glimpse of the Flower-Patch with alacrity. She was intending to pay a round of visits that had been owing since 1914; should she come to me first, or a little later on?

I begged her to come to me first, as by that arrangement *I* should be the fortunate hostess to secure her sugar ration, or whatever other item of food our paternal Government might be handing out to us in spoonfuls. Whereas, if she started with a visit elsewhere, the other hostess would secure these priceless treasures when she unpacked.

Virginia agreed to come for the week-end—absolutely could not spare longer from her scientific investigations.

On the journey down we heard much from one of our fellow-travellers on the iniquities of the Government, particularly as regards the pattern of their whisky; while another gorgeous passenger, his wife I imagine, gushed over the countryside all the way along, and patronized the flowers; and only regretted that her life was too full of important affairs to allow of her bestowing some of her society on the dear souls buried in such outlandish places.

"What I *adore* in the country is the child-like simplicity of the people, and the calm majesty of the unbroken nights," she was declaiming, when, mercifully, the express slowed down to drop us at Severn Tunnel Junction; and we managed to get Virginia out, speechless with suppressed emotion.

But when she felt the first dash of clean, cold wind from off the water, as we motored from Severn Tunnel to Tintern, she, too, started inquiries as to why we permitted our souls to be dwarfed by the octopus-like tentacles of town life, and saturated with the City's noxious odours and political intrigues, when——

The tyre suddenly burst; it evidently couldn't stand any more of it.

One characteristic of the Flower-Patch is its inability to adhere to rules and regulations, or any set plan.

I had decided the previous year that it should be roses, roses everywhere, the year following; and I schemed accordingly. I sent down dozens of new roses, and I also transplanted and trained and pruned and took cuttings of those already there. Then I went away, leaving much to Nature, and the rest to what little time the man in charge could spare from the vegetable garden, the fields, and the woods—which in these days must be allowed the prior claim on his time.

Virginia and Ursula had also contributed some roses to the garden, a few bushes of the dear little white Scotch briar, several ramblers to cover a rough wall, and some moss roses, white, pink, and crimson, as most of mine had died. Consequently we all arrived bubbling over with expectation as regards roses, hoping to find the place a mass of rosebuds ready to burst into colour. We could not wait even for tea, before making a tour of inspection round the garden.

What we actually found, however, was a swaying sea of columbines; literally thousands and thousands of blossoms on tall stems—violet, pink, pale blue, rose, mauve, deep wine red, white, wedgwood blue, purple-brown, yellow, dark blue, and numerous shades between; some single, some closely-packed double, but all swinging on the garden slope with every breath of wind.

Of course there were plenty of other flowers besides these, but the columbines were everywhere, not only in the beds, but also in the paths, in the corners of the stone steps, in the crevices of the walls, and even waving from the roof of the disused pig sty. At first the eye was carried away by the beautiful colour effect of the masses of intermingling blues and pinks and purples, and saw little else.

By degrees one realized that many other flowers were contributing to the wonderful expanse of colour. There were plenty of wallflowers—streaky yellow and brown, and gleaming gold. There were tall tulips—scarlet mingling with orange, white splashed with pink, cream edged with carmine, pale yellow feathered with purple—a haphazard mixture of colour that never clashes, never seems crude when seen in the mass, and is infinitely more cheerful and exhilarating than a formal bed of self-coloured tulips, where each is the replica of its neighbours.

Tufts of violas were holding up appealing little faces near the edges of the beds, some primrose colour with a heliotrope flush on the upper petals,

some yellow with chestnut-brown, and sundry others. White and purple arabis hung over stone walls and clambered about the irregular stone bordering. Clumps of irises gave a more solid dignity to the garden, some with handsome heads of blue flowers, others white with a pencilled tracery of mauve. Bluebells in plenty had escaped from the near-by wood. Cowslips and polyanthus clustered about the edges of the borders, and, equally at home, spread over into the path.

Weeds—or wild flowers, whichever you will—were there, it is true, but many of these helped to give a groundwork of colour to the whole. The blue speedwell was particularly welcome, and with the blue forget-me-nots carpeted any available bit of bare earth.

Where the garden snuggled up to the orchard rails at the top, and joined the field where the colt plays, taller wild flowers banked themselves with cheerful certainty that no one would bother about them; it was trouble enough to keep them from monopolizing the rest of the place!

Thus the garden was "finished off" with a sturdy edge of uncurling bracken, soft grasses ready to flower, bluebells in plenty, tall, blue heads of the common bugle, the bright, rosy vetch climbing among it, a spike of early purple orchis here and there, and innumerable stars of the pretty white stitchwort; while in the foreground, creeping stealthily farther and farther over the garden beds, were plenty of late violets, the equally beautiful blue ground ivy, and the ever-enterprising tiny yellow clover. Mere words can never describe how lovely was the mass, pushing and edging its way through the dividing rails, every flower craning its neck and determined to be seen at all costs.

Above and beyond, in the higher parts of this garden (that is largely built in terraces, the hillside is so steep) the flowering trees added joy to life, particularly the laburnums with their swinging yellow chains, and the guelder rose tossing its lovely snowballs in the wind; somehow, I never think of guelder roses without seeing them being flung about in a warm, spring wind or wet with a soft spring shower—perhaps because the spring winds upon our hills are always playing about among the trees and tossing anything that can be tossed, and the guelder balls are most inviting. Their local name, "Tisty-Tosty Balls," is very appropriate.

Presumably, the rose bushes were there—they must have been, as they came into blossom later on; but we forgot all about them in our surprise at seeing the army of columbines, which had all sprung from seedlings that had been left undisturbed.

And we had no complaint to make—Nature had outdone all our plans, as she usually does, if given a fair chance.

The fruit and vegetables were also attractive. The warmth had brought on everything a fortnight ahead of its usual performance. Lines of low, feathery foliage showed where the young carrots were coming on, Already the lettuces made pretty rosettes of pale, delicate green.

Fine, straight spears gave promise of a good onion crop. Onions are always more or less of a gamble with us. An old man once explained the matter to me thus: "It's like this 'ere with hunjuns: sometimes they be and sometimes they b'aint; but thur, you've just got to maken the best of it, anyhows." I am inclined to think that an experienced vegetable grower would not be content with this fatalistic acquiescence in the uncertainty of life, but would have a word or two with the seed or the soil. Unfortunately, I have neither the time, nor the requisite knowledge, to bring the onion family to book; I have to leave them each season to "be or b'aint," as they please. Only when they *do* chance to come up, we are all mightily pleased with ourselves.

The gooseberries were remarkably forward and the bushes were loaded. Town dwellers seldom know what things of beauty gooseberries and currants are when growing in clean air, in situations that suit them. The translucent gold of a ripening yellow gooseberry, with its seeds showing in the centre, is a very far cry from the green, unripe article, dull with knocking about in baskets, that is usually the shopper's only portion.

Currants, again, ought to be seen on the bushes, in the sunshine, when the intense polish on the red variety makes the fruit like gleaming jewels; while the "bloom" seen on the ripe black currant when growing is lost once the fruit has been handled.

I have a large red currant tree, growing against an old, disused out-house. Whether it was planted there originally, or merely seeded itself, I do not know. But to-day it smothers the grey, stone wall, stretching out long arms that barricade the door, and dripping with fruit every July to such an extent that often there are more berries than leaves.

White currants, too, are very beautiful, their long sprays of cream-coloured fruit, semi-opaque, showing up against the dark stems and green leaves—a fruit, by the way, that needs a skilled artist to paint, so subtle and complex are the tones and colours reflected on its glossy skin, and revealed in the half-light below the surface.

And how one's small, feathered pensioners love the berry bushes! Thrushes and blackbirds will dodge round and round and up and down the currant alley to avoid the fruit picker, rather than fly away and lose the chance of a feed. I netted my raspberries one war-year, as everyone pointed out to me my patriotic duty in this respect, despite the fact that I myself never eat fruit and no one in the community had any sugar to jam it! Of course, most of it was wasted, as I couldn't afford to pay the Food Controller to come and fetch it away.

Nevertheless, at least one intelligent thrush managed to circumvent the authorities. Bringing her two, fat, fluffy youngsters, she placed them in a safe, secluded spot *outside* the netting, where they could fly away to cover should trouble threaten. Then she squirmed herself into the enclosure, somehow, and gathered the ripe raspberries, running to and fro and carrying them one by one, to her babies, and feeding them through an opening in the mesh. It was a very pretty sight—and pathetic, too! What won't a little mother risk of danger for the sake of giving her children the best her earth can produce?

This year I was anticipating a plentiful supply of preserving sugar, and meant to make jam for all my relations and friends. I was thinking of this, and how very popular I should be, as I was examining a row of gooseberry bushes near the garden hedge, when I was startled by a sudden rising at my very feet, and a whirr of wings carried off a much-agitated hen-pheasant into the wood.

Do pheasants eat gooseberries? was the first question that rose in my mind. But quickly another idea occurred to me, and I looked about among the tall, waving grass that grew all over the bed among the gooseberry bushes, and there, at the very edge of the path, in a little hollow of the ground that was all there was in the way of a nest, I found six, olive-green eggs, the size of small hens' eggs, with nothing to screen them but the grasses and a clump of horseradish that overshadowed them. I was interested; many little folk chose my garden for their home, but I had never known a pheasant to nest in one of the garden paths before. I looked towards the wood where she had disappeared, when, as if in answer to my thoughts, a voice close to me said—

"Her won't never come back!"

I turned, in surprise, to see, peering over the hedge, Mrs. Jane Price—a widow I do not particularly love, her record being anything but a creditable one, and her ingenuity in annexing other people's goods (including my own)

having exasperated me on several occasions. Indeed, the remarkable way she always manages to keep a well-stocked larder on no visible income, has caused Virginia to wonder whether the late Mr. Price's ancestresses, on his wife's side, ever resided in Zarephath. But I did not want to show ill-will, as the rector had given me very hopeful news of her lately. She had evidently turned over a new leaf, he said. It seemed as though the war had chastened her, as it had chastened so many others. She had even expressed to him her deep regret for her past iniquities, said she owed it to her children to set a good example and had been attending the Mother's Meeting regularly. I had agreed with the rector that it was sad such drastic measures were often necessary to human reconstruction; and we had meditated for a moment on those past periods in Church history that seemed to corroborate our views.

Altogether, I was glad to think that Jane Price was trying to make good, especially in these days, when there seems little to encourage the ordinary person to stick to her duty; and she and I had a little chat, over the hedge, on the ways of pheasants. She was packed with information—which was not altogether surprising since her late husband had devoted his life to research in connection with the subject. Indeed, when he met with his death, in 1912, by slipping over a rocky ledge as he was trying to dodge the gamekeepers, he had two plump specimens in his pockets.

But of course this was not mentioned; her only reference to her husband was when she told me (forgetting that I was neither a tourist nor a new-comer) how he had been shot by a German sniper when trying to rescue a comrade; and what a beautiful letter his officer had written to her about him; and how she was hoping to save up enough to visit his grave at Ypres, but times were hard, and do what she would she couldn't save so much as a sixpence, etc.

For the rest, we compared notes on the precocity of our gooseberries.

"That be a fine show o' yourn; better'n mine," she said politely. "Us'll be seein' of you taking a barrer load to market one o' these days, I'll warrant."

While I—anxious to be equally generous—protested that they were not so fine as those I had seen in her garden when we passed—which was certainly true; she had a splendid crop. And we parted with amicable wishes on both sides when Virginia clanged the tea-bell.

After a third cup of tea we usually begin to grow bright. The drive from the station has blown away every vestige of town cobwebs, and given us a most un-town-like appetite; the sight of the flowers has soothed our jaded spirits; while the tea-table, spread with bacon and eggs, young lettuce, home-made cake, and our own blackberry jelly, has proved an invigoration beyond description.

The war has taught us how very little we really need—and how very much that little really is.

I was feeling universally grateful, as I pressed Virginia to take "just half a cup; there's still plenty in the pot, and it seems a pity to waste it." "Well, if you're quite sure you have it to spare, I think I will; travelling does make one *so* thirsty." And I expressed my thankfulness that at least Nature and Clover had not gone on strike.

"That reminds me," said Ursula; "there isn't any more butter. While you were up the garden, Mrs. Farmer sent word that she's sorry, but she's hurt her hand and can't do any churning for another week or so. You can have as much milk as you like; but this half-pound is all the butter she can spare you at present. Butter's scarce everywhere; still, she thinks you might be able to get some from Mrs. Cransome, who has bought Muskbrook Farm—you know, that pretty little place over the other side of Offa's Dyke, where we found the yellow mimulus growing by the brook. Mrs. Cransome is a newcomer; did landswoman-work on a dairy farm during the war, and is now experimenting on her own. I'll go over there the first thing after breakfast, as Mrs. Farmer says she'll be butter-making early to-morrow morning."

"Isn't that just what I've been arguing for years?" broke in Virginia. "What's the use of a cow having two stomachs—or is it four? I always get mixed with cows and camels. But, however many it is, why should she have more than one interior apartment devoted exclusively to her own meals—dining-room as well as kitchen—in these days of house shortage? Why can't she make one do for her food, and be taught to run round and round and churn her own milk into butter, using her spare apartment for storage? Think of the saving in labour, especially if she were harnessed to some machine, so as to provide the power to work that as well as the churning. Think what a beautiful advertisement-picture for someone's washing-machine it would make in your magazine—a flowery mead in the foreground; a lovely Jersey cow trotting round and round, and supplying not only butter and skimmed milk and cream and even condensed milk, perhaps, by special arrangement with the sugar authorities, but also generating the power to turn the handle

of the washing-machine, with the first boiling of snow-white {}clothes already fluttering on lines against a blue sky in the background."

"I'm sorry to appear damping—especially about clothes," I said, "only I don't see how I could supply a Jersey cow trotting round and round the magazine, in addition to the many other expensive attractions of our advertisement pages. But, in any case, I think we'll trot ourselves round and round the said Mrs. Cransome to-morrow morning, until we've heard what the cow's trade union has to say about her taking on two jobs at once."

"I don't expect gratitude," Virginia replied resignedly. "I long ago realized how much smarter than a toothless child it is to have a thankless servant. Nevertheless, I shall endeavour to do my duty——"

I left her endeavouring, while I answered a knock at the door, Abigail being upstairs. A small boy from the butcher handed me a joint—real English mutton, too!—and said:

"Please, ma'am, the gov'ner's borrowed this 'ere leg for you, as the sheep what you was to have had the shoulder off of ain't being hung yet."

Even when she goes to "invite her soul" in undiluted Nature, the housewife is never able to move out of sight of the larder these days!

There were many oddments needing attention before bedtime that night. It does not sound much when reduced to a catalogue, yet every housemistress knows what a deal of energy can be absorbed in unpacking; getting out towels and table-linen; listening to Abigail's list of the things we ought to have, but haven't, for next morning's breakfast, and such-like occupations. Abigail had her hands more than full getting her kitchen into working trim, and unpacking the box of provisions from the stores.

But at last it seemed possible to go to bed—indeed, I felt ready to fall asleep where I stood. I had put hot-water bottles in the bed as a final precaution, though the weather had been warm and they seemed well aired; and I had even put away Virginia's fur coat and her velour motoring hat while she and her sister were out skirmishing for potatoes, as I had none. Then I decided that everything else that needed attention could wait till to-morrow. I was too tired to do another stroke.

I seemed to have been asleep for hours, though it could only have been minutes, when I was awakened by a shriek from Virginia in the adjoining room. Of course everyone flew to the rescue, and besought her to be calm, collected, and coherent while we looked under the bed. She said the fox wasn't under the bed; he had got *into* the bed, and he had a duck or a

pheasant in his mouth. She was sorry she had disturbed us all, but for the moment, when she put her foot down the bed and the fox got hold of it, and it got mixed up with the duck's feathers, she forgot what was the correct thing to say. . . . Oh, yes, it was still there; *she* couldn't turn it out.

Naturally, I told her it was all nonsense. I had put the hot-water bottle in the bed myself only an hour or so before, and there was neither a fox nor a goose in the room *then*. And I turned back the bedclothes cautiously—I didn't want it to spring on me unawares.

She didn't seem a bit grateful when her velour hat came to view, with its jaunty wings damaged beyond repair. I had no recollection of having placed the hot-water bottle, cosily wrapped in tissue paper, in her hat-box; but I did remember that when I pushed what I thought was the bottle down the bed, it did not go with quite the easy glide one expects.

But though I refilled her hot-water bottle, with abject apologies, there was a slight coolness in the air. She said she thought that, at my age, I might have something better to do than the playing of silly jokes like that upon reasonable and intelligent people.

Having no inclination for sleep at the moment, I leant out of the window hoping to hear the nightingales who nest in the adjoining woods. But the night was perhaps too cool for them, or their concert hadn't started. Beyond one experimental cadenza of "Tweet, tweet, twe-e-t," followed by a characteristic trill, they were silent. An owl flew past the window, so close that it almost brushed my face, with a straight but heavy motion, unmistakably its own. It alighted in the fir tree that towers high inside the orchard gate; not that a fir tree is supposed to be part of the orthodox furnishing of an orchard, but our orchards have always flouted the conventions, and done as it best pleased them. And in spite of all that intelligent fruit-growers say when they see that tree with blue-green sheen on the surface of its branches, it still stands, and the owl is much addicted to it. I conclude it is the same owl who perches there with the utmost regularity, since many birds appropriate unto themselves a particular pitch, and warn off all interlopers as zealously as a London crossing-sweeper.

I waited; and though I could not see my little friend in the deep shadows of the thick branches, I knew he would soon call out, not to me, alas!—he has never learnt to give me a personal greeting as the robin does—but unto some of his kind, enemy, rival, lady-love, or a mere relation. One seldom knows who it is that is answering him, but the answer invariably comes from near-by coppice, or distant woods across the river.

There is something so far removed from all our petty struggles and worryings in the call of these birds. They seem so utterly indifferent to the rest of creation, waking or sleeping; the world, for the time being, belongs entirely to them. An owl has but to speak a word, and behold! it travels for miles in the all-pervading stillness, that is broken only by the song of the streams; it seems as though the whole earth were listening for what it chooses to say next. And miles away, it may be, the question asked is answered, or the challenge is accepted; and, farther still, another takes up the subject. And so the talk goes on, often covering distances that would do credit to the conversation of giants. The owl has constituted himself Nature's night-watchman; and he alone of all the night-wanderers of our woods speaks from hill to hill, at all times and seasons, no one venturing to interrupt him.

I can quite understand that his hoot seems a tame affair to those who are used to the mysteries of tropical nights in pathless forests; but I do not covet the lion's roar, despite its grandeur. My fluffy brown bird speaks of peace and safety, as well as a certain soul-satisfying solitude; I doubt if the lion mentions either.

Once more I turned in, and fell asleep as quickly as before.

And also—— Once again I was awakened by an alien sound; but not a shriek this time. I could not say what it was, but I was sure something had disturbed me, because it wasn't an easy, natural, graceful wake-up on my part; it was a start. Yet I could hear nothing more.

It was daylight now—a quarter-to-five my clock said. I lay and listened intently, and then I heard subdued sounds in the garden—merely a slight crackle occasionally, as though something had trodden upon a twig or a dry leaf.

"That wretched fox again!" I murmured, and resolved to take no notice.

But soon, through the open window, I fancied I heard the sibilant sound of a human voice, speaking in low whispers. Instantly I was out of bed and studying the landscape.

And there, standing in the garden, was Jane the Converted, with one of her daughters, and, each with a large basket, was gathering my precious gooseberries as fast as possible.

"Mrs. Price! What business have you here?" I called out indignantly. "And what right have you to be picking my fruit?"

For one moment, and only one, the woman seemed taken to, at being caught. But I fancy Jane Price is one of those flowers that are born to blush unseen, for she never by any chance blushes in public. Looking at me with the air of an injured but long-suffering saint, she picked up her basket, and said in aggrieved tones—

"Well! An' I did think as how if I come up *here* I should have a *Christian* to deal with! But seems I haven't. So us had better go."

And go they did—my gooseberries going with them. Obviously, I couldn't chase after them at the moment.

Ursula, who had put her head out of another window, merely remarked to me, over the intervening rambler rose, "What I *adore* in the country is the child-like simplicity of the people and the calm majesty of the unbroken nights."

It took us a long while next morning to talk over what we might have said to Mrs. Price had we but thought of it at the time (only, unfortunately, we didn't!); also to examine the devastated bushes, and to outline to one another our exact estimate of the Reformed Character; and it was past eleven before we remembered Mrs. Cransome.

Abigail had already gone into Chepstow to outfit us with sundry necessities. Muskbrook Farm was a mile and a half in the opposite direction. Virginia surprised us by offering to cook the dinner while Ursula and I went butter-hunting. I said the borrowed leg could well wait until Abigail returned, and be cooked for our evening meal, and perhaps by then I should know whether, being only borrowed, it would have to be returned. Virginia said if there was the slightest uncertainty on that point she should cook it at once, and we had better get it eaten before it could be re-claimed. And if anyone asked after it while we were out, she should merely send cards returning thanks for kind inquiries.

We found Mrs. Cransome, in business-like apparel, planting scarlet-runners. One great boon the Landswoman Movement conferred upon the agricultural world was the introduction of suitable wear for women engaged in outdoor work; and though Mrs. Cransome had modified the uniform to some extent, her trim appearance was quite refreshing after the draggled

skirts and slovenly blouses that are all too often the garb of the country woman when working on the land.

She said she could let us have some butter. Would we kindly come up to the house and sit down a minute? What lovely weather we were having for the time of year, weren't we? Still, the country wanted rain, and if it didn't come soon, it would be a bad look-out for the crops. The farm was doing pretty well considering how it had been neglected; but the stoats! and the rabbits! Yes, the onions were very forward this year.

And with more conversation on these local lines, we walked up the steep garden to the front door.

The place was much improved since last I had seen it, and bore evidence to the fact that it was now occupied by an intelligent, educated woman who brought method, as well as knowledge, to bear on her work.

She showed us into the sitting-room, thinking it was unoccupied. But some one was looking over the bookshelves, apparently in search of an interesting volume—a woman over thirty, very casual as to hairdressing, and wearing a Japanese pink silk gown, embroidered with wistaria, which, in its first youth, must have been lovely. Now, however, it was a truly pathetic object—shabby and derelict; and it seemed oddly out of keeping with the pretty chintzy sitting-room and the well-equipped landswoman beside us.

"Oh, I didn't know you were down, Susannah!" said Mrs. Cransome, with a slight touch of annoyance, I thought. "These ladies are wanting some butter." She didn't know our names. Then to us she said briefly, "My cousin."

I couldn't see the cousin's features very clearly, as she had her back to the window, whereas the light fell full on us. But I was about to give the pink gown a bow befitting its former glories when, to our amazement, the wearer stepped forward with outstretched arms and exclaimed—

"Of all the wonderful things in this dull old world, if it isn't *you*!"

It certainly was, and I could not deny it!

But I didn't recognize the speaker, though she fell upon me and embraced me heartily, while I wondered which of us was the lunatic. I evidently looked a blank, for she continued—

"You surely must remember me? You can't have forgotten Bella?"

That settled it in my mind—as to which of us was out of poise, I mean; for I remembered that Mrs. Cransome had called her Susannah.

I determined to do my best to make polite and soothing conversation till I got hold of the butter (I wanted the butter badly), and then we would effect our escape.

Bella Explains Her Mission

The lady in the pink wreck did not intend to remain unclaimed however; and as I showed no gleam of recognition, she hurried on with biographical data—

"I'm Miss Snoggs, you know; you surely can't have forgotten me?"—a slight pause to see if I looked intelligent—"I'm Bella Bellairs; you must remember me? *You* know—the student who wasn't the King Edward."

Both Ursula and Mrs. Cransome grew wider-eyed and more open-mouthed as the cousin proceeded to attach this crazy-sounding collection of labels to herself. But suddenly it all became intelligible to me.

My mind went back to the days when I was a student at one of the biggest music colleges in London, and among the crowd that chanced to be in my vicinity—*i.e.* studied under the same professors on the same days—was one, Susannah Snoggs. She wasn't brilliant; she wasn't witty; she wasn't more remarkable than hundreds of others attending the same college at the same time; she did not even hold a diploma or a degree; she was merely—Susannah Snoggs.

But Susannah did not care for her own name; neither did the other students, if it comes to that, only they didn't worry about it as the owner did, because they cared for Susannah even less than they did for her name! Eventually she announced that she should call herself "Bella Bellairs" for professional purposes; she considered it a more euphonious name for a coming *prima donna*. She also besought us to call her Bella, and we did so, though unromantic college clerks still continued to make out the receipts for her fees to Miss Susannah Snoggs.

It was so exactly like the old-time Bella to be certain that no one could ever forget her once they had set eyes on her—she was so convinced that she left a marked impression on all whom she met.

Perhaps she did. At any rate, I instantly recalled quite a number of items connected with her career at the college.

I remembered the irritated ferment she kept us all in when she proposed to compete for a very valuable scholarship, offered by the College Council,

called “The King Edward Scholarship,” the winner of the first prize always being referred to as “The King Edward.”

It was a scholarship that provided three years’ study in any European country for the competitor who came first on the list; also it gave four short-term scholarships to those who came nearest the top of the list. Hence it was exceedingly popular. And most of the competitors modestly announced, “Of course, I don’t expect to get the Three Years; but, at least, I may have a chance of getting one of the smaller scholarships.”

But not so Bella! I remembered the airs and graces she put on, being absolutely certain she would head the poll. “Because I have such marked and striking personality as well as undoubted genius,” she explained, leaving the rest of us wilting under a depressing sense of our lack of both. For six months before the scholarship examination her conversation invariably began with, “When I’m ‘The King Edward’ I shall do so-and-so”—whatever it might be. Though we were all of us most loyal and devoted subjects of His Majesty (the word Bolshevism hadn’t been invented in those happy days), we got rather weary of the sound of his name as continually voiced by Bella.

Time ends most of our troubles, however, if we only wait long enough, and in this case our woes terminated as soon as the list of scholarship winners was stuck up on the notice board in the college hall—for Bella’s name was not even among those who “also ran”! No one but Bella had ever imagined it would be. She was one of those students (to be found in every large college) who aim to do everything, and are quite sure they do everything brilliantly. Their belief in their own endowments is amazing. They try their hand at each fresh type of work they see being done successfully by some one else. It is not necessarily freak-fads that students of this class run after; rather, they are hypnotized by success, and the moment they hear of fame being achieved by another in any branch of art, they must immediately embark on that branch themselves—which usually means throwing on the scrap-heap all they have been striving after, and what they may have accomplished in the past.

For instance: a marvellous ’cellist appeared from nowhere and played upon the emotions of thousands of people with his magic bow. Promptly Bella announced that she was going to study the ’cello next term, as she felt it had the power to convey to others the subtle nuances of her artistic soul that were clamouring for expression. And a junior professor was doomed to listen to her agonizing scrapings for at least thirteen weeks. Fortunately her enthusiasms didn’t often survive one term.

Meanwhile, at a students' concert, she had heard applause showered on a loose-haired, spectacled youth, who had played Bach's big G minor Fugue on the organ, skipping about the pedals with the ease and lightness of a Russian dancer. Whereupon she decided that the organ alone could do full justice to the surge of her temperament and the great impulses which were carrying her—whither? she knew not where. Neither did any one else! But at any rate they never carried her farther than a few melancholy pedal exercises.

Then there was the time when a group of us went to hear a world-famous pianist, and assisted in nearly bringing the roof down after a performance of Schumann's Pianoforte Concerto. Forthwith nothing would satisfy Bella but to study the Schumann Concerto herself—though she could not play a Mozart Sonata properly. And for another weary period we were favoured with this at her pianoforte lessons, her rendering of the opening chords always suggesting some one tumbling down the kitchen stairs with the tea tray!

But perhaps the most vivid picture that came back to me was the first and only occasion on which she appeared at a students' concert—this time as a vocalist. Now I must explain, though not in an unkind spirit, that Bella had one very glaring facial defect, viz. unusually prominent teeth, which no amount of closed lips could hide. Imagine, then, the suppressed hilarity of a crowd of light-hearted students when the programme announced that "Miss Bella Bellairs" would sing a setting of Shelley's poem, "I fear thy kisses!"

The terrific applause she received nearly turned her head, poor dear. Little did she know that the audience simply had to clap, or it would have exploded.

No; one certainly could not forget Bella, even though she had escaped my memory for a few years. And I was wondering why it was I had not recognized her at the outset, and what could have altered her so much in so short a time, when I suddenly realized it was the dentist who had worked the transformation—Bella's profile was now pleasingly normal.

I had never seen her since the term when she failed to win the scholarship. She had promptly decided, on seeing the List of Successful Candidates, that the plastic arts were the more responsive as a medium for the expression of her ego; and, in any case, she had no intention of remaining at a college so hidebound in commercialism that it could not recognize genius when it came knocking at its very door.

With that, she went out into the abyss beyond the college gates—the dark world that knows nothing of the thrills that punctuate the music-student's life, but merely swallows up hosts of promising musicians, who are simply palpitating with genius that no one seems able to detect but themselves and their dearest friends. Sometimes you hear of a student again after he or she has left the college; more often you do not. Sometimes you trouble to hunt them up; more often you do not.

In the case of Bella, no one ever gave her a second thought; and the reason was not far to seek. She had a failing that is detested among the student fraternity—*she was mean*, and mean with an ingrained meanness that was always coming to the surface. She was mean over money, she was mean over friends. She would borrow any one's music rather than buy her own. She would attach herself, uninvited, to a group of students going out to lunch, and would then find she had left her purse behind—and never remember to repay the debt. She would join a man student, if he happened to be leaving at the same time as herself, explaining how awkward her 'cello was, and would he mind helping her carry it to the bus? It made no difference if he chanced to be escorting another girl; she would stick to them like a limpet, boarding the same bus with them, engaging the man in rapt conversation, and ignoring the bus conductor till the young man felt compelled to pay her fare, while she purred, "Oh, I really can't let you! I wish you wouldn't insist!"

If you have never met a girl of this type, you can scarcely imagine what an all-round nuisance she becomes.

In my time students were not supposed to attach any importance to mere money; if they had much (and some had) they kept it in the background. "Art for art's sake" was our watchword. To be a poor struggling genius seemed a positive virtue.

Meanness was a different thing, however. An open-handed, large-hearted generosity was supposed to go hand-in-hand with art; but it was not to be a one-sided sponging on others. Hence the men got to hate the way she used their purses and laid herself out to get others to pay her expenses; the girls waxed furious over the way she sought to annex their men friends. She was never popular, and when she dropped out, I, in common with all the others, never devoted anything more than a sigh of relief to her memory. Imagine, then, my surprise at hearing myself introduced to Mrs. Cransome as her life-long, dearest friend, and her inseparable chum at college.

Of course we said, “Who would have thought it?” when at last we managed to disentangle ourselves. Mrs. Cransome, who had not been very intimate with her cousin in her student days, seemed much relieved when she heard the explanation of the various names with which Bella had ticketed herself, having only known her as the authentic Susannah Snoggs. Ursula, also, consented to take a seat and lean back restfully when she found we were not in a sanatorium for the mentally afflicted.

We plunged headlong into reminiscences, but soon found that one short morning would be useless for so extensive a subject; besides, it was nearing mid-day, and we had our various meals to consider. So Miss Snoggs agreed to spend the following afternoon with us. I gave her my address, Rosemary Cottage, and directed her how to reach me. I remembered afterwards that I had omitted to tell her I had changed my name since our college days; but that was immaterial, the old name would serve her purpose equally well, if she chanced to lose herself and had to inquire the way.

Virginia was anxiously impatient when we reached home. We were late, she said, and the dinner was getting frightfully thick.

“But how can a roast leg of mutton get thick?” I inquired.

She hadn’t cooked the whole leg after all, she explained; had merely sawn off a piece at the bottom—mostly bone. It was quite all right; she had been reading it up in one of the old cookery books on my bookshelves. Very fascinating subject cookery was! Only none of the books were nearly adequate. She had decided to write one herself to meet post-war requirements. But with all their faults the books were unanimous in saying that there was a tremendous amount of nourishment in a bone that was usually thrown down the sink; and she wasn’t going to roast the whole leg, and then have all the nourishment dispersed in so extravagant and wasteful a manner, after the brain power and time she had expended in cooking it; and would we please hurry up?

The dinner proved to be the type of hash that needs to be served with a *Who’s Who*, so impossible was it to gauge the social standing of any of the ingredients. There may have been nourishment in the bone; but, if so, it had remained there, for there was no trace of it in the dinner. Still, a good appetite overlooks fine distinctions, and the concoction wasn’t so bad after we had added the forgotten salt, and taken out a wandering nutmeg that we first mistook for a pickled walnut. (The recipe said, “Add a little nutmeg,”

Virginia explained, and she therefore put in a little one. What more did the author expect?)

A gooseberry-tart completed the menu.

"I thought we might as well consume our own gooseberries, as give others the trouble of carrying them away; so I used up the remainder of the butter, as you would be bringing more. How much did you get?"

I looked at Ursula, and Ursula looked at me. We had forgotten all about the butter in the excitement of falling into Bella's arms! We told Virginia all about her. Ursula said the meeting reminded her of an old story she had read about the late "John Strange Winter." That writer had just published her best-known book, *Bootle's Baby*, when she chanced to find herself, at a big At Home, next to the late Sir Morel Mackenzie. After a little desultory conversation, the authoress said—

"I don't think you know who I am?"

The famous doctor said he was sorry to have to own that he did not.

"I'm John Strange Winter, the wife of Arthur Stannard," the lady said. And seeing him still look mystified, she added, "*Bootle's Baby*, you know."

Sir Morel bowed his acknowledgement of the information, and shortly afterwards sought out his hostess.

"I'm afraid some one has got in here who is slightly unbalanced," he whispered, indicating the authoress. "First she told me she was a man, next she said she was somebody's wife, and then she said she was some one's baby."

Bella's conversation sounded equally lucid, Ursula said.

When we had finished our chronicle of current events, Virginia announced that she would fetch the butter herself, after dinner. She felt so drawn to that pink silk gown with the draggled wistaria, she really must go and glimpse it. Did I think the lady would prolong it as a tea-gown later in the day?

Remembering Bella's idiosyncrasies, I suggested that we should wait patiently at home. I was certain her bump of curiosity would see to it that she came over to call as soon as possible. And the butter would provide an immediate excuse. She might arrive any minute.

We rushed the washing up, got into our freshest summer garments, and then sat under the big fir tree inside the orchard gate, hoping we made an

affecting ensemble.

Virginia had equipped herself with the latest number of a French fashion journal. She said she derived untold comfort nowadays from truly high-class fashion pictures; because it was evident that though her own apparel and appearance were painful, they were nothing to what they might be.

Ursula had settled herself with her work-basket and a collection of rags —"all that the London laundry sent home last week of what was once our chaste personal wardrobe," she explained.

Meanwhile I was trying to read about the Labour demands, or, at any rate, about as many of them as it was possible for one human being to keep track of during her only lifetime.

And it was at this critical juncture that Miss Susannah Snoggs came tripping down the path from the top gate.

She was kindly appreciative from the very outset—pronounced the cottage absolutely charming; had no idea it was so large; how many bedrooms were there? And wouldn't we call her Bella, as it would make her feel thoroughly at home? And, yes, thank you, she would love to see the inside of the house.

It was inevitable that our talk reverted to the old student days, and naturally one of my earliest questions was whether she had continued her music study.

Oh, no! (with a sigh and shake of the head) she had given all that up long ago. It had seemed a pity, certainly. Every one who heard her sing—after she had left the college and gone to a really *good* singing professor, of course—had said she would be a second Melba, and had urged her to continue. But alas! she had been obliged to relinquish all idea of becoming a prima donna; couldn't *possibly* give the necessary time to it, so many other, and more urgent, matters demanded her attention; absolutely no chance to follow up one's artistic cravings; life wasn't nearly long enough for all that claimed one's time.

We felt, dimly, that we were in the presence of Much-sought-after-Greatness, and breathed softly and respectfully in consequence.

Virginia looked a nudge at me, and I realized that, being the hostess, I was supposed to say something suitable just here; therefore I inquired deferentially as to Bella's present specialization.

"I'm the Honorary District Organizing Secretary for the Executive of the F.E.W.V.," she replied, with an air of surprise that it should be necessary to repeat so well-known a fact. (Thus and thus might the Prime Minister have looked had some old friend turned up and inquired as to his prospects in life!)

What I said was—

"Oh, indeed!"

What I thought was—

"Am I never, NEVER! NEVER!! to find a spot on earth where I can escape the alphabetical female with organizing propensities?"

Ursula saved me from having to expose my own ignorance by remarking —

"Let me see—that's the 'Fund for Enlarging Woollen Vests,' isn't it? A most useful society, I consider. A branch ought to be affiliated (that's the right word, isn't it?) to (or should it be 'with'?) every laundry in the kingdom. Just look at *this* garment."

But Bella was explaining, with dignity, that it was the "Federation of Enlightened Women Voters" that she organized secretarially. Whereupon we said "Oh!" politely, and listened for twenty minutes to a mild assortment of half-baked information that was not much of an advertisement for the enlightenment of the rest of the Federation. Anyhow, it appeared that Bella's life was now one intense longing to enlighten her fellow-sisters on the subject of their votes. Hence her official appointment.

"The apathy among women is absolutely *appalling*," she told us impressively. "Here we have the greatest victory our sex has ever known—a victory which places in our hands the weapon that ensures complete emancipation from the tyranny of man! Yet what do the majority of women do with it?"

"Use it as a hat-pin, of course," responded Virginia. "What else would you expect? But why worry about it? You'll never cure them of the habit. A normal woman is seldom happier than when she has succeeded in putting an article to some other use than that for which nature and the manufacturer intended it. I'm engaged myself at present in trying to turn some book-covers into hand-bags; and I'm sure our grand piano could be made into a nice little chicken-run if its legs were wired round."

But Bella was not to be side-tracked by flippancies. Feeling, probably, a lack of sympathetic responsiveness in Virginia and Ursula, she turned to me.

"Look at yourself, for instance," she continued (but having neither a mirror handy nor a flexible india-rubber neck, I was unfortunately unable to oblige her). "Did you give much serious thought to the weight of your own vote at the last election, and the responsibility it entailed? I doubt it! Tell me, really, how did you approach the poll?"

"I didn't approach it," I replied, feeling like a small child being catechized by a school-mistress.

"You did not? Do you mean that——"

"I mean that I did not vote at all," I informed her.

Bella's eyes grew round with amazement. Then, anxious to give me a loophole for escape, she said—

"I suppose you were ill, or away. But could you not *possibly* have got there somehow? To think of a woman missing—er—— Of course you were entitled to a vote?"

"Oh, yes; and I was quite well, and in town; but all the same, I did not vote!"

"Well, I think this is the most extraordinary case that has come to my notice! I must make a memo of it."

And Bella began to get out a pencil and note-book. But I protested against being thus "memo-ed" to serve as a "solemn warning" at future F.E.W.V. meetings!

"I shall not mention your name, of course," she said. "I shall merely say that I came upon a woman of apparently average intelligence" (evidently Bella wasn't going to give me more than my due!) "who did not feel sufficient interest in the affairs of the land to take the trouble to walk to the near-by polling station and record her vote when the ballot-box was waiting for her——"

"Keep to facts," I warned her. "I didn't say any of that, you know. Neither was that my reason for not voting."

"What *was* your reason then? It must have amounted to that in the end."

"Not quite! I did not vote because our candidate was returned unopposed."

"Oh! Ah! I see." A moment's pause while she digested the situation. "Still"—turning the subject hurriedly—"surely, *surely* you believe in your own sex, and take an interest in their uplifting?" she inquired in tones vibrating with professional emotion.

Now experience has taught me that when a woman asks me that question (and it is one of the stock-in-trade questions of a certain type of feminine revolutionary) she is not so much concerned with the uplifting of her own sex as she is keen on the down-dropping of the other sex. And Bella proved no exception to the rule. Like all high-grade propagandists, however, she did not require any answers to the problems she propounded, but went on glibly with the recital of her creed, which consisted mainly in the denunciation of the masculine gender, and a profound pity for all women who were doomed to own male relatives.

"Think of the women of this village!" she continued. "How my heart aches for them! Think of the centuries of masculine domination that has reduced them to what they are. Think of the suppression of their lives, their stunted outlook and their ineffective labours——"

But here I had to remonstrate.

"Bella," I interrupted, "let me advise you to wait till you really know something of the women of this village before you talk about stunted outlook and ineffective labour. The majority of them could give you and me points on most things connected with the essentials of life; and, in addition, quite a number of them are up-to-date in their reading, and as well, or better, informed on the topics of the day than many an educated woman in town."

But Bella had stuffed her head with all the sex inequalities that her "Federation" could lay hands on, and was not to be thwarted. It was not *her* fault if our village did not work out on the approved lines as laid down by her Executive; she knew what it ought to be like. And also she knew what ought to be said in order to induce the correct state of enlightenment in her hearers as prescribed by the Federation. Therefore she went steadily on—

"Think how your own personality would have been dwarfed had *you* been tied to a man who regarded you merely as a chattel, a nonentity, a ——"

"Well, we need not bother about that," I interrupted her, "as I have not married a man of that kind."

"Of course, I didn't mean it literally," she replied. "I know you're not a marrying type—never were. I was merely generalizing. But *supposing*——"

At this moment Ursula, who had brought in tea, dropped the sugar-tongs with a deal of rattle, and Virginia interrupted the lady's eloquence to inquire how it was that Miss Snoggs could spare the time, in the very height of the London season, to be buried in such an out-of-the-way spot as our village; wasn't she badly needed in town?

Bella explained that she had come, in the first instance, on a brief visit to her cousin, suffering from over-work and being in need of rest and quiet; but on finding how dense was the local ignorance regarding the importance of the feminine vote, she had decided to waive all other claims on her time for the present, and remain, with a view to enlightening the village.

"And Mrs. Cransome—does she belong to the Federation?"

"My cousin, I am sorry to say, has become exceedingly narrow in her views since her marriage. Like most married women, her outlook is hopelessly limited, her——"

"Oh, don't say that," said Ursula. "I'm more than thankful that her outlook was in the direction of a cow yesterday and the day before, otherwise we should have been eating dry bread now."

"Would you like to go round the garden?" I inquired, more with a desire to change the topic of conversation than with any idea that Bella would care for this form of dissipation. I had already observed the glance of utter indifference that she cast over the borders.

Like a mother who is sensitive about the attitude of a visitor towards her only child, I invariably make a subconscious note concerning the appreciation—or lack of it—shown by the stranger when setting foot for the first time in my garden, more especially as it does not conform in any way to orthodox notions of what a garden should be.

And, as a rule, one can tell instantly whether it is better to exhibit to one's guest the new rose tree, bearing only one bud, that cost some fancy price because it was a prize seedling at the rose show; or, instead, to take them round by the back door where the wall is packed with ferns and trailing rock plants. Some people are most interested in the size of the bill one paid for bulbs; others feel a sudden catch in the throat when they see the expanse of rosy-pink vetch that has planted itself on the top of a rough bank of stones, clothing them with the most joyous colour imaginable. Some people are intensely interested to learn that a certain clematis bloom measures

exactly the same size across as a large bread-and-butter plate, to them it is such conclusive evidence of its worth; others gaze spellbound at the Quaking Grass timidly shaking out its tremulous brown blossom, with touches of primrose and heliotrope in the stamens.

It's all according!

In the case of Bella, no one would have had a moment's uncertainty about her feelings on the subject of the flowers.

"Queer things, aren't they?" she said carelessly, indicating the columbines. "What do you call them? For my own part"—continuing, without waiting to hear their name—"I think there's nothing like a rose." I seemed to fancy I had heard this remark before.

"You had better come and see the garden in a few weeks' time," I said; "the roses will be out then, and I am inviting a few friends to come and have a look at them the first week in June. I must send you an invitation."

Bella was instantly enchanted. Was it to be a garden-party? What sort of dress? Was I expecting many guests? etc. The flowers were utterly ignored.

I assured her it would not be anything at all like a garden-party, but was merely a gathering of a few of my friends in the neighbourhood; and would she please wear just whatever she preferred, as it was quite an informal affair. (Virginia said afterwards I was absolutely holding out the right hand of fellowship to the pink silk rag.)

Bella promised to come, and went off evidently more than pleased with the prospect of a little social diversion, if not particularly impressed with us as individuals!

"Do let me get out in the fresh air," exclaimed Virginia, as soon as the visitor had departed. "I feel as though I had been breathing the stale air of mean streets. When one knows how important the woman's vote really is, and how much it can accomplish, it makes me furious to hear the whole matter being dragged down to the sordid level of the anti-masculine. Why, that misguided soul needs more enlightenment herself than most women I know! How she could ever have been elected torchbearer passes my comprehension."

We heartily agreed with her.

"I should fancy she is out to do good work," said Ursula, "but has got a bit mixed in the doing. Evidently she isn't depending on it for a living, as she's 'honorary.' What a joy she must be to Mrs. Cransome! Such a sedative to live with!"

"I would like to hear her enlightening the women of this district," I remarked, as we were walking under the grove of larches up to the top gate, "just to see her methods!"

"Hush!" Virginia warned me, "or Fate may take you at your word and put you in the chair at one of her meetings!"

"Never! At least I am master of my fate and captain of my soul to *that* extent!"

Abigail appearing round the corner, laden with parcels and packages, we forgot the unwelcome guest in listening to the budget of local news and gossip she had accumulated on her travels.

Then we resumed our stroll. It was really our first walk since we arrived, apart from our visit to Mrs. Cransome. And there is such a joy, on returning to familiar haunts, in looking up old friends in the way of pet plants, special ferns in special crannies, clumps of uncommon wild flowers which, we flatter ourselves, are not known to the general public, though we seek them out with nervous anxiety each time, lest the touring marauder has found our treasures and despoiled the land.

Our lanes in May are dappled with blue and white against a green background. Localities vary in this respect; in some districts yellow is the glowing note of May; in others pink and white seem the month's favourite colours. We, also, have yellow and pink and carmine; but blue and white are the prevailing tones, and there is usually one week when they predominate in the fields and woods, as well as the lanes and hedgerows.

The primroses and windflowers were over before we arrived, but the stitchwort was climbing and showing its stars, all over the hedges, helping itself up, feeble-stemmed though it be, by leaning for support wherever there was anything to lean on. And I always think our hedgerows are wonderful examples of "give and take." So few of the plants have much individual strength; true, the foxglove sends up a sturdy independent stem, but in spring-time especially, our hedgerows are largely composed of frail stalks helped up by climbing leaves or tendrils. Only in a few cases do the plants seek to monopolize the whole earth, and oust their fellows, as does the

bindweed. The majority seem to lend a helping stalk wherever available for another to lean against, in a comradeship of live and let live.

Among the taller grasses growing against the hawthorn in the background—or the grey stone walls—were numberless bluebells; big clumps of alkanet were showing intensely blue flowers; ground ivy, bugle, and big blue violets were nearer the edge of the path, with cushions of wood sorrel, and crowded spikes of the wild garlic—a flower so utterly exquisite that one feels it ought to have been a sweet-scented bridal flower instead of the malodorous outcast that it is.

And in order that no space should be left uncarpeted, the blue-eyed speedwell and the small white daisies played about under one's very feet.

The woods around us took on a new gaiety, with the wayfaring trees in bloom, the crab-apples, and the hawthorns.

Even in the larch-woods, great drifts of speedwell brought a sense of smiling young life wherever the sun had found a way through the enveloping mistiness made by the network of under-branches.

The glory of the flowers, the multitude of tints and tones in the young leaves, and the sounds of joyous and abundant life on every side, whether we listened to the birds or to the singing of the brooks, made existence seem as nearly perfect as we shall find it this side of the Land that has no need of the sun. Despite the thousands of birds that were singing in woods and hedges and upland fields, and in the trees that were surging and swaying unceasingly in the wind of the heights, there was an indescribable peace over all. We had reached the realm of wide spaces; every foot we climbed took us farther from the grinding of the wheels that coin gold and at the same time crush the spirit out of man.

"There is not a discordant note anywhere," said Ursula at last, as we turned from looking over range beyond range of the purple Welsh mountains.

"I'm not sure that I have enough Christian charity just at this moment to agree with that," replied Virginia, unexpectedly waving her sunshade at a footpath running across a near-by field. We looked, and there, all smiles, and evidently very pleased with herself to think she had run us to earth, we beheld Bella hurrying breathlessly towards us.

Enlightening the Village

When Bella had collected sufficient breath to speak, she apologized for having chased us up-hill in so summary a fashion, especially after having taken up most of our afternoon; but such a splendid idea had occurred to her, and she was obliged to turn round and come right back to discuss it with me.

I knew it! I had felt that splendid idea hovering in the air ever since she left. So nervous was I lest I should communicate the idea, telepathically, to Bella in the distance, that I would not even voice my fears to Virginia and Ursula. Hence I was quite prepared for it when Bella sketched out the delightful possibilities my garden-party would afford for the furtherance of the noble work of the F.E.W.V. And might she give an address in the course of the afternoon, explaining the aims of the Federation, and emphasizing the need for such work among women at the present time?

Very emphatically I said, "No!"

But Bella evidently did not hear me; she went on talking glibly of the good I should be perpetrating, and the untold advantage it would be to our neighbourhood, were she permitted to shed some of her own Enlightenment upon it—"uplifting our fellow-women," as she termed it. To hear her, you might have thought our village was a mud-hut affair in the African hinterland, and that the people who lived therein could neither read nor reason, nor play the gramophone.

I still said, "No!"

And Bella still went on talking.

Finding that we were getting back to the self-same subject-headings that she had dealt with earlier in the day, and being heartily weary of them, Virginia and Ursula meanly dropped behind, and made their way back to the house by another route, leaving me in the very clutches of the enemy and minus all moral support.

And still Bella went on talking.

She asked me (among a hundred other questions) why I could possibly object to her speaking briefly on the subject so near her heart?

I did not like to say that, for one thing, I was sure she could not speak briefly on any subject. But I did explain that I thought it unfair to one's

guests to invite them to a social gathering, and then expect them to give to a collection, or pay a subscription to some organization, when they had not come prepared for any such form of hilarious dissipation.

Bella was voluble in her assurance that she would not ask for subscriptions; and as for a collection——! she was positively hurt I should imagine for an instant that money was the object of her campaign! Surely it was possible to work disinterestedly for the good of one's fellow-women without being always on a money-making, cash-collecting enterprise? Surely——, etc.

At last, in sheer desperation, I was weak-minded enough to say that she might speak for fifteen minutes if she would keep clear of all anti-masculine tirades.

"There is plenty to be said that needs to be said on the subject of wise voting; tell women how to make their votes really effective, and you will be doing useful work. But the stirring up of sex antagonism is nothing but a waste of time," I told her.

Bella agreed to keep clear of the whole subject of the masculine gender; nothing would please her better, in fact. For her part, she only lived in the hope of seeing the day when men would be ousted from their present position of domineering over-lords and sink into mere nonentities, with women filling the highest positions in politics, as well as in the professions and commercial life. *Then* the world would be properly managed.

Eventually I got rid of her.

When I reached home I felt irritated with the entire universe. Not only had our walk been spoiled, but the whole atmosphere of the place seemed to be changed; the peaceful aloofness from the turmoil of town and its petty jargons and jealousies, had been broken into; the very elements I was seeking to avoid had descended upon me wholesale, in the person of Bella.

Not the least of my annoyances was the knowledge that I had done an exceedingly foolish thing in giving way to her pertinacity, and in allowing myself to be influenced by her persistent plea for the "uplifting of our fellow-women," when I knew quite well that my fellow-women had no need of any such uplifting, and that Bella was merely using the phrase as a parrot-like repetition. There is always something especially aggravating about a mishap for which no-one can be blamed but one's self!

The two girls begged me not to worry, however; they said we should not see much more of her now she had extracted this concession from me; and, in any case, they would keep an eye on her at the party, and see that she didn't do much mischief.

I asked how they could possibly do that. Who could guarantee *what* a woman like Bella would, or would not do?

But they did not take it very seriously, and in the end I hoped for the best, and even felt I had been uncharitable in imagining that she was merely trying to secure members for her Federation. After all, she was an honorary worker. Probably she was sincerely anxious to help on the millennium of the feminist!

For the next few days we saw nothing of Bella. We concluded she was composing her speech; but we had no time to pause and mourn her absence, as the Head of Affairs had written to say he was coming down for the week-end, and would I please *not* send a car to any station to meet him, as he preferred to feel himself a bird of freedom soaring, and would catch the earliest train he could manage on Friday. Which, being interpreted, meant (I knew from past experience) that he was going to try yet another new route, in the hope of saving ten minutes on the journey.

And equally I knew, from past experience, that he would land at some mysterious out-of-the-way little junction, in the Midlands, or in North Wales, or maybe in Rutlandshire, only to find himself lacking the connection he had hoped to make, the rails having been taken up in war-time for use in France, and the return train, that might at least assist him to retrace his steps, not being due to leave for an hour or so. Having waited there till he had exhausted all the quotations from the poets that he could remember, and having said sufficient about the people who compile post-war time-tables to cover an acre of tombstones, he would ultimately be taken back—not to his starting-point; nothing so straightforward as that—but to one of the various semicolons that had occurred on the journey down, where——

Well, I need not go over the whole process in detail; it is perhaps better for me, at least, to maintain a dignified silence about the rest of the journey! Suffice it that about sundown, or later, a motor-car would arrive from some small unfamiliar town, bringing a hungry passenger who had been found stranded at the station, in company with a paper bag that æons before had contained a couple of Paddington's prehistoric sandwiches.

And we would live happy ever afterwards.

I wonder what it is in town air that makes it nearly impossible for a city man to wait five minutes, calmly and dispassionately, on a railway platform until the right train comes along? I can only conclude that the general hideousness of most town stations gets on the nerves of the traveller to such an extent that he will jump into the next train, no matter where it may be going (if his wife does not happen to be there as a restraining influence), rather than remain another moment on the platform.

Still, all men seem alike in this particular; probably that is why they invented air-ships.

When any one is expected in the country it is, of course, necessary to make preparations. If it were not necessary we should make them all the same. To an office-bound person like myself there is something very exhilarating in the pleasant bustle that precedes the arrival of relatives or friends at the cottage. I may not be as thorough in my preparations as the American housewife, who turned out the attic and spring-cleaned it—as well as the rest of the house—when company was expected, because it would be so mortifying, should the furnace in the cellar happen to explode, if the guests found any dust when they were blown up into the attic!

Nevertheless, I enjoy the atmosphere of hospitality that pervades the business of "getting ready." What woman does not? And if one is expecting a visitor whom one specially delights to honour, what a pleasure lies in getting out one's best napery, in arranging everything just as he or she prefers, and in planning that the meals shall provide as much varied novelty as possible.

In town I have but little time to give to household preparations of any description—I am obliged to relegate them to others. In any case, one has most things at hand, and the telephone will secure the remainder at very short notice. In the country I have more time, not only to possess my own soul, but also to possess my own belongings. I am able to spend a minute debating whether my coming guest—if a woman—will be more interested in my best toilet cover with the Irish crochet inlets, or in the equally best one with the fine Hedebo embroidery. I am also quite sure that the guest will revel in the views from the windows—and few town-dwellers can say the same! True, I have to do more thinking in regard to meals—local resources are limited; but, since the war played such havoc with the world's eatables, I

am inclined to think we do better in the country than in town; for at least our country eggs and vegetables and fowls are fresh, and not the Chinese cold-storage variety that are served out to us in London.

Though the Head of Affairs was not a "visitor," we instituted preparations as though we had not seen him for months. Virginia gathered fresh flowers—and oh! what flowers there were to gather! Sheaves of long-stemmed tulips; armfuls of columbines; branches of hawthorn thick with white bloom; bluebells and wallflowers for the living-room, which is papered a buttercup yellow. Pink campions, guelder roses, crimson and white dielytra, and lilac for the sitting-room, which has a white paper patterned with rosebuds. Syringa and spikes of golden broom for the hall. A large blue vase of the starry yellow marsh-ragwort for the dark oak table in the room which is called my study—though I usually work out of doors. For the dinner table there were low bowls of violas and pansies, alternated with small vases of violets and forget-me-nots—a lovely combination.

Altogether the mere sight of the wonderful display of clean gleaming colour was a mental tonic, to say nothing of the delight of the perfumes that were being distributed all over the place by the soft May breezes coming in at the doors and windows, and playing all about the house.

Ursula and I set off on the usual foraging expedition for the week-end, happy in the knowledge that at least we had the promise of a fowl, if we would go and fetch it from the farm—and fowls were fowls at that time! But first we went down to the village shop for sundry necessities.

That shop deserves a chapter to itself, so well equipped is it, and so delightfully comprehensive are its contents. It provides practically all the conveniences and advantages of one of the big London "Stores," combined with a real welcome, courteous attention, a personal interest in the customers' wants and an endeavour to supply them, and then the local news thrown in.

But I must not stop now to tell all I find to admire in that shop and its owner, it would take up too much space. Only, when we go shopping, we do not say: We will go to the village and buy a bar of soap (or a pair of garden shears, or a bottle of Eau-de-Cologne); we say: We *must* go down and see Miss Jarvis. Our main interest does not centre in the acquisition of the soap, no matter how urgently it may be needed, but in the visit to Miss Jarvis herself. Her marked capabilities, and her sound common-sense, make her a really refreshing person to meet.

It may sound an exaggeration when I say our village shop combines the conveniences and advantages of the "Stores." Nevertheless, it is the Stores in miniature. Is one tired with the long walk? Miss Jarvis wafts one into her little sitting-room—a veritable "Rest-Room." Is one in need of refreshment? she will bring a cup of tea in a beautiful old china cup and saucer that belonged to her great-grandmother, and anything else her house contains, if one were to express the slightest wish for it. And as for shopping, she will get anything you need, from wall-paper to sunshades, if she does not happen to have it already; but probably you will find she has whatever you ask for, stored away upstairs if it be not already among the wonderful miscellanea that lines the walls, and hangs from the ceiling, and covers all the floor space (save where stands the customers' chair) in her quaint, low-raftered shop.

Miss Jarvis kindly said she was pleased to see us, and looked it, too, as she brought out a second chair from her living-room, and squeezed up some zinc pails and a sack of chickens' food and a roll of oilcloth to make room for it beside the counter.

And, by the way, yes—before she forgot it—she was hoping she would see me. It was about the poster Miss Snoggs had brought in and asked her to display in the front of her shop window. Miss Snoggs had said she was a great friend of mine, and it was all right; but before putting it up she would like to have my authority for so doing, as she had heard nothing about the matter from any one other than Miss Snoggs. Of course, it was doubtless all right; only she thought it better to mention it, one really couldn't be too careful.

She reached out a roll from a little alcove between the tins of salmon and packets of Quaker Oats on the shelves behind her, where she kept her day-book and pen and ink and a bit of blotting-paper.

When spread out the poster announced that a Garden Party would be given at Rosemary Cottage on June 2nd, when Miss Snoggs, of the "Federation of Enlightened Women Voters," had been specially asked to address the guests on the subject of "The Vote that will Rule the World." The final line being that well-worn benediction—

"No Collection."

Ursula and I looked at each other in astonishment; then Ursula exclaimed, "The colossal impudence!"

This gave Miss Jarvis the keynote to our sentiments, and she promptly offered some of her own.

"I thought it was very strange to have a bill like this, when you had not said a word about the matter when you kindly invited me. And being our early-closing day, I am so looking forward to coming, and I can get some one to stay with father." (Mr. Jarvis is blind and bedridden.) "But what also seemed to me odd is the fact that your name is never mentioned, neither is any time stated. Moreover, it looks as though it is a public meeting to which everybody is invited, instead of your private party at a private house. But Miss Snoggs said she had known you all your life, and you were one of her dearest friends, so I could hardly refuse to take the bill."

I lost no time in explaining the length, breadth, and thickness of our friendship. Miss Jarvis, on her side, proceeded to part with a little more of her own mind.

"It's a curious thing to me, that any one who has had all the experience that comes from living in town should have no more sense of proportion than to come into this shop and tell a woman like myself, who has lived all her life in a little village, that she ought to be doing big things in the way of executive work (whatever that may mean!), instead of frittering away her life in trivialities; and that if only women had had a vote sooner, I and all other women would have been doing big executive things by now. Wouldn't you think that a woman who professes to speak for the whole of her sex would realize that *some one* must do the handling of the bread and bacon, even if it is trivial? That some one must look after poor father? That some one must keep the house clean? And that I who was born in the midst of these trivialities am better able to do such things than to do the executive work she talks about, of which I know absolutely nothing? I daresay this sounds as though I am a creature without an ounce of ambition—one of those women who are just 'content to sit and vegetate,' as Miss Snoggs puts it. But it isn't that at all. I'm as ambitious as most people, but I've sense enough to know that you want something besides a head crammed full of ambitions to carry you through; and I know I am wisest to stick at the trade I was brought up to, rather than spend my time going about the country making speeches no one would understand (and it wouldn't hurt them if they didn't), even though selling frying-pans isn't anything heroic. But Miss Snoggs actually does not comprehend that minds like mine exist!"

"She certainly does not," I said; "neither does she comprehend that the world badly needs women like you—needs them far more than it needs the Miss Snoggses, in fact—and that it would soon tumble into chaos if it were not for the steadying influence of you and other women who are like you. But you must not judge the whole of the women's movement by Miss

Snoggs and what she says about it. There are numbers of really well-informed and able women who are doing good work in the interests of their own sex. Nevertheless, I do not believe that any one has done more useful work than you have been doing in handling the food problem all these difficult years, and supplying half the district with the necessities of life. A woman who could cope single-handed with *that* work during the war—and cope with it successfully, too—has done 'executive work' of the highest service to the country."

Miss Jarvis modestly protested that she had really done nothing to speak of, only, of course, the rationing had made it a little difficult, etc.

When we left we took Bella's poster with us, and Ursula could hardly wait till we were out of the shop to say what she thought of Miss Snoggs.

"Isn't it impertinence, when she really knows nothing of Miss Jarvis and conditions here, to start lecturing her on her lack of 'enlightenment,' and belittling her work?"

"Yes," I agreed with her. "And when you think of the way she managed in the first place to get the foodstuff delivered in this out-of-the-way spot during the war, and then saw that it was fairly distributed so that all should get a share—why, she could give points to a Government official on the subject of supplies! I should like to set Bella to the task (so long as I was not depending on her for my food), and see the sort of mess she would make of it!"

There was plenty more on the ends of our tongues, but the Lady of the Manor suddenly loomed in front of us at the turn of the lane; and, as usual, she wasted no time in conventional preliminaries.

"So glad I've run into you. About that Miss Snoggs. Is she a personal friend of yours?"

Once more I explained.

"I see! Then I'll say at once that she is an unmitigated nuisance." (The Lady of the Manor had been the Commandant of a V.A.D. Hospital, and had learnt to call a spade quite a number of other names, most of them uncomplimentary, even though her language was always respectable.) "And the cruel part of it is this: Just as I hoped I had got her thoroughly sat upon and mangled out flat, *you* come along and take her lovingly by the hand and start her on a fresh career of crime. She brought me a poster about the garden-party you are giving on behalf of the F.E.X.Y.Z., or whatever it is (I daresay the organization is all right, as you are sponsor for it, only I never

heard of it before), but don't expect *me* if that creature is the guest of honour, for I've had more than enough of her already. I'm truly sorry for Mrs. Cransome—such a charming woman, and a real acquisition to the district. There she is, saddled with this incubus of a cousin, who appeared one day uninvited and has remained there ever since, and it seems impossible to oust her. Poor Mrs. Cransome is at her wits' end. I'm going to look up that Federation when I'm next in London, and ask them to remove her."

In vain did I speak feelingly on the subject of Bella and her doings; it was evident that no words of mine could dispel the notion in the back of the lady's mind that *I* was the one responsible for the upsetting of the whole village.

And Ursula and I went on our way feeling distinctly chastened.

We were longing to get home to hear Virginia's views on the poster, but first we had to call at a small farm for the fowl, on which we were basing our Sunday menu.

The farmer's wife was up to her eyes in work, but still not too busy to elucidate in minute detail the legion of family photographs, single, double, and in groups, that smothered the sitting-room walls and were tilted on every available perch.

We admired Jessie, aged twelve (fringes cut across the forehead, and lockets were in at the time); Jessie as a bride with eight bridesmaids, flower-baskets and shepherds' crooks, and all the relations (which, as is usual at our local weddings, included most of the village—at any rate all those with whom the family were on speaking terms at the moment). Then there was Jessie with her first baby and her husband placed at the correct angle leaning over her chair; Jessie's first child, aged two, standing patronizingly beside a stuffed St. Bernard (and had we ever seen such a child such a size at such an age?). We followed Jessie's family as it increased; fortunately the rest of it was photographed in relays, or the wall-space would have given out.

Then we passed on to Egbert in all the orthodox stages, plus his family; ditto Sylvia; ditto Paul; ditto the remaining six children. Of course, I was interested, only, unfortunately, it all seemed such a long way from our Sunday dinner! But at last the conversation veered in the right direction. It was when we were looking at the photo of Eustace's eldest daughter, leaning gracefully against a grand piano and wearing a lovely white satin evening dress with ropes of pearls and a gorgeous big ostrich feather fan, that the grandmother remarked what a pity it was such a beautiful and stylish girl

should be buried on a poultry-farm in Queensland; yes, that was where Eustace was now, right up country, fifty miles from their next-door neighbour, and as for the heat——

But I clung to the word "poultry," and inquired more about the farm, and kept us wandering about it and counting the chickens and discussing the most suitable breeds for hot climates, till at last, by quite an easy transition, I brought us home to the fowl I was waiting for. And was it ready, please?

Our hostess was most sorry to have to say that it was not ready yet; but her grandson should run up with it later on. It would have been ready, yes, she was one who always tried to keep her word, no one could say she wasn't. Her mother used to say, when she was quite a small girl, "At least, you can depend on Annie to keep her word." And here she was without the fowl ready, after saying, etc. "But it was all that Miss Snoggs." (My heart sank. Was I to be haunted by Bella for the rest of my uncertain life?) "She come in here at about half-past three, just as I was going to pluck the fowl, and asks if I could get her some tea, and she would have a bit of fried bacon, a couple of eggs, hard boiled—can't eat 'em any other way; queer, isn't it, how tastes differ? Now my husband——" (exact specifications regarding *his* boiled eggs).

"But why did she come here to tea?" Ursula asked. "It isn't much farther to go home to Mrs. Cransome."

"Mrs. Cransome's gone," the one-who-always-kept-her-word replied darkly. "Cleared right off! Well, you know what I mean" (but we didn't!). "She's gone visiting, leaving the man to look after the farm. And you don't need to have your head screwed on backwards to see why she went, either! My only wonder is that she didn't go sooner. And that's why Miss Snoggs come here for a meal; but it's the last she'll have in *my* best parlour! A piece of fried ham, two eggs—and you know the price they are even now! A second pot of tea, nice and strong, if you please, half a loaf of bread and butter, some cake, and I brought in a jug of cream to go with the stewed rhubarb. And if the Queen herself had come, I couldn't have done it no better. I even put on the jam-spoon that Harold won at the school sports, I did. And after taking up the time I ought to have been devoting to that fowl, she comes to the kitchen door and says, 'Thank you very much; a lovely tea; and I'll come again. I've left the money on the tray;' and she sails out with the dignity of a duchess. When I come to look, there lay a thin sixpence—*sixpence*, if you please! And she'll come again, indeed! I hope I'm not mean, ma'am, but I did feel that she needs a good bit of enlightening herself, though she says she spends her life in enlightening others."

I felt indignant with Bella—it was so like her old tricks; and I was annoyed to think she should have imposed upon a woman who is the very soul of open-handed generosity, and would gladly give away a meal to any one who was really in want. I expressed my feelings pretty strongly, which mollified her a little, and she finally dismissed the subject with a shrug of the shoulders, saying, "But there, what could you expect of a poor feckless thing who actually asked me if them guinea hens out in the field were *grouse*?"

Virginia was a trifle detached when we got back, and inquired, Could we tell her why it was that Melancholy seemed to have marked her for its own? So far as she could recollect, she had never done anything to deserve it. When young, she had invariably said, "Thank you," and "If you please," and had eaten all her crusts; now she was old, she had paid not only her own income tax, but, judging by the amount the man put down on her tax paper, and then extracted from her, she had likewise paid everybody else's. More than this——

"Is he asking for another donation?" I interrupted her.

"Oh, no; it's nothing to do with taxes this time; it's that old motoring-coat of mine that I sent to the tailor's to be remodelled the day I came away. I hadn't looked at it since we sold the car early in the war; and as it was packed up nicely in a box I merely tied up the box and sent it off. And *this* is what they now write!"

"Moth, of course," I commented.

But all the letter said was, that Messrs. Somebody and Something, Ltd., of Conduit Street, begged to acknowledge the receipt of the coat; and would she kindly forward her esteemed instructions regarding the two tins of condensed milk that were in the pockets. Assuring her that they would receive their best attention. And they had the honour to remain, etc.

"Who could have put them there?" I inquired.

"Why, I did, of course," she said testily. "It was at the time the Food Controller was so touchy on the subject of hoarding, and threatened to search the houses. Of course, I had to hide a little somewhere, like everybody else; and milk would be so essential in emergencies if any one died and left me a family of orphans to bring up. Then I forgot all about them—that's all."

“I expect there are quite a few good meals still stored away and forgotten like that,” I consoled her. “Miss Quirker used to move a certain cushion from the lounge during the war, when any one called. She told me it had fourteen pounds of tapioca inside, and was rather knobbly to the back if one leaned against it. At last she put it away in a cupboard, and forgot about it, till she was getting ready for moving last week, when she rediscovered it, and found that the mice had got at it. Another woman told me, the other day, how pleased she was to rediscover a nice big tin of tongue which she had camouflaged as a round pincushion for a spare bedroom.”

“That’s all very well,” said the Hoarder; “at least she could eat her old tongue—unless it was one of those tins the U.S.A. had left over from the Spanish-American War, like the bacon they sent us; but what am I to do about these wretched milk cans?”

“Merely give esteemed instructions that they are to be presented to the caretaker; you will be regarded by her as a little ray of sunshine.”

Having thus disposed of the contraband, we unfolded the latest about Bella.

“Evidently the Ethiopian hasn’t changed her skin, and Mrs. Cransome is more than fed up with the colour of it!” said Virginia. “But don’t worry about the garden-party. The Saundersons called while you were out to say they have some cousins staying with them, who are simply aching to find an audience for a Pastoral Play of their own invention, and may they give it at your party? I accepted at once, without waiting to hear your views. We’ll allow Bella ten minutes for her speech, and then ring the gong for the Play. They say the larch grove will be ideal, and as that will be a quarter of a mile away from the lawn where Bella hopes to speak, she can be left talking to her heart’s content, and won’t disturb her audience in the slightest when they have gone away to the Play.”

I hoped for the best, and started opening letters that had come by the afternoon post. One was from some very nice people who kept the post-office and general shop in a village four miles away. They wrote to say they were so very interested in the bill Miss Snoggs had brought them about the garden meeting, and might they come? Being early-closing day they could manage it. But they did not know the price of the tickets. Would I kindly let them have a dozen, as several people had asked them for tickets, and they knew they could sell that number at least.

“How many more posters has she written and placed about, I wonder?” said Ursula.

We were diverted from thoughts of Bella, by the arrival of a telegram from the Head of Affairs, which said, “Coming to-day.” We looked at the clock; he might be arriving any time now.

“I do hope we shall be quit of Bella while he is here this week-end,” I said. “I don’t want him to be bullied for being a man, and belaboured with the misdoings of masculinity from Adam onwards. It’s hard if a man has to be ‘enlightened’ in his own house! And she is evidently on the warpath.”

“Rely on us,” Virginia said. “We will make it our exclusive business to see that she doesn’t cross his path. I will not stand idly by and see a happy home wrecked before my very eyes by a soulless syren. Only over my prone body shall she approach him.”

Five-thirty is the respectable hour when the last train puffs up our valley. As this had just gone by, we decided to do a little walk down the hill in the direction of the station, in case he had come by that last train. Otherwise, there was nothing left to do but wait till some motor-car brought him from no one knows where. It was just the glowing afternoon to saunter on and on, and it is easy to saunter on and on when one is going downhill!

The lovely “May Carpets” had been laid in all directions. Do you know them? They are to be found under certain trees in early summer, though not beneath all. Some blossoms, when the hour comes for their departure, merely wither away with no lingering farewell; others drop their petals one by one, as though anxious that not the smallest fragment of their beauty shall be missed by the beholder. Thus, some day in May you will find an expanse of white and pink beneath the apple trees; while the laburnum spreads around a soft yellow carpet; the old medlar tree, with its curious trunk all “elbows,” provides a pure white carpet when its large starry blossoms fall; the black poplar gives a scattering of white woolly fluff that looks like late snow when its catkins shake in the breeze; the sycamore sheds pale green flowers; the bracts both of the beech and of the lime tree contribute May Carpets of a pinkish-brown tint; the wistaria, climbing over the back of the house, is lavish with a spread of mauve-blue; under the mountain-ash the earth appears to be covered with a white powder so soon as the sweet-scented blossoms fall; but the hawthorns perhaps provide the loveliest carpets of all, as the small white petals, many of them flushed with pink as

they fade, fall thickly by the thousands. And there is one “Carpet,” that appears in April, which must be singled out for special mention, and that is formed by the wonderful blue-green drifts that appear some years beneath the Wych elm, when especially full of blossom.

The May Carpets are of short duration, but while they last they add yet further beauty to the loveliness of the spring.

One gets fairly cautious when wandering about our hills, always remembering subconsciously in the back of the mind that a walk downhill means a return climb up-hill, and a stiff climb at that; it was not long before we decided it would be wiser to wait on an eminence, instead of descending farther into the valley. Free seats abound in this happy district; there are always the grey stone walls or unlimited boulders. We sat on a low wall that was thickly padded with moss; beneath our feet were trails of blue violets, and woodruff, that fringed the roadside. And, oh! the blessing of being with companions who neither made nor required conversation amid such scenery!

Though we were silent, others were not. We could hear voices a good way off, but making up-hill without a doubt. Then the sounds grew more distinct and very gushing.

“I simply revel in it all. I want to gather every single tiny one of them, don’t you know! I feel I could take all the lovely little innocent flowers in my arms and nurse them like sweet little children.”

“Does she, though?” exclaimed Virginia. “Well, I wonder who she is enlightening now?”

We soon knew. It was the Head of Affairs, who replied in a cheerful matter-of-fact way, not at all in keeping with Bella’s soulful tones.

“Oh, I shouldn’t pull them up like that, even though they are weeds,” he said; “but if you really want a little work of that sort, I expect some of the paths at Rosemary Cottage would give you all the scope you need.”

Bella was starting to explain that her emotions were of the æsthetic rather than the utilitarian order, when she caught sight of us, and hurried forward, kindly introducing her companion to us with the words, “Here’s a gentleman who was looking for your house, so I am bringing him up.”

Bella Becomes Attached to Us

The appearance of the Head of Affairs at the turn of the lane was, of course, the signal for the usual chorus of greetings and words of welcome. In the general concourse of handshakes there seemed no need for me to introduce Bella, as she appeared already to have performed that ceremony for herself.

I heard later that she had met the Head of Affairs coming up the hill. He said "Good afternoon" in passing, as is the custom in our part of the country; but he was not prepared for the alacrity with which she immediately joined him and inquired where he was going! When he said "Rosemary Cottage," she had kindly said she would show him the way, as she was going there also. He wondered who she was; but one hasn't much breath to waste when walking up-hill. Now, however, she adhered to our group, and proceeded along the lane with us in the direction of the house.

At first she edged in beside the Head of Affairs, and started to point out to him the various objects of interest in the landscape; explaining how he would admire the view from the front door; and doing her best generally to make him feel at home. But Virginia managed to detach her when we arrived at a stile, calling her aside (while my husband and I strolled on) to show a mass of pure white Herb-Robert, enlarging on the fact that the white-blossomed variety was not common, naming the few places in the district where it was to be found. And wasn't it curious how one came upon unexpected variations in colour like this, etc.

But Bella wasn't at all responsive to treatment (the girls explained, in telling me about it later on); said in bored tones that she knew nothing whatever about Herb-Robert, and thought it a very silly name.

Virginia, carefully blocking the way over the stile, apologized profusely for its being a *masculine* name; but, of course, she had not named it, therefore she could not be held responsible for that. And now she came to think of it, most of the flowers named "Herb" had a masculine name. There was "Herb-Christopher," "Herb-Bennet"—of course, Miss Snoggs would know that—such a pretty flower, sometimes called "Wood-Avens"; why, here was some in bloom already! And then there was "Herb-St. Barbara," *that* was feminine, at any rate, though nothing wonderful in the way of a

flower. Ursula reminded them (also leaning comfortably against the stile) that there was “Herb-Paris” and “Herb-Twopence,” and she fancied she had heard of a “Herb-Patience,” but was not quite sure. Did Miss Snoggs know anything of such a plant?

Miss Snoggs said she did not; she was not at all interested in grubbing about among the weeds and rubbish in the hedges—never had been; she seldom even *saw* the flowers. Doubtless it was a wildly exciting recreation for those with marked natural or personal limitations; she quite agreed that *some* sort of occupation must be found for such. But so far as she was concerned, the public simply would not permit her to waste her power and her influence in rhapsodizing over a few flowers, when you could buy quite a nice bunch for a shilling any day in the London streets. Moreover, she considered it positively disintegrating to potter round a sodden garden, pulling a dead leaf here and there, and going into ecstasies over a flowering pickled cabbage; she was all too conscious of the call to real work, that was for ever reaching her from the big World of Action. Indeed, she really ought not to be wasting the afternoon like this, only she knew I was expecting her, and did not like to disappoint me.

May it be counted to Virginia for Christian charity that she refrained from reminding Bella of her longing, only ten minutes before, to clasp all the sweet little blossoms to her chest! She did point out, however, that cabbages in our benighted district seldom flowered *after* they had been pickled. But Bella had now been permitted to cross the stile; and she was looking anxiously up the lane, where the Head of Affairs (I didn’t count!) was just visible in the distance—too far off for Bella to catch us up without sprinting; and as the lane was nearly on end, it was not the ideal type of landscape for chasing long-lost friends. There was no alternative left but to follow on, a quarter of a mile behind us, with the two girls—unless she had turned round and gone in the opposite direction; unfortunately, she showed no inclination to do that, or I am sure Virginia would have done her utmost to speed the parting!

For a minute or two conversation flagged, excepting that Bella wondered why nobody did anything to make the path less rough and stony, and abused every one connected with the lane, from the Local Authorities to those who walked up and down it. In the faint hope that it might be possible even then to induce her to turn round and respond to the higher call from the World of Action before mentioned, Virginia started a much-involved scientific explanation of the geological, hydrographical, climacteric, and temperamental conditions that had contributed to the unmaking of that lane;

and she told me afterwards that she had intended to give out so much information on the subject that Bella, in sheer self-preservation, would have been compelled at last to beat a retreat in order to get out of the sound of it all and save her reason. But before Virginia had got well under way, and was merely pausing to get a good long breath for continuation, Bella suddenly asked, nodding towards the couple of us on ahead (we were turning into a field, to look at a new barn in course of building)—

"Are those two engaged?"

In a flash it came to Virginia that Bella did not know who my companion was. And she replied circumspectly—

"They once were, some years ago."

"Why was it broken off?" Bella became cheerfully interested.

"No reason was ever given on either side," Virginia continued mysteriously; "and, of course, one couldn't ask."

"Do you think they will make it up?" Bella inquired. The idea seemed to depress her a little.

"I feel pretty certain that things will merely remain as they are at present," her informer replied with conviction. "They will never be more to each other than they are now."

"Well, for my part, I should say it is just as well, they are so utterly unsuited to one another; a man of that type——"

"Oh, I wouldn't say *that*," interpolated Ursula hotly. "You must not classify all men according to the tenets of the F.E.W.V."

"A man of that type," Bella repeated, ignoring the interrupter, "ought to be *most* careful in making his choice. With his charming personality, his big intellect, his wide outlook on life, it would be disastrous were he tied to any one who had not the ability to rise to his intellectual level. On our walk up from the station I was immensely impressed with his insight and the breadth of his outlook. Indeed, I was *en rapport* with him immediately. I should say he has a *most* sympathetic nature that would develop marvellously, given the right environment."

"Behold the man-hater!" Virginia laughed gaily.

"Who is the man-hater?" inquired the Head of Affairs, as we emerged from the field into the lane again at the moment the trio reached the gate. "I hope it isn't you, Miss Virginia! Oh! and to think how I've always trusted

you! Don't blight my life at this stage of our happy friendship! And it's not Miss Snoggs, I'm sure. Why, we had a most improving conversation coming up the hill; let me see—it was about—oh, yes, I remember—weeding, that was it. Miss Snoggs is a very thorough gardener—likes to clear the whole place of weeds and carry them away in her arms as she goes along. *What* a boon you will find her!"

Miss Snoggs bridled, and immediately took it as a personal tribute to herself. By the time we reached the house she was so graciously amiable to us all that she entered with us as a matter of course, with no need of an invitation from myself.

Ursula once kindly remarked that the arrival of the master of the house is like the winding up of a clock—it sets everything going cheerily. And she is right. By the time we sat down to a seven-o'clock meal, he had already inspected the new barn; mourned with me over some winter-planted larches that had died without a kick; discovered a gate-post in need of reinforcements; noted that the guelder rose-tree wanted supporting; congratulated the gardener on the hopeful indications of potatoes; and discussed the hay prospects and the price of young pigs; observed a loose tile on the roof of the old Wood-house; examined his saws affectionately; praised Virginia's floral decorations; and, finally, before sitting down to the table, straightened two pictures that were hanging out of the level.

And through it all, one had the consciousness of Bella hovering somewhere in the offing, ready at any moment to dart forward and assist with conversation should there be the slightest sign of invitation.

When every one was seated, and supplied, at the table, and the meal was starting merrily, I expected the Head of Affairs would make a time-honoured remark we always look for at this juncture. It is a simple statement, which does not amount to anything when it is repeated; but to those of us who know the speaker, it implies that he is absolutely contented and at peace with all the world, and that the meal is grateful and comforting after a long journey.

As I had anticipated, he picked up his knife and fork, and said with thoughtful emphasis, and apparently addressing the greatest stranger—

"*Well*, we *may* be happy *yet*!"

Under ordinary circumstances, every one assents to the possibility, and conversation proceeds on general lines. But this time Bella blushed so vividly, and smiled in so self-conscious a manner, that any one might have thought it was a wedding breakfast, and she the bride over whom the customary compliments were being poured. Immediately she put on the coyest of airs and graces, talking girlishly at one moment, then becoming playfully teasing and archly daring, till we others looked on in amazement at seeing the one-time denunciatory feminist trying to assume the gay *insouciance* of juvenility. I say "trying," because she got no farther than that. And I really felt, after watching the performance, that I preferred her in the *rôle* of Enlightener to that of the heavy coquette. But possibly one could not judge her fairly, because (as Virginia said afterwards) when thirty-five plays the sprightly kitten she can be guaranteed to make her fellow-women catty!

Bella had just been explaining to the Head of Affairs (she ignored the rest of us) how endless was her store of energy and vivacity; how she could dance all night and then start work, as bright as a daisy, at nine o'clock next morning; how she would love to golf, only she had never had the time to learn; and was there a golf-club near? And did he golf? She thought it must be so fascinating to walk on and on, mile after mile, over soft springy turf, with the starry blossoms under foot, and the scent of wild thyme in the air.

Bella paused a moment to think up further flowers of speech, when the Head of Affairs, always anxious to provide our guests with the type of recreation they most enjoy, said—

"We have no links near here; but if it is merely a matter of walking on and on in fresh air and open surroundings, why not go with me to Stony Glen Church on Sunday morning. It is a wonderful walk, right along the top of the hills. It is a beautiful Norman church, and——"

Bella nearly fell over the vegetable dishes in her eagerness to accept; and I realized that my fears least we should have anti-masculine propaganda hurled at us, over the week-end, had been quite unnecessary.

She seemed most reluctant to leave after dinner; but as every one else had slipped away quickly, anxious to make the most of the long summer evening, and showed no signs of returning, she soon found my undiluted society too much of a trial, and announced that she really ought to be going. I promptly escorted her to the top gate, and saw her feet planted on the upper road leading in the direction of Muskbrook Farm, as I did not want any fresh

attraction to turn up and detain her. And I knew by various signs and tokens —Ursula fetching the ball of garden twine; Virginia inquiring through the window as to where I had put the mallet which she clearly remembered having used somewhere or other yesterday; the gardener hurrying down the larch grove with a stout sapling on his shoulder—that the guelder rose-tree was receiving attention; and that tree grows in the vicinity of the lower gate.

We were all intending to go to Stony Glen Church on Sunday morning; but when the morning arrived, our plans had to be revised, as Abigail was not well enough to attend to anything, and, of course, we knew immediately that she was suffering from the latest fashion in ailments—pyorrhœa.

Every one has heard of this disease by now; but it was quite the newest thing when we first welcomed it, the year before, to our happy home. We were introduced in this wise. Abigail had been troubled with a dull pain in her arm. "A touch of neuritis—nothing to worry about," she said in her ignorance. Nevertheless, as we both agreed, the Insurance stamps had been regularly affixed to her card, and she was entitled to medical attention; therefore, why not consult the panel doctor and thus get back a little of what was her lawful due?

We did not know the whereabouts of the panel doctor, but he was found, after many inquiries. She explained to him how she experienced a little stiffness in elbow and wrist first thing in the morning; and——

"Oh, yes," he said, adjusting a bottle on the surgery shelf. "Pyorrhœa! Go and have all your teeth out." And before Abigail realized it, she was out in the street again.

Feeling naturally bewildered to think she was suffering from anything so mysterious, she rushed on feverishly to the dentist, hoping she would get there in time to save her own life. Fortunately, he was an honest man, who, after due inspection, said—

"There's nothing wrong with your teeth; you've a splendid set. I shouldn't think of touching them."

Picture, then, my perplexity when such a confusion of contradictions was brought home for me to disentangle.

Fortunately, the stiffness quickly disappeared, and we shelved worrying about pyorrhœa for the time being, though I promised I would find out how

to spell it, as she was naturally anxious to tell all her relations and friends about it.

Nothing happened for about six months (save that the panel doctor sold his practice and retired—proof positive that he had made an unrighteous fortune out of Abigail's case!), and then she developed what, to a mere lay eye like my own, appeared to be a bunion.

Once more she sought medical advice. The new panel doctor never looked at her, she said, much less consented to see the inflamed swelling she described. He merely uttered the usual formula—

"Go and have your teeth out; it is a case of pyorrhœa."

This time she was more annoyed than alarmed; and I prescribed bathing in hot water, and added a memo to the scores already on my desk, "Look up P."

I started investigations the very next day. But all I could get hold of concerning the affliction were two different theories as to its origin.

One authority explained it in these words:—As the older generation knows, the reign of King Edward VII. ushered in appendicitis as the essential hall-mark of up-to-dateness. And during the happy, peaceful years that followed, every facility was given to those who desired it (and, indeed, to many who didn't) to indulge in this popular pastime. But with the outbreak of war, appendicitis, like every other form of recreation, had to be curtailed and rationed; the hospitals could only receive the smallest percentage of their former cases. And the medical profession had to invent a fresh amusement that could be indulged in at home, to take its place. Hence the introduction of pyorrhœa.

That is one version. The other is as follows:—On the very worst day of the war, the then Food Controller—a certain Mr. Hubbard—suddenly caught sight of the bottom of the flour-bin; whereupon he summoned the Medical Board and explained the awkwardness of the whole affair, and asked if anything could be done to divert people's minds from the Food Question *in toto*, as he had now used up all the substitutes, and America had despatched the very last bale of the famous Irish bacon which had never before left their shores since it first landed with the Pilgrim Fathers.

Instantly some bright person (who deserves a cenotaph, if any one does) suggested pyorrhœa as being absolutely certain to distract the mind, and remove all temptation to eat anything in the nature of a solid. Thus was Mr.

Hubbard enabled to tide over the situation with cups of sugarless tea till the dawn of brighter days.

Personally, I incline to the last theory; it also seems to explain why it was that none of the victims ever received their sets of "substitutes" until after the Armistice. Doubtless another of the many complicated wiles of D.O.R.A.!

At any rate, it was not difficult on the Sunday morning before mentioned to diagnose Abigail's affliction when I found her suffering acute pain in her ankle and quite unable to put her foot to the ground, in consequence of a slip down some rocky steps the day before.

"Pyorrhœa, of course," I said. "But you had better stay in bed to-day and have one last good meal before you part with your last tooth. Don't worry, I shall really enjoy getting the dinner."

Only, of course, she did worry—proceeded to do so instantly; was sure she could hobble around (even though she was still wearing her own teeth). But when Ursula came up to view the sprained ankle professionally, she said, in her firmest war-hospital manner, that the patient was on no account to be moved. She bandaged it scientifically, and established it in so comforting a manner that Abigail had no alternative but to remain where she was.

It was decided that Virginia should go to Stony Glen, since Ursula insisted on staying at home to give me a hand with domesticities in general. But as the day was yet young we two home-keepers walked to the top gate, and a few yards along the lane. We had not gone many steps, however, before we ran into Bella, breathless with hurrying, and all aglow with excitement—until she found that Virginia was going too. Then she soured visibly. And matters were not improved by the Head of Affairs inquiring innocently—

"Why ever did you come all this way to meet us? We shall pass quite close to Muskbrook Farm; you could have joined us there, and saved yourself this extra walk."

In reality, she had added three miles to the journey, the farm being a mile and a half from our place. It was not surprising, therefore, that by the time

they got near the farm, on their way to Stony Glen, Bella showed signs of giving out. She was no longer sprightly;—but who could be, when climbing a steep rough path in thin-soled, high-heeled, pointed-toed shoes? She complained of the hills, and complained of the heat. Before long she began to limp; and matters climaxed when she had to sit down by the roadside in order to try and fix on a heel which had ill-naturedly parted company with the shoe. Finally, she snapped out the information that she was not going any farther, but would cut across a field back to the farm.

Of course Virginia, only too thankful to see any chance of being rid of her, insisted on seeing her home, and persuaded the Head of Affairs to go on and represent the family at church.

The weather was abnormally warm, and it got hotter and hotter as the day advanced. At first I thought it was merely the heat of the kitchener while the dinner was cooking which made the morning seem oppressive. But when the wanderer returned from Stony Glen, he said there was not a breath of air even on the top of the hill: and how thankful he was that Miss Snoggs had not gone all the way.

So was I. She would certainly have returned with him to dinner; and try how you will, you can't get much more than five helpings from one fowl, and we were five already. I agreed with him that it was all for the best.

In the afternoon, while the Head of Affairs was addressing the Sunday-school down in the village, the rest of us were mainly engaged in trying to decide whether it was cooler indoors or out. Virginia said it wasn't cooler anywhere. The sun blazed into every room in the house, save the bathroom and the scullery; and even the most cleanly soul cannot pretend to be spending the whole of Sunday afternoon in washing up either her crockery or herself.

Wherever we went the sun followed—as is always the way on a hillside sloping to the south, since the sun rays invariably manage to slant under the trees, thus reducing their shading capacity to the minimum.

Virginia started off with a deck-chair, to hide herself in the depths of the larch-wood; but she soon returned, saying dreadful things about the sort of insects I kept in the wood. Meanwhile Ursula was trying to find a shady spot in the lower orchard—but has any one ever known an apple tree in a tilted southern-looking orchard to provide any shade when the shade was most wanted? Certainly not! By the time she had climbed up the terrace steps

leading back to the garden again, plus her chair, she, too, was saying spiteful things about May turning itself into August; and had I ever before known so many buzzing things in the air at that time of the year? And what did I propose *now*?

I myself was getting weary with wandering. But across a field I espied a dark cavernous hollow—it was the empty cart-shed beside the big barn. We toiled across the grass, chairs and books in hand, to this inviting haven. Here was shade at last—a little stuffy, perhaps, as it was enclosed on three sides; but there was a thick roof between us and the sun, and we settled ourselves and mopped our moist brows, and looked out upon the close-cropped field covered with white daisies and a host of other low-growing flowers, while the hot air shimmered just off the ground like some tangible living thing.

Virginia was just giving voice to a prose-poem in praise of cart-sheds in general and mine in particular, when the landscape and sunlight were suddenly eclipsed by a dark form that trotted in, and was almost on top of us before it realized we were there, It was only the mare, with her colt in the rear, likewise in search of shade. But as she was in a suspicious and touchy frame of mind at the moment, there was a slight mix-up before matters were satisfactorily explained.

As we recrossed the field Ursula suggested that it might really be cooler to remain out in the open; at any rate, we could not be warmer than when we were doing duty as a furniture-removal van. In the end we left the chairs in the garden and went for a stroll along the shadiest lane in the vicinity, and about that time a cloud began to obscure the sun. But we did not escape the abnormal heat; the very stones seemed to radiate the sun they had been absorbing all day.

Though the birds were quieter than usual, Nature was not silent. Far away there were murmurings that ought to have told us what was coming. Near at hand we heard that faint indescribable hum in the air that means—not one single machine, but a legion of something in the distance; those who have seen a covey of Hun Gothas approaching London at a height of, say, five thousand feet, know the horrid hum.

Then round the bend of the road came a cloud of flies.

In the centre we eventually discovered the Head of Affairs. I can’t say that he seemed particularly grateful for things in general, even after we had disinterred him; but then, neither was I, for by that time the flies had transferred their attentions to myself.

We ought to have recognized these various unusual doings as indicating thunder in the neighbourhood; but I did not realize, until a second peal reverberated among the hills, that the sun was no longer blazing overhead; instead, dark clouds were rolling up from behind the larch-ridged heights—sinister clouds with indigo depths and dark curls of smoke-like grey, while beyond were heavy red and dull orange lights. It was a sky that meant mischief. No wonder the birds had ceased to sing. Did they anticipate trouble in the direction of flooded nests? Or was it the oppressive heat and general airlessness that tried them? Who can tell how much the little folk of the forest really know?

A flash of lightning zig-zagged down a dark outstanding hill, which appears to block the river course and close in the valley to the south (though no river with any enterprise allows a trifle like that to check its progress; it merely winds around it). A louder crash followed the flash. The storm was coming up very quickly.

I am not "afraid" of a thunderstorm, as some people are; neither am I like the lady who refused to have her cellar filled by an obliging coal merchant (who, for once, chanced to have a little coal on hand) because she would have no place of refuge if it thundered. But I do not care about being out-of-doors when there is a display of lightning. I once read an exhaustive article on the subject, which stated that one only ran risks when in the vicinity of trees or water. Unfortunately for the lightning-timid, our hills are practically covered with trees; every lane is overhung with them. Also there is usually a liberal water supply during a storm.

Perhaps it might be wiser to stand well in the middle of a field; only I always feel the lightning would see me more easily there, and I shrink from courting publicity in this manner. Therefore I resort to the more old-fashioned method of dealing with thunderstorms—I get home as fast as I can.

I set the pace at hurrying that afternoon; Virginia, scrambling after me, explaining that, scientifically speaking, I was as safe in the open as anywhere else; while statistics proved that only one in so many millions of people are ever attacked by lightning, etc. But I was not to be delayed by science.

When the first big rain-splashes fell, the stones were so hot that they dried immediately; but before long it was evident they were no mere heat-drops. As they increased in volume, and the ground got thoroughly moist,

there arose that wonderful incense that stands out above all the odours of trees and flowers—the scent of the rain on a dusty road.

Alas! this scent is lost for ever to towns and cities; it has been ousted by the march of civilization, yielding place to the fumes of petrol and tar. One does not deny the advantages of hard-core and asphalt for motor traffic; one knows the world must move on, and one does not deplore the movement, since stagnation means death. But one cannot help regretting that so many of the "improvements" take from life as much as they put into it. Nature is inexorable as she strikes the balance. The more man is able to curb and harness the forces of the universe for his own personal use and enjoyment, the more do the elusive spirits of the earth, who used to minister to man's happiness, retire silently from the on-rush of progress, apparently conscious that humanity, in the main, has no longer any need of them.

But here and there are souls who still stretch out hands for things that allow of no concrete measurement; and when, occasionally, they get a glimpse of some of the fast-fleeting beauty belonging to a day that is past—they pause and give thanks. And to some whose path in life lies ever upon the noisome pavements of the crowded city, nothing is more calculated to arouse wistful memories and poignant longings than the indescribable perfume that pervades the air with the falling of a summer shower upon a country lane.

The rain steadily increased till it became a downpour; and the downpour soon became a deluge. Unless one had seen a violent storm among the mountains, it is impossible to realize how quickly dry land can be changed into running rivers.

The narrow lanes rapidly became frolicsome streams; the water rushed down the garden paths, over the many steps and terraces, in real cascades. The brook in an upper field burst its banks—some stone or other obstacle having barred its progress; the water tore downhill in a direct line, through the hedge and into our vegetable garden, scoring itself a fresh channel eighteen inches deep in the soft newly-dug earth. On it went (taking some of our precious sprouting potatoes with it) into some disused pigsties; it started to fill them with water, but found a way of escape through a hole in one side. Then it dropped over a twelve-foot wall, splashing down into the lower orchard; down, down, into the woods below, where the ferns and the foxgloves may have valued its unexpected call more than our vegetables did.

At any rate, it soon found the stone steps we had made in that wood, and careered down them, depositing on each some of the leaves and roots and twigs and cones and nutshells accumulated *en route*.

Truly, some mischievous little nixie must have broken loose that day!

As we watched the storm from within doors, it seemed as though nothing could stand against it; yet, in most cases, the flowers no less than the trees merely bowed their heads while the fury lasted, and raised them with a smile when it had passed on. The lightning was intensely vivid as seen against the sombre green walls of the high hills, which duplicated the thunder again and again in their echoing recesses, even though their summits were now hidden by the low-dropping clouds. They seemed to toss the sounds to and fro, till the air was one perpetual vibration, with constant repetition in far-off places.

When the storm was at its zenith, and we were expending much well-meant sympathy on the unfortunate little creatures who were doomed to remain out in it, Ursula exclaimed—

"Just look down there! Whatever is it?"

We were standing at an upper window. On the grass immediately below we beheld a bundle of fur. Master Squirrel was anything but worried about the weather. He had turned up his tail—that valuable appendage that serves him equally as a warm winter blanket and a summer umbrella—to protect his back from the rain, while he nibbled at some delicacy he had discovered. Then he strolled on (after sitting up a moment to wipe the damp from his whiskers with his front paws), apparently quite unconcerned about the climate; he examined a plant he found in one of the garden beds; ran up the damson tree to see if there was any business doing in that direction—though what he hoped to find there at that time of the year, I don't know! Having inspected it most thoroughly, he swung down and alighted on the orchard rail; lilted over the apple trees; dropped unexpectedly into the lush grass, where he disappeared for a few seconds; reappeared the other side of the orchard, and walked leisurely into the larch grove, and was lost to sight up one of the trees in the Squirrels' Highway. And all the time the thunder was raising a tumult that might well have scared the senses out of the little morsel.

The storm died down almost as abruptly as it had arisen. It trailed its ragged cloud-rack up the valley, leaving behind it large patches of blue sky,

sunshine once more, and floating masses of silvery white clouds, together with a gentle warm rain that would have been a credit to any community —"a nice growing rain," or "a lovely drop o' rain," we should have called it locally but for its previous reprehensible behaviour.

I could not wait for it to leave off. Slipping into my mackintosh and a pair of rubbers warranted to stand running brooks, I paddled out to see how it fared with Martha, the black-bird who had four big youngsters in a nest in a holly tree—a senseless place to build a nest so far as any hope of shelter went; though she may have considered its prickles a certain protection.

I found her a dripping object of pity, but spread out all over the nest containing her precious babies, her wings drooping over the edge at such an angle that the water ran off them beyond the nest, as it would from sloping eaves. She was drenched and she was draggled, but what did she care about that? The children were warm and dry, and she had certainly saved their lives. It is amazing what discomfort the mother bird will endure to safeguard her nestlings.

After the raging of the storm came God's Message. Across the hills, across the river, across the wide expanse of sky it was written in brilliant colours, as a glorious rainbow arched from earth to heaven, turning the trees as it touched them on the hillside to strange visions of red and blue and gold. We so seldom see more than a section of a rainbow in the town, that we can form but little idea of its gorgeousness when it spans the sky in the open country. For nearly a quarter of an hour it remained, moving slowly across the hill, as the sun pursued its course, until the last cloud-fragment had fallen to earth, and the wondrous curve of colour went—where? No one knows! The passing of beauty is a deep mystery. But at least in this case we could read its meaning. And faith was renewed by reason of the Message that had been brought to earth by this Angel with the flaming wings.

There were still some hours of daylight, with brilliant sunshine; and we spent the evening wandering round the garden, aiding the beaten-down plants to get on their feet again, and generally noting the effects of the storm. On the whole, it had done very little damage, while the boon it had been to the thirsty earth was undeniable. Wilted leaves were now fresh and strong again; the young turnips and carrots seemed to shoot up an inch or two while you looked at them. Birds were busy all over the Flower-Patch—though I am afraid it was not so cheerful a time for the snails!

By ten o'clock we were ready to retire, not because it was dark (ten o'clock summer-time is absurdly light in May), but the hot day had made us weary, and, unlike the flowers, the rain had not entirely revived us, though it had cooled the air considerably. We had hardly got to our rooms, however, when a loud knocking was heard at the front door. I went down to see who the late caller could be.

On opening the door, I found—Bella!

She was so *very* sorry to arrive unceremoniously like this, but *would* I mind her staying for the night? She could sleep anywhere—in a chair in the kitchen, on a sofa in the living-room—*anywhere* would do; and I was not to take the *slightest* trouble. But the storm had *so* unnerved her, and with Mrs. Cransome away, she felt she could not possibly stay at the farm alone. And so on.

Of course, she had to be made perfectly welcome. And as there was no time to get a bed aired at that hour of night, Virginia immediately said she would turn in with her sister (though it was a single bed), and give up her room to Miss Snoggs, who accepted it gracefully (likewise one of Virginia's nightdresses, as she had forgotten to bring her own).

"But what I would like to know is this," said Ursula to me in a whisper, as we hurriedly put on fresh sheets, "why didn't she drop into that cottage right opposite the farm door, where Mrs. Cransome said her man lived with his wife who is her servant? Why didn't she get them to come and stay at the farm, if she was nervous? And why has she let all this time elapse before coming round here? The storm was over by six o'clock."

"I give it up!" I said. "But, then, why does Bella do anything that she does?"

Mrs. Poddles Lends a Hand

Bella came down about half-past nine next morning in the best of spirits, to find breakfast for one laid at the end of the table. I was far too busy, with Abigail laid up and no other servant in the house, to have time to sit and entertain the late-comer; but Ursula did the honours for me. I had commissioned her to find out whether Bella was proposing to leave after breakfast, or remain on to the next meal. Being the cook, *pro tem.*, I was naturally anxious to know how many would sit down to dinner.

Ursula led conversation in the right direction by expressing pleasure that the weather had cleared up so that Miss Snoggs would have it fine for her walk back to the farm. But Bella merely inquired if the gentleman who came on Friday was making a long stay?

"Oh, no; he went off by the early train this morning," Ursula told her.

Bella's sprightliness vanished, and she looked blank with surprise. Then she said—

"But I gathered he would be here for my Garden Meeting?" (She had evidently annexed my party entirely!)

"He will probably come down again for the week-end," Ursula said.

Bella promptly revived, and was enlarging on the importance of her forthcoming speech, when I entered the room and inquired how she had slept?

"Splendidly!" she said. "And now I'm going to ask a favour—and"—archly—"you must not be *too* cross with me if I am presuming. But that is the best of life-long friends—you always feel you can ask them anything without fear of being misunderstood. Now, I do wish you would invite me to sleep here for the week, until the meeting; just to sleep here; I wouldn't dream of bothering you to feed me, I'll provide my own rations. But I do realize that, if I am to do full justice to myself, I must get out of that lonely house at night. I can't tell you what I've been through in that big, weird, rambling place" (the farm actually contained eight rooms arranged mathematically within a four-walled square), "counting the passing hours and starting at every sound. Doubtless the average woman, with her torpid

brain, would simply go to sleep and snore till morning. *I* couldn't, however; I'm too imaginative."

"But why didn't you get the couple from the farm cottage to sleep in the house?" I asked.

"I couldn't stand them," said Bella emphatically. "I am *so* responsive to environment; I can sense a jarring element immediately——"

"You don't mean to say that they quarrel?" exclaimed Ursula. "Why, I always thought them a devoted couple!"

"I was speaking in the abstract." Bella waved the marmalade spoon to indicate the extensive nature of her remark. "The average cottager is antagonistic to progress in any form. And——"

"But surely you wouldn't want them to do much progression in the night, would you?" inquired Virginia, who had joined us. "It's so disturbing when people specialize on sleep-walking. I should be content to have them supine, if I were you."

"I know it is difficult for any one to understand the various phases of the artistic temperament, unless they are similarly endowed," Bella continued. "I can only assure you that when I find myself in an unsympathetic atmosphere, I simply *cannot* synchronize."

Of course, when I heard she could not do *that*, I hastily said, "Certainly;" and "By all means;" and "Delighted to have you; stay as long as you like." I have learnt just enough of the workings of a woman's mind to know that so long as she is using words from the earlier portion of the dictionary, she is gentle and yielding and open to conviction; but when she goes foraging among the unspellable words that flaunt y's and z's in awkward places, beware! She means business, and you may as well give way first as last!

I knew I should have to supply Bella's meals; I had supplied them (or at any rate paid for them) too often in by-gone days not to know whither we were trending. I did not grudge her the food or the use of the china and cutlery; but seeing that my office work had to be attended to as usual, even though I was out of London, and Abigail was unable to move her foot, I was not yearning at that particular moment for additional cooking or washing-up.

Moreover, I felt a trifle nettled when she proceeded to explain how she was sacrificing herself on the altar of friendship. It appeared that, but for me and my need of her, she would now have been away in Cardiff, enjoying life with Mrs. Cransome. Indeed, she had debated the question at the last moment, so distressed was Mrs. Cransome at having to leave her behind; but

she could not bear to break her word to me, and upset the whole affair—to say nothing of disappointing all the people who were coming on purpose to hear her. Therefore, she had decided to remain at all costs, and fulfil the engagement.

"And you will now find yourself quite popular when the day arrives," she added graciously.

I won't attempt to explain what I felt like inside!

Bella set off for the farm to collate her wardrobe. She returned later on with two suit-cases, and immediately proceeded to drape herself all over the house. By the afternoon there was scarcely a room—barring our bedrooms—that didn't bear the imprint of her presence; her hat was on the settle in the living-room; her literature was scattered about the sitting-room, the garden seats, and the tent; her rubbers were in the hall; her empty suit-cases were in a spare room, despite the fact that she was occupying one of the largest bedrooms. And Virginia tiptoed into my little study—where I was dealing with a heavy post—to whisper—

"It is evidently a bathrobe!"

"What is?" I inquired absently. I was engaged at the moment in thanking a lady who had kindly written to tell me how she had suffered badly from insomnia for years, till she read one of my books.

"The remains of the pink silk with the wistaria. It is hanging in the bathroom. Do you think she proposes to keep it there?"

I was evidently getting raspy, for I merely begged her to go and keep it company.

Recognizing that Bella was the last straw, I decided to set off at once in search of any sort of human being who would graciously consent to assist me in the kitchen. I could not spare another maid at the moment from my London house, and I did not want Virginia and Ursula to spend their much-needed holiday in doing my work. My search was long and wearisome. I felt very sympathetic towards the many others who are for ever on the same quest. Every one was too rich to need to add to their income.

These are days when women of the middle-classes are apt to get very tired—tired of work that seems never-ending; tired of a daily routine that varies very little from one year's end to the other; tired of small jobs that

may not amount to much individually, but which, collectively, are enough to take the go out of Solomon and Samson and Job all rolled into one! There is no day of eight do-as-little-as-you-can hours, accompanied by high wages, for the middle-class mother of a family. She can't go on strike the moment some trivial thing doesn't please her. Neither is she given any unemployment bonus—she never is unemployed!

I thought I had discovered a jewel when I was told at one cottage—

"My sister-in-law would 'blige you, I'm pretty sure, because she's wanting some teeth." (Pyorrhœa again, I concluded.)

I explained, however, that I hadn't any to give away at the moment—I was anxious not to raise any false hopes. But I added that if a grand piano, or a garden fountain, or a nice massive front portico that costs an annuity to keep decently clothed with paint, would answer the purpose, she was most welcome to either, and I would have it sent down from town by the next train, if only she would consent to assist me by sitting in the drawing-room and entertaining callers, while I black-leaded the kitchen stove. But after a half-mile walk in search of the sister-in-law, I found I was just the half-mile too late. Some one else had booked her up only ten minutes before.

At length I discovered Mrs. Poddles (with the "o" pronounced as in toddles), a non-native whose husband had been drawn from London by the lure of that gold-mine which has cost the nation so dearly—the Chepstow shipyard. She didn't mind lending a hand—after she had arranged exorbitant terms.

True, she could not promise to come till 10.30 (which materialized as 11 o'clock), and by that time we had done all the washing-up and the bedrooms and the boots and got the kitchener in full swing. But, at any rate, when she *did* come, she could talk. It seemed as though all her muscular strength had run entirely to tongue; hers was a case of abnormal development in one direction, balanced by marked deficiency in every other. Her talk was one long stream that knew neither semi-colon nor comma. What it was all about no one could tell. She had a trick of always endeavouring to start at the very beginning of events, and discovering, when she had said half a sentence, that there was something antecedent that led up to it. Breaking off her first narrative, in order to relate the antecedent happening, she, of course, remembered something still farther in the rear, and proceeded to gather up this thread also. In this way the hearer was always being dragged backward mentally to some remote incident, only she never got there, because there was always one still more remote. I fancy that if she had ever finished a

story—only she never did—one would need to start at the end and read it backwards in order to get the real sequence of events.

I would not have you imagine, however, that the lady was merely a garrulous "Mrs. Grimes," like the typical pre-war charwoman who always wore a crêpe bonnet, a brown dress, no waist, and a large opaque bag. Certainly not! Mrs. Poddles belonged to the prosperous ungrammatical classes. Her husband was receiving big money (the shipyard belonged to the Government at that time); his wife admitted that she had no idea *why* they paid it to him, but she considered he had as much right to it as any one else.

Mrs. Poddles was a product of the times, and her costumes changed daily. The first morning she arrived in a hat of pronounced fashion, and wearing a rose-coloured silk jumper with deep collar and cuffs of cream silk, and ornamented with little crystal beads; it was nearly new. She scorned an apron, though I noticed she had pinned on one of my large damask tray cloths later on, when cleaning some knives.

We started in well from the very first. Not realizing how late the lady would be, I had left the washing-up of the breakfast things, pending her arrival, while I made Bella's bed in addition to my own. But since there was no sign of her by 10.55, I attacked the things myself, as I hate to see a scullery littered with unwashed crockery. I can enjoy the work in the cottage scullery (if only I had nothing else to do), with the window opening on to a cool green fernery, where the blackbirds are always turning over the leaves on the ground, and the busy little cole-tits flit about among the fronds in search of something enjoyable, and the wren sits on a bramble spray and sings the biggest song you ever heard come from so small a throat. Washing-up in itself isn't hideous; it is the conditions under which it has usually to be done in town that are so depressing.

Mrs. Poddles arriving just as I was beginning, laid her hat to rest on the bread pan, and volunteered—

"I'll give you a hand with those, if you like; you wash and I'll wipe, or turn and turn about, whichever you please."

In order to emphasize her willingness to assist, she seized the teapot, dashed with it to the tap—yes, dashed is the right word. Then, picking up the spout from the sink, she exclaimed—

"There! Isn't that just like everything you buy nowadays; not a *bit* o' wear in it!"

"Unfortunately, that teapot wasn't bought nowadays," I said ruefully. "It was bought nearly a hundred years ago by my great-grandmother!"

"Oh! I see; it was only an old one. Good thing it wasn't one of yer best!"

The washing-up did not progress as rapidly as the dual arrangement seemed to suggest, because in the end it was I who had to do it all, while Mrs. P. looked on and entertained me with her life-history. It was a misfortune that I had voiced the word great-grandmother, because it gave her a good opening.

Just off the Walworth Road her grandmother had lived. East Street was the road where she first saw the light. Perhaps I knew it? *Such* a bright road! Not quite so classy as it was when she first arrived in it; still, there was always something doing, which was more than could be said for this village! And as for marketing—why, many and many a time had she bought beautiful tomatoes at a penny the half-pound; she remembered it quite well, because it used to make her so wild, the way they took you in by having a card on the stall that looked like "1*d.* a lb.," if you didn't chance to notice the small "½" beside the "lb."! And when you got the bag home, you found they had slipped in miserable little ones from the back of the pile. Yes, it was a splendid district for shopping, particularly for eatables. She preferred Peckham for clothes. Did I like her hat? Everyone said how Frenchy it was, and how it suited her. She had bought that in Peckham. She should never have come here to live, but for her daughter Morna's health; she was so afraid she would go into galloping consumption. (It is a queer thing, but you will seldom meet a London charwoman who is not afraid that her daughter is heading for consumption; it seems to run in the profession. And she would be indignant if it appeared to be anything less than "galloping," too!)

Speaking of Morna's symptoms naturally led us directly to Mrs. Poddles' own health. And for the rest of the day I seemed to be engaged in listening as politely as I could to the serial story of her ailments—what she had been through in the past; what she anticipated going through in the future; and very particularly what she was going through at the present moment.

"I can't say that I'm exactly ill, and I don't *suffer* nothing; but I feel I *could* be ill *very* easy, if I tried."

I assured her that quite a lot of us feel like that.

But she was not to be comforted. And I soon found that it did not matter what one wanted done, her feeble health invariably intervened. She couldn't carry trays, as she was weak in the arms; she couldn't go up and down stairs, as she was weak in her legs; she couldn't eat dripping or margarine, as she was weak in her stomach; she couldn't do scrubbing, as she was weak in her knees; she couldn't shake rugs, as she was weak in her back. The only thing she did not lay claim to was being weak in the head; but before many hours of her society I was—so it squared things.

And yet I did try to do my best, and to make sympathetic remarks as occasion required. I had been reading an article in a daily paper, which gave, as the reason for the shortage of domestic workers, the non-democratic attitude of employers. According to the writer, all would be well if only mistresses would treat their employees as one of themselves, give them hedge-sparrow-blue curtains in the kitchen, take a kindly interest in their affairs, regard them as equals, and have young men to supper twice a week. I longed to do all this, only no one in my kitchen liked hedge-sparrow-blue curtains, they said it was a colour that made their complexions look green and bilious. And I simply could not find relays of sufficiently hungry young men.

Of course, I knew I could not really hope ever to be Mrs. Poddles' equal; my rosiest dreams never included the possibility of affording a silk jumper of the same hue for kitchen cleaning; neither could I afford to wear my rings when I peeled potatoes. But at least I could be kind! and attentive! and interested! and I strove hard to live up to the highest standards of the domestic-democrats.

But alas! it only shows how easy it is to mis-direct energy. In spite of all my efforts (or, all *our* efforts, for Virginia and Ursula took turns nobly when I showed signs of collapse), it was only next day that Mrs. Poddles was eulogizing a rich new-comer (war profits) in the neighbourhood, for whom she had been doing some washing.

"Ah! *she* is a *real* lady, *she* is! Keeps herself to herself like a queen. Just gives her orders to the servants without looking at 'em hardly, and never a word more than she's obliged. Yes, you can tell *she* was born to it!"

After Monday and Tuesday, under the new *régime*, I began to wonder whether I could get a cheaper person to come and talk to me while I did most of the work, since the subject-matter of the monologues was immaterial. Mrs. Poddles' stipend seemed so high, considering the amount of work I did not get in return, and the heartiness of her appetite. But

Virginia said I must look at it from a literary point of view; if I counted how many words she produced for her week's salary, and ascertained how much per thousand it worked out at, I should certainly find I had secured a wonderful bargain—and a bargain is always a consolation, if it is nothing else.

When she was not discussing her ailments, and those of her family, her friends, and her acquaintances, she was instructing me on the ethics of skilled versus unskilled labour, being particularly bitter against the skilled workman—by which it was safe to conclude that Mr. Poddles belonged to the great unskilled. It appeared that the man living in the cottage adjoining hers was a skilled worker in the shipyard, and, as the result, his wife was—but I will quote Mrs. P.'s own words:

"Well, I'm not one to utter a word against any one behind their back, but I do say we should all speak as we find, and *I* call her a viper!" That being so, I was not surprised when she continued, "Why should one man be paid more than another merely because he calls himself skilled, which only means that he can stand about with his hands in his pockets, while the unskilled man earns his money for him? After all, the unskilled man wants as much to eat as the skilled one, don't he?"

My own opinion is that he—and more particularly she—wants more to eat than the skilled worker, *i.e.* judging by the size of Mrs. Poddles' meals; but perhaps she was the skilled man, and I the unskilled, since she stood about with her hands in her sports coat pockets, while I got on with the work.

I did suggest, however, that as she did not approve of one worker being paid more than another, probably she would like me to lower her wages to the same as Abigail's, instead of my paying her at a higher rate than I was paying the other household workers? But she said she was certainly entitled to more than the others, being a married woman with a husband who paid Income Tax and supported the country.

I couldn't help feeling that when we have a feminine Parliament, Mrs. Poddles will be just the one to appoint "Labour Adviser" to the Government.

Still, she had her good points: she didn't waste *everything*. She was most economical where water and house-flannels were concerned, evidently believing in the dry-cleaning process. She fancied she might have a slight tendency to rheumatism, her grandmother having died of water on the brain, therefore she never put her hands into water if she could help it—excepting when she washed up, and here I noticed her method was based on the

principle that hands were made before dish-mops. And the crockery looked it, too!

On Wednesday, Mrs. Poddles arrived at 10.45 (jumper wedgwood-blue with bands of lemon-yellow below the waist-line), and sought me out upstairs, without taking her hat off.

"I thought I'd just come up and see what you felt about having anything done on a dull morning like this? I dessay you've noticed how it looks like making up for rain?" I can't say that it struck me as looking like anything but a pleasant May morning, but I had no chance to argue the matter, as she ran on, "I didn't take me hat off, because I felt certain as you wouldn't care to have anything started afoot on a day like this. So, as you aren't wanting me, I'll run into Monmouth by the eleven-twenty, and do a bit of shopping with a friend o' mine what's going in to-day. Can I get you anything while I'm there?"

This was a new aspect of things; I had not made any allowance for joy-rides. I foresaw that I must book-up and secure the lady's ministrations for the party the following week, at all costs, even if I gave her a holiday on all the preceding days. So I thanked her, and said I should be glad if she would order some mineral waters to come next week for my garden-party, and in this way I introduced the event to Mrs. Poddles' notice. I wound up by asking if she would kindly assist on the day, as Abigail would be unable to run about.

"The cook will be coming down from London," I told her; "but I shall want your help as well—in fact, every one will have to help!"

Mrs. Poddles was delighted with the prospect of a little excitement; said how much she would like Morna to come. I invited Morna there and then. Also the sun came out with full summer brilliance. Yet she did not offer to stay and do her work on the strength of this.

But I was getting quite used to stirring a pudding with one hand and correcting proofs with the other. She wasn't any very great loss—only, unfortunately, I was paying her by the week.

Bella, meanwhile, had made herself quite at home; there could be no two opinions as to that! She borrowed postage stamps, hairpins, stationery, handkerchiefs, raincoat, and bedroom slippers. She asked Abigail where we sent our laundry, and said hers could be put down on our list. Far from

providing her own rations, she sat down to our meals as a matter of course, and then asked if she could have something different from what was on the table.

"Do you know I should rather enjoy some of that cold tart that was left from dinner last night. May I have it instead of this pudding?"

She wanted me to take her to call on my friends, in order to arrange further meetings. But I was really firm on this point, and said I had too much to do to have time to make calls.

Bella had decided that her contribution to the housework should be "looking after Abigail." Her assiduity in this respect was unflagging. Not that she did anything for the poor girl, save drive her to distraction by the way she constantly invaded her room, catechizing her about our friends and relations, and our affairs in general.

Fortunately, Abigail was equal to the emergency. She has the priceless gift of being able to look hopelessly vacant when any one tries to extract information from her which she does not intend to impart; and I know Bella frequently found herself staring at a blank wall, where she had hoped to gaze on pastures new.

On one occasion I could not help smiling as I overheard her questioning the invalid—

"By the way," she began, "do you happen to know the address of the gentleman visitor who was here on Sunday? It will save my going downstairs to inquire. I want to write to him about my meeting. I'm sure it will interest him, and he will come if he can."

"The visitor who was here on Sunday?" Abigail's voice sounded surprised. "Why, there wasn't any visitor here on Sunday!"

"I mean the gentleman who went to Stony Glen Church in the morning."

"Oh! Do you mean the master?" queried Abigail.

"Well, if that's what you call him!" said Bella with a sniff. "What is his address?"

"What's his address?" Abigail repeated in mystified tones. "Why, the same as ours, of course! How could it be anything else? Where would the mistress's husband live if he didn't live at our house?"

"Your mistress's husband?" Bella fairly gasped.

I didn't hear any more. But she was quite cool towards me for the rest of the day. And I don't think she wrote the letter about the meeting, either. It was a relief, however, no longer to be asked at intervals when I was expecting the gentleman to return; what day he would arrive; and what train he would come by. Bella's interest in the Head of Affairs dwindled considerably from that hour onwards, though her capacity for getting on other people's nerves showed no sign of diminution.

Next day Mrs. Poddles turned up in very high-heeled suede shoes, and white crêpe-de-chine blouse (at least it had been white once) and great perturbation, and said excitedly—

"You can't have your party on Tuesday now; I suppose you've seen the announcement in the paper? They don't say what *time* the world's coming to an end; but they know it'll be Toosday, because the sun and the moon are going wrong that day. Every one was talking about it in Monmouth. I suppose you won't be wanting me that day, under the circumstances? Poddles says he sha'n't go to work that day."

Vaguely I remembered having seen one of those perennial predictions that the world would be coming to an end shortly, because of some astronomical vagaries. I had not given it a second thought; but Mrs. Poddles had evidently spent most of the previous day in discussing it with every one she had met on her outing; indeed, she had forgotten all about ordering the mineral waters, so taken up was she with the impending dissolution.

In vain did I tell her that the greatest of all Dates is hidden from all men and known only to the One Who has set sun, moon, and stars in space, ordering their goings according to His own marvellous Will. She was not to be convinced.

Abigail, who is not at all fond of emotional *séances*, raised her voice from the chair by the kitchen table where she had insisted on establishing herself, and helping with things in general. "Now that Mrs. Poddles is here, madam, perhaps you would like those fine vests washed, that you mentioned this morning?" Abigail's calm matter-of-fact tones seemed to steady affairs a little, and she continued, "You see, I've got as far as this, Mrs. Poddles; and if you will kindly put the water in the small bath for me, I expect I can manage to wash those things."

Of course, Mrs. Poddles immediately said she would do it herself, as she thought hot water was very good for rheumatism.

Later on, when I saw the size of the garments after she had poured boiling water on them, I mourned aloud.

"Shrunk, have they?" she inquired with great interest, flapping them about a little as though to spread them out and make them go a trifle farther. "Now isn't that a quincedunce? Why, the woollens at the lady's house where I washed last week shrunk something awful, too! But it wasn't a *real* loss, as you may say, for they fitted my Morna beautiful. I never don't hold with waste, I don't." Then, holding up one of the much-thickened and much-reduced vests from the clothes-basket beside her, she added thoughtfully, "This is about her size, too."

But I failed to respond to the invitation.

Evidently Monmouth was not the only town in England concerned with the astronomical trouble. Next day I got a letter from my cook in London. She was *very* sorry, and hoped I would not be disappointed, but she must ask me to excuse her coming down for the garden-party. She was so upset by the news that the world was coming to an end that day, as I had doubtless read in the papers, and she felt her place was near her own relations at such a time, as naturally they would want to talk it over afterwards. So she hoped I would kindly spare her for that day; she would like to have it as a holiday, if she might, instead of the day that was due to her the following week.

Bella finds New Interest

By Monday it seemed as though my brain must be dented all over, by reason of the cartloads of words that had been dumped upon it during the week. From morning till night *some one* was talking.

Bella was evidently rehearsing her speech and using us as a dummy audience, judging by the way she harangued us whenever she got opportunity; and before Monday arrived we were overflowing with an intense longing to spend the rest of our days in an unenlightened condition, and in the exclusive company of those who were similarly lacking; and if, in addition, they chanced to be dumb, we felt it would be a further gain.

Then there was the incessant conversational torrent supplied by Mrs. Poddles. She was never at a loss for a word. My bedroom window needed mending. I had asked the local builder to send some one to see to it. One afternoon, while I was changing my dress, a meek-looking man strolled into my room with his bag of tools—though, of course, he backed out again more than hurriedly! When I remonstrated with Mrs. Poddles for sending a workman straight upstairs like that, without first letting me know, or coming up herself to see if it was convenient, she exclaimed:

"Arn't workmen pushful! *Arn't* they just! Give 'em a hinch and they'll take a nell right enough, and never a thought for no one but theirselves! He simply *would* go up!"

I was taking care of a few hens in my empty fowl-run, for a neighbour who had gone away for a week. When Mrs. Poddles put in their hot mash, she invariably left the gate of the run unfastened. Finding the fowls all over the garden, I reminded her, for the umptieth time, that the gate (which is self-locking if it only has the chance) must be shut after feeding them. "Well there!" said the lady cheerily. "You don't mean that they've got out again? Now how *did* they manage to open that gate? Ain't they just as knowing as children? Such artful little things!"

Callers, too, had been more talkative than usual, and included a large percentage of the type that can never leave off! Have you noticed what a large number of girls and women seem unable, nowadays, to bring their conversation to a full stop? They go on and on, *accelerando*, from one unimportant topic to another equally unimportant and totally irrelevant; the slightest pause in some one else's remarks impels the talkative ones to start

again with feverish haste. Silence, to such people, seems a positive menace, instead of the soothing and renovating force that it really is.

A spell of silence is what the perpetual talker (no less than her hearer!) badly needs; her speech is indicative of a nervous condition that is only one among many forms of nerve trouble developed by the war. Only, unfortunately, the garrulous one does not always realize that she is suffering from a specific ailment—she merely thinks she is a brilliant conversationalist, and the life and soul of the party. Neither does she realize that a couple of hours of her undiluted society can be guaranteed to reduce the minds of all within earshot to mental mincemeat, coupled, in extreme cases, with a slight tendency to homicidal mania!

Bella had a keen scent for callers, her method being to enter the room, where we were, with an artless air of surprise, and then pretend to beat a retreat—only she never did retreat. After this she either monopolized the conversation herself, or performed a duet with any one who had cornered a monopoly before she arrived. For myself, I was merely required to act the model Victorian child—to sit still and be seen but not heard!

There was only one occasion on which Bella remained quiescent—when the caller happened to be a woman of outstanding reputation, who chanced to be visiting the neighbourhood. Bella, quite awestruck that so famous a personage should condescend to look at *me*, listened respectfully to the visitor's remarks. She managed, however, to score a success as the caller was leaving, by saying cordially—

"We *have* enjoyed seeing you *so* much, and listening to you, too; we are not in the habit of hearing interesting conversation like yours in this house."

I didn't like to explain that, until that afternoon, no one had had an opportunity to indulge in conversation, interesting or otherwise, as Bella had taken up all the space there was.

On the Monday morning Mrs. Poddles announced lugubriously—

"I'll just give a run round the bedrooms, even though you mayn't want 'em after to-morrow; then you'll be ready, no matter *what* happens!"

Well, she *had* run round. And, later, I had run round also—removing a blacklead brush from a dressing-table and a sponge from the bowl of bath-salts; retrieving my hearthrug from beside Ursula's wardrobe; transferring towels from the back of a chair to the towel-rail; salvaging a cake of my best soap from a pail of water; turning toilet covers right side uppermost; refilling the water jugs that had been emptied and carefully dried inside

before replacing on the washstands; rearranging the chairs so that one could get into bed without having to jump over them; and generally performing those many little nameless unremembered acts of kindness and of love which, we all know, are the best portion of any woman's life (good, bad, or indifferent) once she lets the average charwoman ministrate in her bedrooms.

I was quite tired when I finally came downstairs with the blacklead brush, pail, and other etceteras. As I deposited them in the scullery, I could hear Mrs. Poddles in the kitchen still harping on that well-worn theme, the Coming End.

"It wouldn't have been so awkward if it had come on a Sunday," she was saying, "because then Poddles would have drawn his week's pay and nothing owing. But coming on a Toosday like this, he'll lose Monday's pay as well as Toosday's; and one can't afford to lose two days' pay these times!"

I passed on to the living-room, only to hear Bella laying down the law—

"If women would but insist, at the next general election, on having proportional representation in Parliament according to their numerical standing as voters, then——"

Without waiting for another word from anybody I went straight out of the house. Once in the bright sunshine, with a hint of salt and seaweed in the breeze that was blowing over the hill-tops, it was a simple matter to forget blacklead brushes and belligerent females. I climbed up the hill, and up the hill; through a field bordered with crab-apple trees which was up for hay. At the edge of the path, creeping out from among the grass, were patches of the wild heartsease, making a brave stand with their tiny yellow-and-purple flowers. The rest of the field was a swaying sea of daisies and buttercups, clover and vetch, bugle and orchises, with that indescribable misty sheen over all caused by the flowers of the finer grasses. A yellow-hammer in one of the apple trees was singing his perennial song about that little bit of bread and no cheese; a cuckoo flew heavily from a birch tree, so close to my head that he seemed to be shouting "Cuckoo" in my very ear, then chuckled to himself, as is the way of cuckoos. Birds were everywhere telling the world that June had come; and life seemed utterly carefree.

I passed up the field, bees humming over the air-scenting clover, into a wood, and along a path so thickly overhung with trees I had to stoop low and scramble through in many parts. But I don't have it cleared; it is so

comforting to think that there are still a few spots left on earth that are "unimproved."

Then through a gate and across a brook, and I had reached "The Tangle."

Ignoring the rough paths, I made my way down the face of the hill, placing each foot sideways, and planting my stick very firmly against rock every time. Looking down from the upper part of the land, there were large green patches of daisy-dotted grass, with perhaps a wall running up, or along, the hill for a short distance, where evidently some one in past days had laboriously cleared the surface stone from the land, piling it up as a wall, in order to create a little pasture-land. In some parts the way was blocked by barriers of hawthorn—dazzlingly white in the June sunshine; these were originally hedges, but have since grown to the estate of trees.

I always feel, when I am making my way across "The Tangle," that I am intruding upon a very busy community, much occupied with its own affairs, that resents any uninvited guest. Blackbirds said "Chut! Chut!" indignantly as they watched me descending the slope, and did their best to warn me off the ground; jays and magpies screamed at me from the trees; birds began to hop nervously from bush to boulder, with short low flights intended to take my attention from their nesting places. In all directions the news went round that danger was looming; the only friendly word I received was a neigh from the old horse, who welcomes any sort of company.

Reaching the slightly lower level, I had to pick my way carefully over big rocks and around dense masses of undergrowth till I hit the trail I was seeking, the Plover's Brook, that runs down the centre of "The Tangle." This soon led me to my own favourite spot, a ridge of stones making a comfortable seat, with a boulder six feet high forming that most desirable accessory to a seat in the open—a back that will keep off the draught; while in front stretches—space!

The ground drops away so sharply at one's, feet, that you can forget it is there, if you wish to do so; or you can look down the hill into little hollows green with fern and ivy; or at waving bushes of the wild guelder rose; or at dry ridges aglow with furze; with impenetrable masses of blackberries in other places.

Here, at least, I could sit without fear of interruption. "The Tangle" is out of reach of everybody save those who actually know its location, and their number is few. Being right off the road, and closed in on all sides by private fields and woods, the most enterprising tourist would not find it in an all-day search. It is on the road to nowhere; and business never takes a person in

that direction, excepting when a writ of *habeas corpus* makes it necessary to hail the old horse.

We introduce none but our most understanding friends to this particular part of our domain. I did once try it on an acquaintance from town; but the appalled expression on her face as she looked at it from the gate, and inquired if she were expected to prance about that earthquake? made me realize that it would not appeal to the type of Londoner whose only idea of "Nature" is a good motor road or a seaside promenade!

Birds soon got used to my sitting there, and came to the pool to drink and to bathe—or I should put it the other way and say, to bathe and to drink, because it seems a rule of bird-life to bathe in the water when it is fresh and clean, then drink afterwards. Anything seems to do for drinking, but the bath water is decidedly preferred clean.

I think the heat and the shade and the comfortable back to my seat and the drowsy murmuring of the brook must have induced me to close my eyes; not that I went to sleep, I "merely lost myself for half a moment," as afternoon sound-sleepers usually express it. When I opened my eyes again I saw the loveliest sight. Standing on a flat stepping-stone in the middle of the stream was a beautiful reddy-brown squirrel with a biscuit-coloured tail, and he was drinking from the pool. Then he sat up and cleaned his whiskers daintily with his front paws. A pair of plovers rose from the ground a few yards away. They nest in "The Tangle" each year, though it is contrary to all the ways and doings of well-regulated plovers to nest in such a spot; why they come there I do not know. But I was glad to see them again, and leant forward to get a better view of them. Like a streak the squirrel reached the big oak, and ran up its main stem, choosing the side I could not see—though the humorous little scrap kept on popping his head round the trunk and scolding me most irately for intruding.

Civilization obtruded itself at the moment; I heard a train puffing up the valley, though it was not visible from my seat. A little lower down the hill there is another "look-out," from which one can watch the progress of the train through a clearing in the trees, and wave a welcoming handkerchief to an expected guest. It was too hot to move, even for the doubtful joy of looking at a train; besides, I was not expecting any one. The Head of Affairs had been obliged to remain in town, keeping a watchful eye on an incipient strike.

Yet—was it imagination?—surely I caught sight of the corner of something white fluttering for a moment lower down the slope! But it

couldn't be; no one would be there. It must have been a white pigeon, one of those up-to-date birds who flout the orderly life of some one's domesticated dovecots, and set up housekeeping with the wild woodpigeons. I prepared to "lose myself for a moment" once again; but the jodelling of Virginia intervened. Looking uphill I saw her making her way cautiously down the erratic incline. And at the same time I heard twigs snapping lower down, a sure sign that some one was climbing upwards. Ursula then came into view, likewise attracted by her sister's vocalization.

We sat in a row—mostly silent; only too thankful to be out of earshot of the clacking tongues indoors. Eventually Virginia asked me to share my great thoughts with them, as she had none of her own to give away at the moment. I explained that I was meditating on my past life.

She replied that it didn't sound very interesting.

But I am not one to be deterred from good works by non-sympathetic criticism; therefore I continued my meditations aloud. I recalled the fact that three weeks before I had joyously shaken the petrol fumes of London from my feet, and its soots from my hat, and arrived at the Flower-Patch brimming over with delight at the thought of a quiet, peaceful, restful holiday in congenial society; whereas my actual portion had been racket, discomfort, suppressed irritation, perpetual work, and uncongenial society, and all this for no legitimate reason whatever. Moreover, three weeks before I had given informal invitations to about a dozen people to come up and look at a few rose bushes; now it transpired that half the county was being pressed to come and visit me, and I was expected to provide tea and chairs and amusement for people of whom I had never even heard before.

Also, three weeks before, I had decided that the sight and scent of the roses would be all the entertainment those I invited would desire (plus tea, of course). Now, I found that the roses were of no account whatever beside Bella's view of the vote that rules the world.

And so many items were to blame for this: firstly, Bella; then the stone that wrecked Abigail; also the unfortunate contiguity of Mars, Venus, Saturn, and the moon, or whichever of the celestial bodies had been upsetting the balance of certain human brains. And there was myself; certainly I was to blame also. Why had I not been firm with Bella at the very outset?

Virginia interrupted me to say that it was quite immaterial *why* I had not been firm; the charm of the whole concern lay in the fact that having been un-firm I was able, in consequence, to talk like the book of Job. Hence, it

must surely be her part to emulate one of Job's comforters, and she would begin by telling me that Mrs. Poddles had gone home early.

"She felt she ought to clear up everything at home to be in readiness for to-morrow. (No, not for the party; she meant, for the end of the world.) And she has a good many bits and scraps of food in her safe that she wants to use up before the End comes, as she can't a-bear waste. She thought it would be better if she were to be paid for to-day instead of waiting till the end of the week, then everything would be settled, and she was sure you would like to feel that you went owing nothing. So I paid her, and said we should hope to see her at the party to-morrow. But she only shook her head and dabbed her handkerchief to her nose, and said, 'Ah, you never can tell.' "

"I expect she's gone home to tack together a party frock for Morna," I commented.

"Morna's frock has already arrived from a big Peckham Emporium of Fashion," Ursula informed us. "And don't you fancy it's any sort of a tacked-together-by-mother affair. It's silver tissue over white silk, with a deep band of amethyst velvet. I know, because Abigail told me. And I only hope your other guests will realize, when they see me in my cotton voile, that, not being the daughter of a poor working man, *I* cannot possibly afford anything sumptuous."

"If Mrs. Poddles has gone, we had better go back to tea," I said.

Virginia said there was no need to hurry, as she had laid tea in the living-room, in case Bella should require it before we got back. So we sauntered very leisurely. We knew that Bella would be engrossed in giving final touches to her speech. She had made the wildly-exciting discovery, in one of my books, that the ancient Chaldeans indulged in frightfully one-sided divorce laws, the Chaldean husband being permitted to dispose of his marital responsibilities by saying, "This woman is not my wife," and returning her dowry; whereas, if the wife tried to shake off her husband by any such simple formula, she was drowned! Bella said this was the most convincing argument in her favour that she had ever come across! We felt sure she was engaged in saying some scorching things about Chaldean husbands in general; and the girls argued that it was not advisable to arrive home too soon, lest we should cut short her righteous indignation.

But when we got within sound of the open windows we heard Bella gurgling words of pleasantness, and doing her very best to be intensely charming to somebody—evidently not a Chaldean; and, judging by a certain dulcet quality of tone, I was sure the somebody was masculine. Bella is one

of those women who have two quite distinct styles of intonation—a matter-of-fact almost dictatorial quality being the chief feature of her voice when addressing her own sex, which would instantly change to an over-dose of melting saccharine directly a man appeared.

"I do think it so awfully intriguing to be able to read any one's fortune in a tea-cup," she was cooing. "Do give me a lesson; I'd love to know how you do it, only I'm not clever like you."

As we passed within sight of the window, I tiptoed, and saw Bella's head and that of another close together, earnestly examining the tea-leaves in the bottom of one of my very best china cups.

"Why! It's your brother John!" I exclaimed to the two girls, as we went in by a back door. They each gave such a violent start of self-conscious surprise, that I knew in a minute they had expected to find him there. And in my secret heart I wondered why he had come. Not but what he was more than welcome; and the girls knew that; their brothers are delightful men, and sure of a welcome wherever they may go. But John is not the type of lawyer who leaves his office to look after itself, unless there is a very urgent cause for so doing. And I saw no reason for his presence at the moment; though I understood now why Ursula, watching for the train, had waved when she saw her brother signal that he was in it.

But, of course, I greeted him warmly; and he, in turn, thanked me for having sent the car to meet him, but assured me I should not have taken that trouble, as he could have walked up quite easily, having left his portmanteau at the hotel in Tintern, And Virginia and Ursula looked unutterable things at him for giving the business away in so guileless and child-like a manner! I uttered no word of inquiry, however, as to why he had come or the length of his stay; I merely reproved him for having put up at the hotel when we had ample room for him in the house.

We had more tea brought in; Bella scintillated, and John decidedly shone in return, while the rest of us tried to make fragments of small talk that wilted to nothing.

After tea I missed John; Bella was absent also, but one cannot truthfully say *she* was missed; one was merely thankful she wasn't there! Then Virginia explained that some rather important business had brought John to the neighbourhood; he had written and told them he was coming; but they had not told me, as I would have been certain to insist on his staying in the house; and with Abigail laid up, etc.

It was very thoughtful of them; nevertheless they had not hinted in what direction his business lay.

It was about ten o'clock when John and Bella strolled in, and, after all, 10 p.m. summer time in June does not amount to anything wildly indiscreet, especially when a full moon is only waiting for the oncoming twilight to show the world fresh beauties in gleaming water, silvered trees, and golden ambient haze.

It is true we go to bed early in our district; but we are not quite like the village where they had to stop ringing the curfew at sundown, because the natives complained about being "woke-up" before it was morning.

But Bella was all for coyness at the moment; and while John drew a long breath of exhilaration and said it was a glorious evening, and the air on the hill-top had a better flavour than the stuff he had left behind in Inner Temple Lane, Bella pretended to hide behind him, like a quaint child seeking to evade chastisement, as she besought us not to scold them for being naughty and staying out so late. But the fact that Bella is only two inches short of six feet in height gave a humorous touch to an otherwise "heavy" incident!

After supper we went half-way down the hill with John, to set him on his way to the hotel.

I like that old-world phrase "to set him on his way"; it conveys such a sense of human interest in a wayfarer, following, doubtless, upon hospitality; it also conjures up the happy thought that there was once a day when people had a little leisure in which to be kind and helpfully courteous. Who has time nowadays to set another on his way?

The Party

Next morning, the all-famous day when the party was due (to say nothing of other events), we awoke to find the world very much where we had left it over-night, while the sun, the birds, the flowers, and the breezes were attending to their respective duties as whole-heartedly as though Mars and Venus and Saturn did not exist.

I was so glad to see the weather "just right," that I even congratulated Bella at breakfast on the prospect of a good audience for her speech. But Bella's interest in enlightening the village seemed to have flagged since the day before; and her conversation leant more in the direction of Virginia's brother, his abilities, his charm of manner, his wonderful intellect, and—was he married? Bella had no hesitation in asking the question in simple English. Virginia said he was not. As she did not add that he was engaged to be married shortly, I likewise held my tongue.

John came in about eleven, and when there was nothing left that he could do in the way of placing chairs and tables about the garden (no easy task, as he had first to find level places to accommodate them), he suggested to Bella that they should climb to the top of the hill and see if the crowds were yet discernible crossing Glamorganshire *en route* for our garden.

Bella giggled; and I urged them to go—not that Bella needed any urging. I reminded them, however, that lunch would be at one o'clock sharp, and would wait for no one.

They returned to time, seeming on the best of terms. I was certainly rather surprised at John's marked attentions to Bella; but as Virginia and Ursula apparently did not object, or if they did they kept the fact to themselves, it was no concern of mine. Nevertheless, when John once more suggested an outing, asking Bella after lunch if she had seen the waterfall cave under the hill, I could not help reflecting on the gullibility of even the wisest of mankind where a designing woman is concerned; though I could not stop just then to think out the subject thoroughly in all its many aspects.

The first guest to appear was the wife of a farmer, and she arrived half an hour before the time mentioned in my invitation. But though I was not downstairs ready to receive her, Mrs. Poddles was. And, knowing her, she welcomed the visitor cordially, and sat down with her on a seat under a fir tree. They were apparently intending to chat there the whole afternoon,

when Ursula caught sight of them from her bedroom window (where she, too, was putting finishing touches to her finery), and hurried to my room with the news that the party had already started.

Before I got downstairs and out into the garden, others from the village had come up the hill, and Mrs. Poddles was "receiving" under the fir tree in the approved style; and even after I had appeared on the scene, and relieved her of the duties of hostess, she still remained chatting with those whom she knew, and quite resented it when Virginia called her off and set her to make tea and help in carrying out the cups and saucers.

Given fine weather, there is something very delightful about a garden-party in the country, more especially when it represents various grades of society. We are not surfeited with social dissipations on our hills; distances are great, and life is too strenuous for any but the very wealthy to have time for a succession of gaieties. But when we do go out, we go with the intention of enjoying ourselves. It is a real "event," and we make the most of it, with the result that you seldom see bored looks or signs of tedium at our local functions. The grace to enjoy whatever comes along in the way of harmless entertainment has not been taken from the country-dweller as it has from the over-sophisticated in town. And, to my mind, there was one particularly charming feature about the little party I am describing—and one generally finds it at all such gatherings in the country—every one strove to be at their very best both as to dress and behaviour; and those whose daily life was the hardest and whose circumstances the least prosperous made all the more effort to do honour to the occasion. The dresses may not have been in accordance with the ideas of the over-moneyed profiteer's wife and daughters in town; but the best silk blouse, the freshly got-up lace collar, fastened with the best brooch, the black-gloved hands holding a folded handkerchief, bore testimony to an earnest desire to show due appreciation of the event; and the wearers looked far more attractive (even though some were actually wearing bonnets—yes, *bonnets*!) than the majority of the freaks one sees at ultra-fashionable society functions, for the simple reason that their dress was in keeping with themselves—and that has so much to do with the making of a pleasing picture.

In town, we were all wearing our features very plain that year, and trying to look as weird and down-right ugly as we knew how, out of compliment to the portraits in the Royal Academy—though even the worst of us never managed to look *quite* as forlorn as the ladies in the more advanced

Academy pictures! Still, we did our best! Hence, it was a refreshing change to come across women who were really anxious “to look nice,” as they would have put it.

The earliest comers were from some of the cottages, and they apologized for having arrived a little ahead of time, but explained that they had come up early in order to get their breath after the climb—a very necessary consideration, as most of them must have needed all the breath available, seeing the amount of conversation in which they all indulged.

Then there came straggling in various “unknowns,” evidently lured by those wretched posters that Bella had sown broadcast. Some of these I could identify as being visitors staying somewhere in the neighbourhood. Others were entire strangers to me, though in most cases they were claimed as acquaintances by some one or other of the local residents, who would then introduce them to me and present their credentials. Miss Bretherton, the vicar’s niece, could supply most of the missing biographical links, and tell me who was staying where, and why they were staying there, and for how long.

But there was one very striking-looking woman whom no-one seemed to claim. She was tall, dark, noticeably good-looking, and well-tailored. I don’t know when she arrived; she was having tea when I first saw her. Miss Bretherton could not help me as to her identity; and, as she merely strolled about in distant parts of the garden, I had no actual talk with her. Virginia did seek her out and open conversation with the original remark that we were having wonderful weather for the time of year; but as the lady merely agreed with her, and offered no observations of her own on that subject, or any other, Virginia gave her up at last, concluding that she was a tourist in the district who had not approved of my tea.

Meanwhile, the visitors all seemed to be doing their best to find their own entertainment. Of course, every one walked round the flower-beds and commented thereon. By far the most appreciative were those older women who had cottage gardens of their own, those who worked with their own hands, and planted a little pansy-seed here, and raised a few daffodils and wallflowers in another corner, and had only one or two rose-bushes to cherish. *They* knew exactly what a flower garden means in work and loving care, and they noted the choicest tulips instantly, and were sure they had never seen anything more “rich” than my purply-black columbines; it was

they who went into ecstasies over the roses, and remarked how fine my syringas were; and that they had never, no *never*, seen such lovely irises as my white ones veined with mauve.

The most trying people were those strangers who graciously patronized the flowers. There was one unknown visitor with jazz stockings, whose dress—what there was of it—was scarcely Pauline in tone; while her chest reminded one irresistibly of an exceedingly war-time fowl! Her middle-aged face had been liberally massaged and powdered, till every bit of character had been smoothed right away. I once heard an old Scotch lady say, when speaking of one who prided herself on her youthful looks, "Poor dear thing, she hasn't a wrinkle on her face; what a dull, uneventful life she must have led!" the face of the stranger was after this style. She was one of these modernists (I discovered later) who make a point of ridiculing all the old-time virtues, excepting cleanliness; and she would have ridiculed that, only it would have deprived her of the joy of perennial reference to her bath salts. Taken all in all, she did not seem to fit in anywhere, either with myself or my guests; but at least Mrs. Poddles gazed at her entranced.

The lady kindly sought me out to tell me that the garden quite intrigued her, it really did; only she wondered that I took so much trouble over it. She merely paid a nurseryman so much a year, and he just put in what he liked, and took it away again presently. *Such* a saving of brain fag. An equally sparsely-clad friend who was with her, pointing with her sunshade to a splash of the beautiful and uncommon Mountain Woodruff that was hanging over a wall and smothering it with pink balls of blossom, said, with kindly condescension, "Do you know, I rather admire those little things over there—wild, aren't they?"

Later on, this same lady was indoors looking at some of my pictures, of which I am rather proud, most of them being originals that have been given to me by famous artists. "They are very pretty, aren't they!" she said. "*Sweetly* pretty. Are they very old masters? . . . Artists alive now, are they? *Alive NOW?* Then I wonder if they'd paint me a few pretty bits too? I have quite a number of old picture frames I might as well use up, considering the price frames are nowadays. I got tired of the things that were in them, and should like something fresh. But, of course, I should only want something *quite* small—not anything that would cost very much, you could tell them." Evidently she thought one bought pictures by the yard!

Then there was another unknown visitor of the type that never can admire anything for its own sake, but merely sees in other people's possessions matter for envy or comparison. Her conversation was on this wise: After ignoring any and every plant with which she was not on intimate terms, she suddenly spotted a floral acquaintance, and exclaimed, "We have a *Gloire de Dijon* in our garden too; *such* a nice one. I wish you could see it. We had fourteen blooms on it last year." Then, with the first gleam of pleasure she had shown since entering the garden, she continued, "You haven't many flowers on yours, I see!"

I expressed interest in hers, and explained that this particular bush was newly planted, and one could not tell what it was planning to do in the future. It seemed to give her the utmost satisfaction to know that my bush *might*, perhaps, blight off and never reach fourteen blooms!

Then another joy-light came in her eye, as she exclaimed, "You have no ramblers in bloom!" ignoring the scores of rose-trees that were flowering. "*We* have *beautiful* ramblers—or, at least, one; it grows all over an arbour, something too exquisite for words. I wonder you don't try a rambler or two; they would brighten you up nicely, and they ought to do fairly well here, I should think"—casting the appraising eye of an expert over the hillside, and failing to see that there were at least two dozen ramblers in one spot or another. "They do splendidly in our garden at Muswell Hill. Indeed, people always say that our rambler, when in bloom, is a picture, a perfect *picture*!" I explained that our ramblers did not come into bloom till later, but by that time she had recognized a geranium, and was enlarging on the superiority of the geraniums at Muswell Hill. I tried to convince her that I had done my best, and it was not my fault that I could not attain to the glories of North London; but she did not even hear me in her anxiety to give me the life-history of every geranium she had purchased this century.

But the conversation of my guests was by no means limited to flowers, though these served as a convenient starting-point. No woman proceeds far, conversationally, without encountering the psychological tangent, and we all diverged frequently.

I was walking with a most appreciative cottage neighbour who, like myself, was a great lover of wallflowers. I was telling her that one of my great desires as a child was to have a garden all wallflowers from end to end. "Well, you'm about there now; and it's real nice when you get what you've

bin a-longing for," she said, sniffing lovingly at a bunch I had picked for her. "But 'tis odd what different kind o' things folks want. Now I do love flowers; but I want something worse than that, and I've bin a-wanting it all my life—and always shall want, I reckon. Still, I get a lot of pleasure out of planning how I'd arrange if I had it."

Naturally I pressed her to let me into the secret.

"It won't seem much to you, I don't suppose; but I've always wanted a double washstand set. I think a double one does look so *good*."

I sympathized with her longing, and we talked it over and discussed patterns. Nevertheless, I wondered privately why a *double* one, seeing that she was an elderly widow living in a small cottage all by herself?

It reminded me of a remark once made by a small slum child to Ursula, in a Sunday-school class. Anxious to get the children to voice their ideals and secret aspirations, Ursula had asked them to tell her what they wanted most of all.

"Oh, teacher," sighed one girl, with real longing in her voice, "I'd love to have a tooth trimmed with gold like yours" (Ursula has some gold stopping that shows), "I think it does look *so* stylish."

The scraps of conversation that floated about, were often suggestive of earnest confidences. From one group, sitting in the shade of a Wellingtonia, came this sad truth: "And if you offers a little kind advice to 'em, they says, 'An' what business is it of yourn anyhow?' An' if you goes yer own way and leaves 'em to go theirs, they throws it up at you that you don't take a bit o' interest in 'em no more than if——"

The most popular topic of general conversation, however, was undoubtedly our ailments; and we were nothing if not medical. In these days of easily-accessible hospitals, the country woman is not a whit behind her town sister in availing herself of the recreative atmosphere of the hospital waiting-room, even if she can only get there by kindly accompanying an afflicted friend. And as there is a good hospital a mere trifle of twenty-five miles' distance from our village, what we don't know about our insides—and more especially those belonging to other people—isn't worth naming.

I fancy I set the ball rolling by asking an invalid visitor, who was noted for the wide variety of the complaints from which she supposed herself to be suffering, if she had got rid of the pain that had been troubling her? "Let me see," she inquired; "which pain did I mention to you last?" Having settled

that point, I expressed pleasure to think she was so far improved as to have forgotten all about it.

"Oh, I don't know that I'm really better," she replied lugubriously. "I slept all last night, the whole night, without waking once, a thing I haven't done for months! I'm sure there must be something seriously wrong with me for me to sleep like that, only none of the doctors understand my complaint."

"Ah! There's lots of complaints they can't get to the bottom of," said another woman darkly. "Look at my sister, for instance. The doctor examined her *most* thorough; and he says to me: 'It ain't her head, it ain't her lungs, it ain't her heart, it ain't her stummick, and it ain't her 'pendicks, becos they took that away last time but one she went into the hospital.' Now what is it?" We all shook our heads mournfully, the rest of her anatomy being beyond us.

"Just like my Annie," interpolated another woman. (No one wanted to be left behind when such interesting matters were under discussion.) "The doctor ordered a little fish, just to start her on solids, as he said; so I got a *nice* kipper. But would you believe me, she was worse than ever after that, worse than she'd been for days?"

One of her hearers did just hint that perhaps kipper was a wee bit heavy for some invalids only starting on solids, but the mother of Annie settled her conclusively: The doctor had said fish, and kipper was fish, wasn't it? Oughtn't he to know what he was prescribing of?

But the most philosophic of the invalids was one who was subject to heart trouble. "There is one great comfort in a bad heart attack," she told us, "it relieves my mind from the constant worry as to whether I am *going* to have one."

We took the keenest interest in deciding on the cause of an ailment. So long as we could point to the exact moment, or act, in the patient's past that was responsible for the illness, it seemed satisfactory and conclusive. As to the future—that was not our affair.

The origin of some local illnesses was as clear as daylight. The inflammation in Mrs. Maria Hoppit's big-toe joint, which prevented her joining us that afternoon, was obviously due to her partiality for cucumber with cheese. One and all bore testimony to the dangers lurking in a reckless cucumber dietary. Sarah Ann Perkins said if she only ate a piece of cucumber as big as *that* (indicating half an inch of finger), it was like knives

working round and round in her chest; whereas, there were eye-witnesses to prove that Maria Hoppit had consumed slices and slices at one sitting. Obviously it had run to her toe; everything always did run to one's weakest part, and Maria had never been overstrong on toes.

One ailment that seemed to defy investigation was the pain in the lower part of Mrs. Blossom's spine. It was useless to suggest lumbago or rheumatism, because we knew that her cottage was as dry as a bone, and her fires always roaring up the chimney. And she hadn't strained her back mangling her clothes with the wringer, because she had neither wringer nor mangle; she found it much simpler to fold the clothes, before they were quite dry, and put them under the cushion in her chair; in a couple of days they were as flat and smooth as though she had ironed them. We had, therefore, to let her case remain untabulated.

Leaving the "ailers," I ran against Mrs. Chickchack. She does not live with us permanently; she merely descends on the village, periodically, with a collecting-card, a pencil which she can seldom find in the bottom of her handbag, and urgent reasons why every one should subscribe to some never-heard-of-before Society, with a vague and impossible aim. Judging by her expression of countenance, you are not particularly happy if you do join her Society, her own face being of that narrow, dour, pursed-up type that would be all the better for being "let out" a little.

I believe at the time of my party, her energies were directed toward the abolition of saucers (or was it corsets? Perhaps it was; I can't be sure). But, at any rate, she said she felt that peace could only be restored to the earth by the elimination of every non-essential excrescence. I warmly assented, wishing she would recognize herself as one, and eliminate accordingly. But she merely left me to start on other people; like most women who run a freak campaign, she preferred the unconverted to those who agreed with her. For one thing, it gave her a nice, comfortable, superior feeling to know that she was miles ahead of the other person in the matter of Knowledge (with a capital K). She felt so altogether right, too. Likewise, she was in the position to bestow information, counsel, and warning; and we all prefer to have that part allotted to us, rather than that of the humble and grateful listener.

I think that most of my guests were enjoying themselves however; and that was the only thing that really mattered.

The Saundersons were getting exceedingly anxious, and longing to start their Pastoral Play; but as I told them they were to come on immediately *after* Miss Snoggs' speech, they had to hop about among the trees in the larch grove, when the old Wood House, which had been lent them for a dressing-room, became too full for comfort. Meanwhile, I looked about for Bella. It was high time to begin, and get her part of the agony over! Yet no Bella was forthcoming. And, when I came to think about it, I had not seen her since lunch, neither had I seen John!

Then an uneasy feeling came over me: had they got stuck in the mud at the bottom of the waterfall cave? I found Virginia, and inquired if she knew anything of Bella's whereabouts.

She said she did, and asked me to come upstairs. I followed her, wondering whether I should find Bella's limp form in a faint upon her bed, through sheer nervousness at the coming ordeal. Or, had she, also, sprained her foot? Virginia led the way to a window in her own room, from which we get a long view of the river for miles. Handing me the field-glasses, she said —

"Do you see that boat away beyond the big weir?"

I saw a speck.

"Well, that boat contains Bella and John; and what is more, it is going on containing them for the present. That is what John is here for. We sent for him to come down and keep Bella off the scene till the party should be over. He was quite game about it—and he owes us one or two good turns; so you can rid your mind of Bella's speech. She is enjoying herself mightily, I know; we need not worry about her. When they come ashore, John is going to take her to tea in the hotel-garden, unless she is violent and insists on coming back—which she won't do, if I read her aright. Of course, as he said to us, he can't detain her against her will, if an acute sense of duty impels her to return in time for her speech; it wouldn't be a legal proceeding. But he meant to do his best to make the river more attractive than our party, and he seems to have succeeded."

I breathed freely, and went down and set the Saunderson party to work with right good will.

Passing my bedroom on my way downstairs, I fancied I heard a slight sound. Looking in to see who was there, I found Mrs. Poddles standing with red, distended cheeks, in front of my mirror—not that one could object to a woman gazing at her own reflection in one's glass; she neither hurt it, nor

robbed me by so doing. Only she looked so strange, I wondered if she were engaged in having a fit? or had the thought of the Coming End (which she now anticipated at midnight) completely turned her brain?

But she hurriedly explained that she was only practising the new "bulge" that was recommended in her weekly paper, for getting rid of lines around the nose and mouth. According to "Lady Diana," who wrote the page every week called "My Lady Beautiful," you had to take a long breath, close the lips firmly, and bulge out the cheeks with all the breath you had. If you persevered with this method, you would get a face as fresh as that of a baby, only you must keep at it for ten minutes at a time, several times a day. Mrs. Poddles strongly advised me to try it; thought I should find it very beneficial; and she felt sure that was what the lady with the jazz stockings had done.

I said I would bear it in mind. Virginia murmured to me afterwards that she felt thankful to think there was any process on earth calculated to keep Mrs. Poddles' lips closed for ten minutes at a time; she was more than welcome to use her mirror also, if it would increase the period to twenty minutes. Incidently, I now understood why Mrs. Poddles had been missing mysteriously, several times during the afternoon, when fresh tea and cups and saucers were needed.

My invited guests, and those whom I had not invited, settled themselves in the larch grove, with a pleasant anticipatory bustle and a rearranging of seats—and all said it was an ideal spot for a Pastoral Play. The curious thing was the way everybody accepted Bella's absence without note or comment.

I seated myself on a low wall at the back of the audience where I could see the performance over their heads, and yet be quiet and undisturbed for a few minutes. A large rambling party is more tiring than one thinks, if one tries to speak to everybody, and see that none are stranded high and dry, or left like solitary icicles out in the cold.

The Pastoral Play proceeded on the usual lines, with the usual classic draperies, the usual swaying dances, and the usual certainty on the part of the mothers of the performers that their children would all become Bernhardts or Bensons or Pavlovnas.

There were the usual small hitches, and various unauthorized "asides"; but none so pronounced as one I heard recently at an elementary school in a poor district, where some of the girls were performing scenes from Dickens' *Christmas Carol*. The teachers had provided a few delicacies that were to be brought on and eaten by the performers for the Christmas dinner at the

Cratchits'. During an interval, when the curtain was down, a small girl's voice behind the scenes was heard suddenly to exclaim in tragic tones, "Oh, gov'ness! that Scrooge has gone and sat on the coffee-jelly, and we can't get it off of her!"

The play may have been rather long, but I did not notice it; I was revelling in the peaceful, almost unearthly, beauty of the surroundings. The party had not started till five o'clock; I had arranged it so in order to avoid the excessive heat of the early afternoon. And now we had reached the hour of the long shadows, when the sun begins to drop towards the north-west, and the tall trees cast ever-lengthening shades across the grass. A quiet seems to fall over the earth at this time; the heavier farm work is done, unless haymaking be in progress; the cows are milked, the animals are fed; the men may be gardening around their cottages, but it is in a leisurely way, with plenty of time for talk in between.

And nature, too, seems to be gentler; the fierce heat of the day is gone; rabbits and pheasants come out to feed; birds will be singing, but in more of a meditative manner, and there will be less fuss and bustle in the trees. Only the swallows seem to gain new energy, flying higher and higher in quest of their elusive supper.

As I sat on the low wall, watching the hills lit with the far-reaching golden glow of the lowering sun, subconsciously the words came to me: The Glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. And I wondered how anything could excel the beauty of that sky aflame with every tone and tint of colour, and all enveloped in a radiance too intense for human eyes to fathom. And yet, we are told that eye has not seen, nor the heart imagined, the beauty that is being held in reserve, for bestowal when He shall see fit!

And I thought—as so many have thought before—Possibly, when He comes it will be on such a day and at such an hour as this!

Nevertheless, one knows that the revelation of His Glory will not be merely the addition of brilliance to brilliance. Will He not also open our eyes to recognize His Glory in places where we least expected to find it? Will He not show us the immense value of the narrow low-lying valley-path, no less than the grandeur of the heights?

Our Lord travelled scores of weary miles during His stay on earth, bringing help and hope and healing to uncountable people by the way. But only once did His journeyings lead Him to the Mount of Transfiguration. Probably it is with definite purpose that He has limited the days of

overwhelming brightness, the scenes of radiant loveliness, the times of unutterable happiness, in order that those who would follow in His footsteps may not have their attention distracted from the work needing their attention by the roadside in the valleys.

We do not know; but, possibly, it might be so.

Like all other pastoral plays I have ever witnessed, this one arrived at nowhere in particular—except the end (fortunately). But though the performance was amateurish and feeble, from the dramatic point of view, there is always something cheerful in the sight of young people enjoying themselves whole-heartedly, as the performers certainly did; and the play made a pleasant diversion for those who were not spoilt for simple enjoyment by the surfeit of entertainment that town life provides.

The play being over, and the performers congratulated warmly by everybody, my guests drifted along in twos and threes to say good-bye to me, most of them making some appreciative remark, like the one who said: "Thank you above all, ma'am, for those *lovely* cups of tea; I've never tasted tea I enjoyed better"; while another added: "I'm sure the cake was most beautiful. Abigail is a wonderful hand at cakes, I tell her."

The Queen herself could not have put more courtesy and grace into her leave-taking than did some of the women who had never had a lesson in their lives on the rules and requirements of polite society.

It was when little remained of my visitors beyond the packing up of the Pastoral Play, that I noticed Virginia and Ursula in earnest conversation with the dark tailor-made lady, who seemed to be saying many things besides "Farewell." I had not managed to get a word with her the whole afternoon; she had kept herself very much aloof, and I was too busy to have time to go after her.

Virginia left her still talking to Ursula, and made for where I was giving a final word of thanks to the Saundersons and their party. When she reached me, she drew me aside and explained.

"The dark lady wants to speak to you. She has come down from London purposely to hear Bella, and now is in high dudgeon because she has been defrauded of her rights. You had better come and see what you can do to induce her to return home quietly and soberly. She won't listen to us."

"But who is she?" I asked.

"That's just the point. She is the President of the F.E.W.V., who appears to have been lured here by one of Bella's big bills, and now considers that she is the victim of a practical joke. I left her demanding that we produce Bella, or you, so that she may confront one or the other with the poster and learn the truth."

The dark lady came to the point with brisk precision. Was I the editor of the *Woman's Magazine*? Then where was Miss Snoggs? Why had I announced a meeting and sent her a bill (poster produced in confirmation thereof), when there wasn't any such meeting?

I told her I did not know where Miss Snoggs was; neither had she intimated that she would not be there to make her speech.

"But what I can't understand is this," said the stranger. "Granted that some unforeseen circumstance has kept her from fulfilling her engagement, why was no mention made of the matter? It seems most remarkable to ask people to come to a meeting for a specific purpose and then make no reference whatever to the object of the gathering. I should have thought that you yourself would have said a few words on the subject, seeing what a keen interest you take in our Movement. Then, had the very slightest opportunity offered, I would have given the lecture myself, rather than disappoint such an audience."

Wearily I started once more to explain that the gathering was my own personal and private garden-party, only that Miss Snoggs had come along and annexed both it and me, bodily and wholesale. And I outlined my very, *very* thin connection with Bella.

By this time we had induced the dark lady to come indoors, and were soothing her as best we could with fresh tea and sandwiches. Eventually she got so far as to concede that we were co-victims with herself; but it took a great deal of tactful effort to get her to realize that we were not as wrapped up in the F.E.W.V. as she and Bella were. She would persist in the assumption that it was as much the be-all and end-all of life to us as it was to her. Nevertheless, she was a very intelligent and altogether agreeable woman, once she managed to adjust her mind to the fact that we had not been participating in a hoax. She was evidently a woman of considerable means, who was anxious to do something outstanding, that would lift her above the rank and file of women-kind, into the sunlight of notoriety. And I think she had a genuine desire to render some effective service to her day and generation. But like many another woman who strives to reconstruct the

universe with a committee of one, and that one herself, she was lopsided in her views.

I was really anxious to know Bella's exact relationship to the Federation —and when our village might hope to be quit of her! But I could not ask it all at once in plain English. Little by little, however, I found how matters stood.

It appeared that in the first instance Bella had answered the F.E.W.V.'s advertisement for an organizing secretary; but, having demonstrated within a few weeks that she was neither any use as an organizer nor as any sort of a secretary, either the plain or the fancy variety, she had been asked to resign. Yet, though she was no longer their paid representative, she had clung to them like a limpet, and do what they would, it seemed impossible to rid themselves of her. (I felt quite sympathetic towards the Federation just here!) She had professed the utmost interest in the Movement, and had announced that she should still devote her time to organizing meetings, though not their official secretary, so convinced was she that the F.E.W.V. was the panacea for all the present social ills. In a fit of benevolence, the dark lady, as President, had said that she should be paid by results; if she got a good meeting together, she should have a fee for her work.

"That was months ago," the stranger continued; "and we heard no more till she wrote that she had so interested *you* in the Federation that you were giving us a Garden Meeting, and inviting the whole county. And, in addition, you proposed to allocate a page per month in your magazine to the work of the Federation. Naturally we were delighted. The editor of so influential a woman's paper is just the person we want. We were quite excited over the news. And behold—this is how it works out!"

"But," I said, "seeing there was money attached to this meeting to-day—though this is the first I have heard of it—I can't understand Miss Snoggs throwing the meeting over merely for an afternoon's boating, which is evidently what she has done. She won't get her fee now, of course?"

"But she's had it!" the stranger bewailed. "She said she was obliged to have some allowance for hotel, laundry, and travelling expenses, while moving about the county working up local interest. She said she had started the campaign six weeks ago, but did not write to us for a week or two, until she had actually landed you—her own term, not mine! When she told us to address all communications to her at your house, as you were kindly keeping in touch with her daily movements and forwarding correspondence, we knew it was a *bonâ fide* affair and paid up briskly. Recognizing that hotel

charges and travelling expenses soon mount up, we agreed to give her five guineas a week for expenses, dating from six weeks ago. When she sent the poster, she said she would be glad of some of her fee on account. She had been obliged to spend more than she had anticipated on dress extras, as you were taking her with you to call on so many of your own personal friends; and she was hoping to arrange for further meetings at several of the largest houses in the district. We then sent her an honorarium of ten guineas, in addition to the money for her expenses."

"She seems to have done herself very comfortably, on the whole," Virginia remarked. "Forty guineas was not so bad for doing nothing but write out a couple of posters, seeing that she has been living here without spending a penny for over three weeks—and before that she did not know us!"

But the dark lady was too absorbed in her own melancholy to notice the details of Bella's defalcations. She merely said to me—

"I didn't mind the money; you were worth it, you know—or you would have been if the business had not turned out a frost. As it is, it forms a suitable climax to a series of disappointments. I suppose it would not be possible for you to give us the monthly space in your paper?" she added wistfully.

But I had to explain that the daily post was thick with similar requests, and if I identified myself with one such organization I must be equally cordial to all. And there would not be enough paper in the country to satisfy the wants of all.

"Yes, I can quite understand that." She nodded.

I tried to get conversation back to the subject of Bella, but the dark lady waved Miss Snoggs' name aside as being beneath discussion. Her own personal disappointment at having failed to secure the co-operation of our magazine in furthering her Federation seemed to swamp all minor troubles; and though I reintroduced Bella's name, hoping to be able to get her removed officially from my otherwise happy home, the only satisfaction I got was the assurance that the Federation—otherwise the dark lady, for she seemed to be president, treasurer, executive committee, and general financier all rolled into one—had resolved to drop her entirely, and in future would have nothing whatever to do with her. A most desirable resolution from the Federation's point of view, I could see; but where would she land when they dropped her? In my house as heretofore? That was the matter that most concerned me. But naturally the dark lady felt no interest in Bella's

after-career, or in the possibility of her remaining on my hands till she was sufficiently mature to claim the old-age pension!

Finally, when the car was announced that was to take her to Severn Tunnel Junction, she shook me kindly by the hand, assured me that she attached no real blame to me for the unfortunate misrepresentations that had caused her so much trouble; nevertheless, she gave me to understand that I was the cause of her ending her days a broken-hearted and disillusioned woman.

Yet it was encouraging to find that there was at least one bright, cheerful person left in the world. There was nothing Job-like about Bella when she returned with John. If I had not known that John was desperately in love with a charming French girl, whom he was going to Paris to marry in a few weeks' time, I should really have thought he had offered his hand and his heart to Bella—and been accepted—so marked was her air of proprietorship when they got back, and so ostentatiously did she provide him with little tasks, and keep him running little errands, as though his only mission in life were to serve her. *Would* he mind fetching her work-bag she had left on the sitting-room table? This, when we were all settled for a few moments' rest in the garden, after a nondescript meal—the sort one invariably has after a party. Of course, John politely went for the bag, though no one had ever seen Bella do any of the work it was supposed to contain. Then, when we hoped for five minutes' conversation with John, she started again—

"I always feel that this chair I'm sitting on needs a footstool; don't you?" (Addressing no one in particular.) "It's such an uncomfortable seat, I think, unless you have——"

Of course, John kindly took the hint and said he would get a footstool.

"Hadn't you better have a shawl, too, while I'm about it?" he inquired. "There will soon be a very heavy dew, after the heat, and you'll catch cold."

Bella gurgled that it was awfully sweet of him to be so considerate, but she would not have the shawl, thank you, as she *never* caught cold, and didn't want to muffle up like an old woman. The rest of us had got into sports coats for the evening out of doors; Bella had nothing outside her thin muslin blouse. The footstool took some seconds to adjust to Bella's liking, and the next interruption was—

“I wonder what I did with my gloves? Do you remember? I took them off when you were gathering that bunch of forget-me-nots for me. . . . In your pocket, are they? Now, how in the world did they get there, naughty man? Oh, I won’t insist on your giving them *both* back; you may keep one as you have been so kind.”

But John returned them both.

As for the undelivered speech, Bella laughed gaily at the thought of how disappointed every one must have been at her non-appearance. She admitted that John had asked her if it would matter should they fail to be back in time, and she had said she would not leave that glorious river for all the Federations in the kingdom; but that if John wanted to be at the party, he was not to let her hinder him. And he had said he preferred the river to all the parties in the kingdom.

I was glad to hear all this, as it relieved me from all responsibility when, later on, she might be called to account by the Federation.

I made no reference to the visit of the dark lady. Bella would hear of it all in good time from headquarters, I had no doubt. She really evinced no interest in the party whatever, her whole conversation being taken up with a recital of their doings that afternoon—the beautiful time they had had on the water; the lovely tea at the hotel; the way they had laughed at the thought of our concern as to where she was. (Ah! little did she know how the outing had been arranged for her!)

And all the time I was saying to myself, “How thankful I am, she will go to-morrow.”

John’s good-bye that evening was his final farewell; he was leaving by the early train, his business being completed, as he told Bella in answer to her protests against his going so soon. Bella was curious to know what the business was that brought him down; he said it was a private matter he was attending to for some members of his family. And though Bella got no farther than this, it was not for want of trying.

Then, with that air of recognized ownership which she had displayed all the evening, she said—

“Of course I shall walk with you down the hill.”

John's sisters immediately said they also would walk down with him; I likewise offered my company. And Bella looked anything but gratified.

"Won't you have a wrap?" I suggested. She still had nothing on over her transparent muslin blouse; the air was heavy with dew, and a cool wind was springing up. But Bella scorned the idea, and reiterated that she never caught a cold and never wrapped up.

That studied contempt of clothing (in public) is such a funny little vanity with some people. They seem as though they would rather freeze, while in the public eye, than don anything that would make for comfort. Yet these are the very women who in the seclusion of their own homes wear quite substantial raiment, like Bella trailing about half the day in her pink silk wadded gown.

Needless to say, by the time we got back home, Bella's blouse was actually wet to the touch. People so often forget that the atmospheric conditions on the top of our high hills, with river mists rising from the valleys and sea mists drifting over from the Channel, are not the same as those in stuffy smoky towns.

The moment we left John, Bella proceeded to explain to us his virtues and his many admirable traits; and continued all the way home, and until we finally said good night, to tell us all about him, as though we had never met him till that very day! Not that she exactly told *me* about him—she ignored me altogether, and directed her conversation entirely to John's two sisters—but I was kindly permitted to listen. So I contented myself with gathering glow-worms, as we went along.

Virginia had a scheme in her mind for decorating the lawn with glow-worms. I dare say you have often seen the names of pleasant country railway-stations displayed in white and grey flint stones on a sloping bank. As Virginia says, this is all very well for day-time use, when, if your carriage happens to draw up near the bank, you are saved the brain-fag of trying to disentangle the station's name from the advertisements; but what is much more urgently needed is a self-illuminating arrangement that will turn itself on after dark, regardless of cost; and while pondering the question of how to generate the necessary power—short of harnessing the Thames for an electric-lighting station—her eye fell on a glow-worm. And lo! the thing was practically done! This was in accordance with the highest traditions of genius, she added; Newton's eye fell on an apple, or else the apple fell on Newton's eye—she was not sure which; but it came to the same thing in the end, everybody made a rare fuss about it, just as they did when Watt's eye

fell on the kettle-lid and Mrs. Poddles fell on the dog. Hence she was sure I would recognize that everything was just as it should be, when the glow-worm pointed the straight road to fame.

By way of experiment, she proposed to display my name in glow-worms on our lawn. Not only would this demonstrate the scientific value of her discovery, but, incidentally, it would provide a charmingly artistic illumination that would be visible up and down the valley, and cheer the heart of any stray wanderer who happened to have forgotten where he lived. If I would kindly undertake to collect the animals, she would feel free to devote her time to working out how her scheme compared financially with the Crystal Palace fireworks.

I had quite a nice number in my pocket handkerchief (held by the four corners so as not to incommode them), when I heard Bella, on ahead of me, explaining—

"You see, I am not really a woman's woman; you may think I am, because I manage to put up with women when I am bound to be in their company, but I am much more at home in masculine society. I am really what you might call a man's woman—I enjoy men's society so much more than that of women; I suppose that is why I always get on with men, and am popular with them. The moment your brother came into the room, I felt I understood him. He has a most complex personality, yet there was no need for him to explain himself, or even to talk when we were together, we were in perfect sympathy. It is not so much what he says as what he does not say, that is so significant."

"Ah! John isn't the only man in the world like that!" Ursula replied.

I wandered down a side lane, where I thought I should find a few more creatures, and by the time I got home I had quite two dozen glow-worms to place at Virginia's disposal.

She started to arrange them at once, but found that they went no farther than "FL" and half of the "O" of my Christian name. And that was not the only trouble. By the time we got upstairs to study how the lettering looked from an upper window, we saw a truly moving spectacle—the tiresome things had started to walk away! while two of them appeared to be having a pitched battle—some slight misunderstanding, no doubt, but very upsetting to a scheme of permanent illumination such as ours was supposed to be.

Virginia was very disappointed over the affair, as she said she had quite intended to arrange a beautiful motto, "Home, Sweet Home," or something

touchingly original like that, when next the Head of Affairs came down. Whereas now—

We had not heard any one come into the bedroom as we were leaning out of the window.

"Look here!" Ursula murmured; "it is evident that *I* am Bella's pet. See what she has just presented to me!"

We turned round, to find her displaying the decrepit pink silk gown with the draggled wistaria.

"What in the world shall I do with it?" she asked. "I didn't like to hurt her feelings by absolutely refusing to touch it; she was so insistent that I should accept it. But what *am* I to do with it?"

It seemed so particularly ludicrous for Bella to have given her such a second-hand rag, since both Ursula and Virginia are very well off—so rich, in fact, that they can actually afford to dress quite comfortably, irrespective of what fashion may decree in the way of discomfort.

"Even Mrs. Poddles would scorn it," was all the helpful advice I could give her.

I did not wake next morning till the early tea arrived; I was really tired after the party. Abigail, as usual, gave me any items of news that might have come to the surface since last we met.

"The world's still here," she remarked, as she drew back the curtains and opened the windows; "and it serves cook right, too!"

"Why, yes—I had forgotten all about the world! It was to have disappeared at midnight, wasn't it, according to Mrs. Poddles? But what serves cook right?"

"Mr. John has given me five shillings, and one of the gentlemen yesterday gave me a shilling; if cook had been here, I should have shared with her, of course. But as it is——"

"You won't share with Mrs. Poddles, I hope, for she is over-paid already."

Abigail merely sniffed. Then, as she set the hot water on the washstand ready for my use, she proceeded with the next item of news.

“And Miss Snoggs has gone.”

“Gone?” I exclaimed joyously. “Gone for good?”

“Oh, no; she’s coming back right enough; said she thought she would stroll down to the station, as there was something she wanted to discuss with Mr. John; and if she wasn’t back by half-past nine, no need to keep her breakfast hot, as she might, perhaps, run into Bristol, and come back by the afternoon train.”

But Bella did not go into Bristol—I knew John would see to that. As we found out later, she had no chance of even a word with him, for he only arrived at the station just as the train was starting, and with him was some acquaintance he had met at the hotel.

Two letters came for her by the morning post, one bearing the bold heading of the F.E.W.V.

I did not delay breakfast for her, as I wanted to get on with my own business; a number of letters were still waiting to be opened from the previous day's post. I looked forward to a long quiet morning of steady work.

Virginia and Ursula said they would go on with the flagged path I was making, in place of a long grass walk that was practically useless in wet weather, and always very damp in the morning until the sun reached it. Having no lack of stone about the place, we had decided to make one of these crazy-patchwork paths, merely fitting up any and every shape and size of stone, irrespective of thickness, so long as one side of it presented a fairly flat surface. In the crevices I intended to plant sweet alyssum, forget-me-nots, blue veronica, and anything else that was handy, until such time as the garden had seeded itself into the path—merely a matter of a few months, as I knew from past experience. At intervals along the sides, in order to break the hard line of continuity, wooden tubs were to stand, full of drooping fuchsias, and a host of other flowers, which we planted gaily—in our minds!

It all sounded so simple and straightforward—until we started to carry it out!

The stones I proposed to use were standing as a useless derelict piece of wall, in an orchard about thirty feet lower down the hill, and reached by a steep flight of stone steps. Thirty feet isn't much to walk up, and nothing to make a fuss about, as Virginia said. Nevertheless, until you have tried to carry up stones weighing anything from ten pounds to a quarter of a hundredweight each, and made the journey many times, on a hot June day, you can form no idea how moist one's forehead gets in the process. And bringing up the stones was only the beginning of the troubles of the amateur path-layers!

I had no time to spare for the work that morning, and I begged them not to attempt it, but to rest that day, and get over the party.

But they disappeared from view, and I decided to start work on a very bulky MS. from a lady who wrote me that her book was "an impulsive expression on a subject of the greatest importance, and intensely arresting in its piercing characterization." But on second thoughts I felt this had better wait till my mind was a little clearer, and I attacked the letters.

The first envelope I opened contained the following letter, written to me by the President of an important Bank in the United States. I did not know him, but his notepaper heading gave evidence that his business standing was a responsible one. This is what he said:

> DEAR MADAM,—Will you do a courtesy and kindness for a sweet winsome baby, with blue eyes and chubby fists? She is my daughter Helen, born six months ago. I am collecting a book of autographs of the prominent people of the day, which she may have and treasure when she grows to maturity. Will you be so gracious as to sign your name on enclosed card, and mail in enclosed envelope? My object is unselfish and not mercenary. Thanking you with a grateful heart,
>
> Sincerely yours.

The next envelope contained a circular from a cremating society, which desired me to become a life member by the payment of an annual subscription. Accompanying it was a not-very-lucid list of the advantages to be derived from joining, from which it seemed necessary to be cremated annually in order to avail oneself of the benefits.

An editor's post-bag is always a fascinating medley!

The next letter was from a reader of the *Woman's Magazine*, who was most irate because the Stores had refused to call for a rabbit-skin (though they had supplied the original rabbit), and take it back as a "returned empty." She wanted to know what she ought to do about it? Before I could tell her the door burst open and in came Mrs. Poddles.

"So you're here safe and sound still, same as me?" she began cheerily. "What a redickerlus fuss some people did make over the world coming to an end! I've no patience with it. Of course, it won't *never* come to an end. It tells you so in the Bible, so it must be right. Many's the time I've heard 'em

read the verse where it says, 'World-without-end-Amen.' So, of course, it won't end. Shall I just run round this room with a duster for you?"

I explained that it might be as well to do the bedrooms first.

But Mrs. Poddles was bent on talking over the party, and especially that part of it that had complimented her on Morna's appearance. It seemed impossible to get her out of the room.

At last I got very restive, and gave various hints that I was busy and pressed for time, etc. But the lady never even heard what I was saying, and continued her retrogressions.

Finally, in sheer desperation, I said, "I'm feeling rather faint" (I really was!); "would you mind getting me a glass of water?" I hoped this would mark the turn of the tide.

She brought the water, and administered it with due ceremony; and then said: "It's just what I thought, you need brightening up. You've been looking very dull lately. I've neglected you. I was afraid I was, and you've got lonely. I shall come in and talk to you every little while, when the others are out, just to keep yer spirits up," and she did, too!

After her second call, I decided to seek out the two girls; evidently I was not going to get through much writing that morning. I found Ursula on her knees, endeavouring to get a collection of stones to lie flat. Actually, the spot where she was at work resembled nothing so much as a dog's cemetery after an earthquake; it was a heap of stones trying to jump out of the ground, and pat them how she would, they would not make a flat surface. Meanwhile, she was anything but cool-looking.

Virginia, equally red in the face, was bringing up stones from the orchard. I felt that part of the business did not appeal to me so much as the stone-laying. I therefore joined Ursula, and added still more to the confusion, as I took up the stones she had already put down, in order to show her the right way to do it. Only, alas! I couldn't find the right way.

Virginia watched me scornfully for a few moments; then placing some of her stones in such a manner as to form a species of seat, she deposited herself thereon, and proceeded to discourse on the children of Israel—not that any one appeared to be thirsting for information on this subject, hot as we were, nor had introduced any mention of it into the conversation. Nevertheless, Virginia told us many new things about those ancient people; at least, they were new to me.

She said that in the light of present-day events, most of the hieroglyphics on Egyptian statuary that had puzzled her hitherto, now became quite intelligible. It was evident that Pharaoh—bad as he was—wasn't the most to blame for the way those poor Israelites were compelled to build the pyramids without bricks. It was Mrs. Pharaoh who was the prime instigator of their inhuman treatment. She it was who suddenly developed the idea that a little landscape gardening would improve the appearance of Pharaoh's country cottage, out Luxor way. True, her gardening scheme was on a large scale according to modern ideas, but probably the desert could be got cheap in those days. Thus, it was she who decided to have a paved path here, and another one there, and so on, running to various points of the compass, with just a few pyramids, by way of bric-a-brac, dotted at intervals along the side, in order to break the hard line of continuity.

"But even *she*," continued the only idle member of the path-laying gang, "even *she* didn't expect her *friends* to do the work for her! Do you imagine that when the Queen of Sheba called on her, she set her to carry hods of stone up a ladder to the top of a pyramid that was standing at 135° in the shade? Not likely! The two ladies reclined on cool marble couches, beside tinkling fountains, and ate lentil ice cream, while Sheba showed her jewellery, and Mrs. Pharaoh displayed her frocks and sunshades. They had the most restful afternoon imaginable, and ended up by Sheba giving Mrs. Pharaoh one of her diamond necklaces, and Mrs. Pharaoh returning the compliment with a chiffon blouse that didn't fit. And now, if you will kindly allow me the usual Trade Union interval for rest and refreshment," she wound up, "I think I will sit here awhile and listen to the weeds growing."

I was quite ready to admit that a little stone-laying goes a long way—at any rate so far as the layer is concerned; though the apparent result was meagre. After a few trips in quest of stones, I felt convinced this was not my metier, and that I had better return to my legitimate duties, and leave the path for masculine muscles to deal with. Also I advocated a shady seat in the Tangle for the two girls, who, for once, seemed inclined to acknowledge the superiority of my judgment.

It was beautifully quiet indoors; I stole in on tiptoe, in order to avoid further attentions from Mrs. Poddles, and I started writing an article to which I attached some importance (though probably no one else would ever do so). But I was not left alone many minutes. Bella, who had returned from the station by this time, and had finished her belated breakfast, saw me coming up the garden, and sought me out. She was looking slightly chastened, I thought.

“I ran into my cousin when I was out this morning,” she began. (I had heard at the party that Mrs. Cransome had returned unexpectedly.) “She tells me she has let the farm, furnished, for a month or two, and has had to send my things across to the cottage, to stay there till I can fetch them. I wondered if you would mind lending me Mrs. Poddles for the morning, while I go over to get them, as I can’t carry all myself; and those grasping people at the cottage will charge me for storage, I know, if I leave them there more than a day, whereas you’ve plenty of room here. And it isn’t as though you need so much spare space.”

I realized that this was the time of all others when I needed to exhibit that firmness so frequently advocated by Virginia; otherwise it was plain that, before long, my only claim on my own house would be the privilege of paying the bills. Therefore I said, with a look of surprise—

“But what would be the use of bringing the things here, seeing that you will be leaving to-day, I conclude, or to-morrow at the very latest?”

“Oh! that reminds me. I was going to suggest that as you will not be here much longer, wouldn’t it be a good idea if I were to stay on and take care of the house for you? You could pay me the same that you have been paying Mrs. Widow; or” (probably my expression did not look very encouraging) “you need not pay me anything; I should be quite pleased to do it gratis, for friendship’s sake. I heard you telling Abigail that you would be returning to town this week; and that would suit me quite nicely.”

Doubtless!

I did not encourage that good idea, however, but told her it would not be possible for her to remain on after we left.

Most people would have realized that I wished the matter to end there. But not so Bella!

She continued, as though I had not interpolated that very firm NO!—

“Naturally, I should take every care of your things; and when either you or your friends wished to come down, I would make you most welcome.”

I wondered whether I ought to say “Thank you” for her kind assurance that I should be permitted to visit my own house; but before I had settled the point in my mind, she started to outline my duty in the matter.

“After all, you don’t require the cottage when you are in London; and we ought all to be glad to share our possessions with others. In any case, it is a desolate, out-of-the-way spot, and really too isolated for people to stay in

during the winter. It would be a great advantage to you to have some one here who did not mind the drawbacks, and who was willing to take charge of your things for you. Not many would care to be cut off from civilization in such a way. And it's a very damp house, don't you think?" This last as an after-thought.

If Bella thought that this was the way to secure my assent, she was mistaken. Of all the minor frailties to which human nature is prone, tactlessness rubs me the wrong way sooner than most. Probably I am very tactless myself; I have noticed that it is a failing of which the sinner herself is blandly unconscious! Be that as it may, I am usually impatient when I meet with it in other people—unless I am amused; sometimes the tactless person is an unconscious humorist.

As an instance: Before the war a friend of mine was appointed Director of one of the biggest organizations dealing with the welfare of young women—a very responsible position, likewise an honorary one. She was a clever woman, who had already a very high reputation; she was exceedingly keen on the work, and the committee knew they were fortunate in securing her. Being anxious to make her rooms at headquarters as attractive as possible, for the sake of the hundreds of girls who would be constantly in and out of them, she offered to have them done up, and the shabby, bare, distempered walls papered, at her own expense. The ladies comprising the committee of management solemnly considered the pros and cons of the matter, and finally arrived at this decision, which they sent the new Director —

"As the Director's rooms have always been distempered, we think it would be advisable to continue with distemper; moreover, your successor might not care for the wall-paper you chose."

My friend herself nearly had distemper when she read the memorandum, for she was proposing to make it her life work!

Tactlessness can outbreak in such a variety of ways, though some people have more all-round genius in this direction than others. There is Miss Quirker, who has a splendid record for invariably saying the wrong thing. She is a middle-aged woman, and not overburdened with sense. This spring she selected (as the sweetest thing in millinery she had seen for a long while) a hat with a cross-stitch goose on a medallion centred in front, while a small chicken disports itself at the side on the upturned brim. Her friends

(and they include a large number of enemies) usually remark, "How well that hat suits you!"

And turning one's thoughts in more serious directions: I was at a drawing-room lecture (in aid of a Church Choir Fund) that chanced to be appallingly long and unrivalled for dulness. In order to wake us all up, the chairman announced, half-way through, that Mr. Somebody, of the choir, would sing a solo. He kindly gave us the aria from *Elijah*, "It is enough, O Lord, now take away my life."

I maintain that though there wasn't one in the room who didn't heartily endorse his sentiments, it would have been more tactful to have refrained from voicing them in quite such plain resonant English.

Equally appropriate was the song chosen to open the musical programme at a social gathering in connection with an important London Chapel. The meeting had been arranged as a welcome to the newly appointed minister—himself a man of prominent standing. Imagine, therefore, the feelings of the new-comer, who was hoping to labour lengthily in that particular vineyard, when the first vocalist greeted him with Sullivan's lugubrious song—

"Thou art passing hence, my brother!"

Preachers themselves occasionally make slight blunders. I remember a clergyman who, when addressing a large contingent of soldiers who had come a long uphill march to the church on a broiling August day during the war, so far forgot the exigencies of the case as to announce as his text: "Oh, that one would give me a drink——" Of course, he went on to say, "of the water of the well of Bethlehem"; but by that time the mischief was done!

That sermon left a special impression on my mind. The preacher was a stranger who was taking duty for the day, the vicar being at the Front. The church had always specialized on the orthodox simplicity of its service. Surprised expectations floated over the congregation, therefore, when the stranger carried a fair-sized attaché case with him into the pulpit. The lady sitting next me in the pew, who had exact ideas as to what a clergyman should—and more particularly should not—wear, stiffened apprehensively, and whispered to me—

"Do you think it contains Popish vestments?"

Nothing happened, however; the attaché case eventually left the pulpit with its owner, and accompanied him to the house of the church-warden who was providing hospitality for the day. Then it transpired that the case contained the clergyman's rations; food was at the minimum just then, and

naturally he was not going to run any risk with that precious, though seldom recognizable, fragment of diet classified officially at that time as "four ounces of meat, including bone."

All this is divergent, however. There was nothing humorous about Bella; she was merely an irritating "sponge," one of those women, (who are far more numerous than is generally supposed), who manage to get free board and lodging, for the greater part of the year, by foisting themselves on unsuspecting acquaintances, who tolerate them at first out of sheer good nature, and then have the greatest difficulty in shaking themselves free of the human limpet.

Unless one has actually investigated the matter, it will scarcely be realized how many and diverse are the methods by which some women manage to extract cash from the pockets of other people.

Only that day I had opened a letter from an unknown correspondent, who wrote me at considerable length concerning her anxiety about what she considered the baneful effect of my writings on the world at large. In order to neutralize their insidious work, she begged me to join the "League of Little Lilies" (of which she was the Founder and Treasurer), and sign a Pledge Card which she enclosed, whereby I undertook (if I signed it, of course) to close my eyes to all that was dark, immodest, and wicked. Then, if I would send her one shilling I could be enrolled a member of the League. If, however, I felt it impossible to break the evil chains that evidently ensnared me, and could not see my way to undertake to improve in the future, would I kindly send her a shilling all the same, just to help on the good work?

> P.S.—Ten shillings would entitle me to become a Life Member, and no pledge card necessary.

As a rule, I do not give a second thought to begging letters, I receive too many; but this one shattered one of my brightest illusions. I had always known I was not clever, (I entered this world at the fag end of a generation that took pains to impress on children their lack of ability and their general unworthiness); likewise I had always known I was neither brilliant nor beautiful. But one idea I had cherished for all it was worth—the supposition that at least I was *harmless*! I had prided myself that the youngest of daughters could place any book of mine into the hands of her oldest mother

with perfect safety, and the assured knowledge that her parent could not possibly come to any sort of a bad end by reading it.

And now—behold, the little lilies were getting worried about me!

Virginia was charmed with the title of the League. "What a good name!" she said, when I showed her the letter. "They toil not, neither do they spin, but merely go around collecting people's shillings—or ten shillingses, if they are specially gullible! I think I'll start a League myself, but mine will be a half-crown one; after all, it is the correct thing to more-than-double the price of everything now!"

Another method of getting money, under a virtuous guise, was that practised by a lady who used to be a familiar figure at Keswick and other Conventions. She had a very pretty, well-appointed house on the riverside above Windsor; and she used to divide her life between attending Conventions and holding religious meetings in her own home—inviting all types of well-known clergy, whom she met on her religious pilgrimages, to conduct them, pointing out how benighted were the rich in her neighbourhood, and how the well-to-do needed a helping hand far worse than did the poor. She had quite a vogue, and drew a select crowd. It was pleasant to meet and chat with celebrated divines over an informal cup of tea after the meeting.

On her hall table was a collecting-box, bearing this inscription in prominent lettering—

BEFORE YOU LEAVE, PLEASE CONTRIBUTE
LIBERALLY TOWARD THE FURTHERANCE OF
CHRISTIAN WORK.

And of course we all did, at least as liberally as our means allowed.

One day, in a thoughtless moment, I asked her to what particular work the contributions were applied?

"Why, to my own, of course," she said, quite candidly. "I live on them. How else do you think I could keep this house and the meetings going? I think we ought all to do what we can to help on Christian work, and as I've no income of my own, I do it this way."

That Bella belonged to the same sisterhood I was certain, though her mode of procedure might differ from others. And I was beginning to be wary.

I did not think it necessary to give her the exact dates when my cottage would be occupied, nor to explain who would be staying in it, and when, and why. But I told her I had lent it to friends who would be staying in it for the greater part of the year.

"Oh, I get on splendidly with Virginia and Ursula," she replied, assuming at once that they would be the occupants, and using their Christian names as familiarly as though she were already their sister-in-law! "I'm sure they would be pleased for me to stay on. *They* have always been *exceedingly* nice to me"—with a marked emphasis on the "they," leaving me to reflect as I pleased on my own lack of niceness to her. But that did not worry me. I have long known that you can't nurse a young gazelle (or should it be a viper? yes, now I think it over, I fancy it is a viper you are always supposed to nurse when in a hospitable frame of mind) without it turning and rending you, especially when you have given it a Sunday dinner every day of the week, and lent it your best sofa cushion for its afternoon nap.

"There is plenty of room for them and for me," she continued; "and you have seen yourself how adaptable I am, and how easily I fit into a household. In any case, I must have a roof over my head until I can make some fresh arrangements." Her tone began to grow aggrieved. "Of course, I quite thought you had invited me for a long visit. I did not understand it was only for a short stay like this; neither did my cousin, or she would not have dreamed of letting her house. It really is better to be quite definite when inviting people to stay with you, isn't it? It's so awkward when confusion like this results. After all, I can't sleep in the lane under a hedge, even though I might turn my suit-case out-of-doors. And there is nowhere else I can go at so short notice. I feel I haven't been treated fairly"—this in a most injured key.

"Mrs. Flabbers would be very glad to have you stay with her," I replied (meanwhile trying to count ten slowly, in my mind, lest I should say what I really felt about the whole affair). "She takes a paying guest, as you know; and only yesterday afternoon she asked me to mention her name, if I heard of any one wanting to stay in the neighbourhood."

Knowing that Bella had netted forty guineas in consequence of having made free use of my name as well as my habitation, I felt no compunction about putting her to the necessity of paying for her board and lodging, not

forgetting her laundry bills! And I proceeded to mention Mrs. Flabbers' terms, and let her know that it would suit my convenience if she would arrange to go there the following day.

But Bella merely started to cough violently—and a most unconvincing artificial cough it was, too. She hastily left the room, apparently so overcome with the paroxysm, that she had to summon a lozenge to her aid. And shortly afterwards I saw her making her way in the direction of her cousin's farm.

Finding it impossible to concentrate my mind on the important article which fate evidently did not intend me to finish, I decided to give up all further idea of doing work, and waste the rest of the morning quietly in the Tangle. I felt I needed a rest, and might well leave something for Mrs. Poddles to do.

The thought of Mrs. Poddles made me notice that the house was very quiet—unnaturally so; Abigail was cooking—I could hear an occasional clang emanating from the kitchener, but beyond that all was very still, particularly upstairs, and hitherto Mrs. Poddles had never been able to disguise the fact when she was "just running round the bedrooms"; neither had she ever been able to get through the regular upstairs routine under an hour and a half. She was not even talking; if her tongue had given out, then I knew indeed that something must have gone wrong! I went upstairs to investigate. I found the bedrooms were just as their occupants had left them; not a hand's turn had been bestowed upon them.

Surely nothing could be more convincing as to the real greatness of the centurion, mentioned in the Gospels, than his own statement that when he said "Do this," some one in his employ actually did it!

Approaching the bathroom at the end of the corridor, I heard sounds of splashing; as no one else was upstairs, the natural inference was that Mrs. Poddles was taking a bath! I tapped on the door discreetly.

"Come in; don't mind me!" the lady called out in a cheerful voice.

I responded to her invitation, and found her putting her pale blue silk jumper through its final water, while a white crêpe-de-chine frock belonging to Morna, and a cream silk blouse of her own were hanging over the towel-horse prior to being hung out to dry. She looked a trifle crestfallen when she saw who the intruder was.

"Oh! I thought it was Abigail," she explained. "I'm going to do the beds in a minute; but really, me hands were so *black* with all the washing up I did

yesterday"—(to hear her, you might have thought I had been entertaining a battalion of chimney-sweeps!)—"I simply *had* to put 'em in a little soapy water to get them fit to touch the bedclothes."

She reminded me of a girl clerk who held one of those pleasant and lucrative appointments in a Government office that were so plentiful during the war. On one occasion, when her superior officer found her washing a pink silk blouse in the office lavatory at 11.15 on a supposedly busy morning, she explained that she could not remove the red ink stains from her fingers unless she immersed them in a good lather, using some fabric to cause friction; and as the red ink dyed the water and all it contained a bright pink, it was necessary to provide a rose-coloured garment for the purpose!

If by chance I have a grievance on hand, I find it is a good plan to walk as far as the Tangle to discuss it, because, by the time I get there, the acrid quality in the grievance has been annulled by the exhilaration of the clear air and the beauty of the scene. Modern troubles are often only a matter of nerves or over-work.

Probably I was merely nervy; but I confess I had never before felt so thoroughly tired after a holiday at the Flower Patch: as a general rule it is such a restful place. But everything seemed to have been against me; and so many oddments of work had cropped up, taking time and energy that I could ill spare.

For example, Miss Bretherton, the rector's niece who keeps house for him, had also added to my holiday work by asking me to the Ladies' Sewing Guild at the Rectory; they were getting up a Sale of Work in aid of the flue pipe; probably I had noticed how it smoked; and would I mind cutting out loose chair-covers for big easy-chairs? Everybody's easy-chairs were shabby now, and they would surely be glad to buy covers.

I said I was suffused with shame to have to admit it, but though I was supposed, as editor of the *Woman's Magazine*, to be head of a very flourishing Paper Pattern Department, I hadn't a ghost of an idea how to disjoint and slice up material so that it could be induced to cover an easy-chair; it would only mean waste of good stuff for me to try.

But Miss Bretherton was very assuring; said it wouldn't matter a bit how it was done, as it was for the Sale of Work, and in any case the material had not cost them anything—it had been given them. And it was such an ugly pattern, she didn't suppose any one would buy them, but the covers would

help to fill up the stalls; and she felt sure I would undertake to make them, as nobody else would; and it would be such a pity if they gave me any of the work that really mattered, and then I spoilt it! Whereas no one cared what happened to this cretonne; they had never liked the lady who had given it, and she had gone to India, so no feelings would be bruised on either side.

Of course, after such a pressing invitation, and such a clear indication that I was the one and only person for the job, I naturally agreed to attend.

At the Sewing Guild my next-door neighbour asked me why I was cutting out chair-covers by the dozen, since no two chairs were the same shape and size?

I didn't like to tell her what Miss Bretherton had said; instead, I explained that we intended to make a reduction if the customer purchased them wholesale. And I reminded her that if they didn't go off in a bunch, loose chair-covers have many good points. You can spread them out quite a good deal, or squeeze them up to next to nothing (according to the space on your stall you desire to fill), or you can use them to drape the front of the stall, or swirl them around the small galvanized dust-bin (lent) containing the artificial palm—just as you happen to need their services.

Finally, they can be got rid of in the Bran Tub, if no one has bought them in the meanwhile. And when the bran-tubber asks what in the world she is to do with them? explain how nicely they will cut up for dusters. And if the bran-tubber steadfastly refuses even to remove them from the premises, you can then assign them to the next Jumble Sale, explaining to the final purchaser their manifold advantages as a drape for the piano back.

My neighbour said she had no idea they could be so useful; and I almost persuaded her to purchase one for herself, offering, as a special inducement, to leave the material uncut, unsewn, and in its natural pristine beauty (charging no extra for this, either), so that, in addition to turning it to the uses I had named, she could employ it first as a bedspread; next as a pair of bedroom curtains; then as the chair-cover (with all its before-mentioned diversified possibilities as a decorative feature should she be running another bazaar). The chair-cover would ultimately cut up into pinafores for the children (but this fell flat, as it transpired that she was unmarried); so I hastened to suggest a cover for a humpty cushion, workbags, and aprons; or, if she preferred to omit the chair-cover (and she probably would, once she saw what they looked like when *I* made them), she could turn the curtains into an overall for herself; and, later, make it into a laundry-bag, a shoe-bag, an under-cover for a sofa-cushion, and——

But she declined it, saying that she never used a shoe-bag, therefore the length of cretonne would be no good to her. And, in any case, she couldn't unravel it and knit it up as a jumper—and she was only interested in jumpers.

Yet I did not want to lose a customer, because, in addition to benefiting the flue-pipe, the sale would give me one the less chair-cover to make. I thought hard, and then drew her attention to the artistic value of the material if displayed on her walls as a tapestry.

"Look at the beauty of that pink cat as it glares at you from the background of purple apples and blue tree-trunks! Note the rich contrasts in the sage-green of the sky and the vermilion of the brook in the foreground!"

But she said the pink cat wasn't a cat—it was the sun. The lady on my left, who was tacking together what looked like frail boudoir caps, but which she told me were dainty bags for morning marketing, became interested in our argument, and gave it as her opinion that the blue tree-trunks were really the legs and feathers of a bird—a foreign bird, she felt sure; the pink sun (or cat) being the bird's nest among pomegranates; yes, she felt certain that, being a foreign bird, it would build a pink nest among purple pomegranates. Why shouldn't it? Didn't pomegranates grow abroad? Whereupon every one tried to make out what the design was supposed to represent; and every one disagreed with every one else. That is the beauty of modern art—it is *so* elusive. And the art of that cretonne was intensely modern!

To end this story, which is fraught with painful memories for me—she never bought a cover in spite of all my persuasion; but I did. In fact, I eventually took the whole consignment, as Miss Bretherton and the other ladies of the committee, who shook over the remains of the Sale of Work contemptuously, after the event, showed not the slightest appreciation of my beautiful work—quite the reverse! And perhaps you know what it feels like to see callous after-bazaar committee-ladies tossing about your choice creations (and these *were* creations; I designed them out of my own head, and I have never seen anything like them either before creation or since).

But this is distinctly anticipating!

I merely mentioned the episode of the Sewing Guild to show that my holiday had not been entirely given over to luxuriant idleness.

By the time I had rested for a few minutes on our favourite ledge of rocks, I was so contented and satisfied with "things as they are" that I might even have agreed to let Bella stay on undisturbed at the cottage, but for the

various relatives and friends who had already fixed definite dates for borrowing.

I could not see the two girls, but I knew they would be somewhere in the vicinity, probably lower down, but hidden by the rocks and trees.

I always carry a little tin box of rolled oats in my pocket, when at the Flower Patch, because I find it the most popular form of refreshment to offer the many residents I meet there. I scattered some of the oat-flakes on a large stone beside the Plover's Brook; in a few moments a robin had started to sample the fare, and soon thrushes and blackbirds, song-sparrows and chaffinches, were helping themselves. They had grown accustomed to the simple feast which we put there daily for them.

There are so many little things in the wild woods all ready to come to you if you will make the tiniest advance toward friendship. And they are wonderfully trustful, even the most timid of them, once you have shown yourself kindly.

Unlike some humans, these little folk, once they have shared your hospitality—and have learnt to know that it is your hospitality—will never disparage you behind your back. What thoughts they have about you are certainly friendly thoughts; that is proved again and again by the glad way they will come to you when they see you, and the confident way they accept the welcome you offer, when they have grasped the fact that it is a welcome.

Of course it takes time; no friendship worth having is perfected in a day. But it takes less time than you might think to get a bird to know your call, or a squirrel to come and beg for a morsel.

Of course food must be the foundation of your advances among the little folk of the forest, as it is among the humans. Even when a "worst enemy" calls, the hostess says to her, "You must have some tea!" And a sympathetic understanding of the universal need for refreshment is as useful in the wilds as it is in civilized society.

But though your friendship with the birds and the animals is based upon food, it is not necessarily bounded by it. A dog gives you devotion and faithfulness and affection out of all proportion to the scraps of food he receives. A bird will give you trust, and show a preference for your society equally out of all proportion to the crumbs you give it.

But the food is needed as an introduction to your virtues; how else can the bird or the squirrel know that you are generous and kind and hospitable?

There is scarcely a window-ledge of my town house to which birds, little and big, do not flutter, as a matter of course, for food all the year round; and my office windows in London got so crowded with the wild pigeons of Fleet Street that I had to give up feeding them at last—they simply took complete possession of my office! The moment the windows were opened in the morning, in they came and started to hunt about for the bag of peas and maize that they knew was somewhere handy; and without going into details, it will be understood that a large flock of pigeons is not the most desirable daily addition to a Turkey carpet!

If the windows were kept closed till I arrived, they crowded on the ledges outside, and positively fought for a place when they saw me come into the room. It quite hurt me to have to sever our friendship, but bird life outdoors is one thing, indoors it is a different matter—and our city pigeons, fascinating as they are, have a pushing pertinacity that is peculiarly their own.

The little wild things of our woods have not quite the hardihood of the Londoner. The jay certainly is bold and brazen; and the robin, of course, is convinced he is welcome, and samples every chair-back and everything he can lay his beak on in the way of food. But most of the others come inside with an apologetic air of "I hope I don't intrude? but it is delightfully mild in here, after the wind outside."

Some people tell me it is only the food that they come for. But I know better. What made Mrs. Chaffinch—timid little soul that she is—bring three fluffy, floppy babies and set them in a row back on the lawn (yes, it is just as well to be on the safe side even with a kind-hearted benefactor, when such exceedingly valuable treasures are being displayed), while she came hopping to the open door, and, standing on the mat inside, called out "Cheep, cheep—*do* come and see what I've brought to show you?"

She didn't want food—there was abundance everywhere at the time. She was simply bubbling over with motherly pride, and felt quite sure that I should be equally delighted. And I was.

I think the visit that affected me most of all was that of a robin who had been my near companion at home for six or seven years. He always came into my bedroom first thing in the morning, and had his breakfast inside; by day, he would come and sit on the corner of my study table, for ten minutes at a time, just resting, while I worked.

On this table there stands a little bowl of rolled oats, with a lid that is usually left open, for the birds to come in and help themselves. But he did

not always want food. After eating what he fancied, he would then sit quietly beside me, evidently for no other reason than a feeling of friendly companionship.

On one occasion, I was in another part of the house, and heard pattering footsteps on the landing; it was the robin looking for me. He cheeped when he found me, evidently trying to attract my attention. Then he flew back to my study. As I did not follow him, he repeated the performance. At last I went with him to see what was wrong. And then he perched himself on my inkpot, and gazed hard at the oatmeal bowl.

The lid was on! He couldn't get at the contents. Meanwhile, a fat, yellow-beaked youngster was impatiently calling for food outside on the window-ledge. As soon as I took the lid off, Father Robin bounced down, seized a beakful of oats, and flew to the window-ledge to feed his loudly protesting infant.

On another occasion, after a long spell of bad weather, he hopped close to my hand and drew one claw up and down, evidently anxious to explain that he had rheumatism or cramp rather badly. Next minute, I found him nestled down in a fur hearthrug near the fire, and he stayed there till the dog came into the room. The bird appeared to realize that though he helped himself from the dog's plate and the dog's water in the corner, he had better not try to appropriate the dog's hearthrug in his presence!

But there came a day when his cramp got worse, and he wheezed in a terribly bronchial manner. I saw he was very weak, and much battered and pecked by the other birds. Then he flew in hurriedly, some other birds chasing him, and he remained all the day on the wide window-ledge inside the room, huddled up in a corner beside the window curtain, certainly very ill, though he answered me when I spoke to him.

And there he stayed until the last, evidently quite sure that here was safe sanctuary, and a friend who would not betray his trust.

To some it may seem absurd to state that both my husband and I miss that little bird, who came at our call and followed us wherever we went, as though he had been a being of much greater importance to the universe.

But others will understand. Such friendship is worth having, and when it ceases, it leaves a real blank behind.

After I had been watching the feeding birds by the Plover's Brook for a little while, Ursula came into view. She was making a list of the wild flowers blooming in the Tangle; she had just found the sixtieth variety when I arrived, and decided this was the proper moment to pause in her exploration and organize suitable celebrations. Virginia was writing, a little lower down the hill, she said. We found her deeply immersed in composition, with many pages of MS. placed under stones to prevent the wind carrying them across South Wales to the Irish Sea. She hoped that we were not intending to discuss great problems, she told us; she had troubles enough of her own at the minute, and could accept no responsibility for those of other people. Neither had she any mentality to spare for trivial matters of an outside world; her book required all the brain she possessed, in addition to any I could lend her.

Ordinary politeness required me to ask what this new book was about. She seemed surprised that I should have forgotten! Hadn't she told us weeks ago that the world needed a new cookery book, modelled entirely to suit post-war needs? She was now engaged in writing that much-wanted work; and the more thought she devoted to it, the more fascinating did the subject become.

"What are you going to call it?" I asked her.

"I've thought of one or two good titles. I mean it to be especially useful to the 'new poor'—those women with refined tastes who have lost their incomes, and consequently have to run their households with little or no outside help."

"That also applies to many who have not lost all their income!" I remarked.

"True! And I shall have no objection whatever to those who still have a little money left buying my book. But what I am anxious to emphasize is the fact that I am not intending this for the wives of the war profiteers and our New Aristocracy."

"Don't worry about that," Ursula advised her; "they all keep chefs. And in any case, I expect the majority of them cannot read. So get on to your title."

"I thought of calling it *Modest Menus for Minute Menages*. Or, if that doesn't appeal to you, what about *Food Fantasias for Famished Folk*?—that wouldn't be a bad title, would it?"

"I can't judge of the suitability of the title until I know something of the contents of the book," I told her. "Are you going to make it a complete guide to cookery, or only a series of menus for the everyday meals of small households?"

"I'm not intending to arrange it on conventional lines; it will be a collection of culinary thoughts and ideas jotted down as they occur to me. I'm getting on splendidly, as you see"—introducing with the point of her pencil the pages that were flapping protestingly under the stones. "I've discovered that the secret of success is to start any treatise on cookery with a larder full of the remains of good meals made from some one else's cookery book; then you can do anything! For instance, I begin on Monday with lunch —

> Take the remains of the lobster from last night's supper, likewise the cold asparagus left from yesterday's dinner; cut into suitable portions, and lay daintily on crisp lettuce leaves with a little mayonnaise and paprika. This makes an appetizing and nourishing first course containing —— calories out of the —— calories that every adult should consume at this meal.

"I'll have to look up the number of calories, as I've no notion what they ought to be, or whether there are any in it; but I notice writers of cookery articles make it up in calories when the recipes are uneatable, so I conclude people enjoy it. And I don't quite remember what paprika is, but it is mentioned respectfully in all the high-class daily paper recipes, so I don't suppose it will hurt any one if I put it in here."

"But supposing there wasn't any lobster left over from supper?" Ursula was always practical.

"Er—yes! I must allow for that, of course. I'll add"—interpolating a note on her MS.—

> If there is not sufficient of the lobster left to suffice for Monday's lunch, remember to order a larger one next time.

"That makes it quite plain, doesn't it? Then for dinner on Monday evening I'm giving them asparagus soup, made from the water in which the Sunday asparagus was boiled, with the addition of a gill of cream. I can't remember much about a gill, though I fancy I came across it in my multiplication tables; and I've never met any one who used gills, but it seems to be the correct language of cookery books, so I've put it in—also

cream; you'd think the whole earth kept cows to see the amount of cream they use in printed recipes; but of course it doesn't cost anything to use it on paper, and that's why I included it here; and it ought to be a nourishing soup."

"Is that all you're going to allow them for dinner?" I asked her.

"Oh, no. 'Salmon soufflé' follows, made from the salmon remaining from Sunday's dinner——"

"But this diet is far too exotic for the New Poor," her sister objected. "You know quite well that neither our stomachs nor our purses could stand salmon and lobster taken serially like this. Aren't you including any plain virtuous dishes that the humble could rise to?"

"Plenty of them. I was going on to tell you that after the soufflé there is 'Ragout à la printemps,' made from the remains of Saturday's roast beef, and any cold cooked vegetables that may be in the larder. Of course, I shall vary things as I proceed; but I'm now giving you an idea of my general scheme in order that we may decide on the title of the book. I can work so much better if I settle my title early."

"I should call it *Fried Frivol and Boiled Blessings*," said Ursula; "it's simple and direct."

"Don't suggest it to her," I protested. "She will be dividing the book into sections, such as *Minced Mercies*, and *Jugged Joys*! The fact is, the alliteration of 'Bella Bellairs' has affected your brain."

"Oh, don't drag in Bella," said Virginia. "This book at least shall be free from her shadow."

"I'm not so sure about that! If you are going to stay on here after I'm gone, to write it, I fear you will have Bella's substance as well as her shadow. That's what I came to tell you—she declines to go!"

"Naturally! So would I if you would continue to provide me with so happy a home, and some one would pay me five guineas per week for living in it."

"Well, I'm going back to town to-morrow, and propose to leave you to deal with her," I said.

"Really? Do you mean it?" they both exclaimed cheerfully. "We've been wishing you would. Only we hesitated about giving you notice to leave your own house! But as you have decided on it yourself, we're only too delighted to take a hand."

"How will you get rid of her?" I asked.

"Haven't the faintest idea," said Virginia. "But go she is going!—and before very long, too. By the way, you said you wanted her room papered. We can put that in hand for one thing. But in any case ways and means are sure to be forthcoming, now you are giving us a free hand."

We had a visitor that day to lunch. Miss Primkins is a charming elderly lady, who usually has a worry when she calls, that she is anxious to discuss with me. Yet she is always so diffident, and so cautious in coming to her point, that I have to do quite a lot of talking myself in order to get her to explain. But she is such a lovable, unselfish woman, one cannot smile at the triviality of her anxieties—they are very real to her, and are usually the outcome of a sincere desire to live only for the best things.

This time she asked me, in mysterious low tones, what were the symptoms of spiritualism? She was so afraid she had caught it! And it worried her terribly, because she knew from all she had read about it—and she had read a good deal lately—that spiritualism was *very* dangerous.

By devious paths, I at last learnt that Miss Primkins had occasionally seen suggestions of faces in the pattern of the wall-paper; sometimes, also, in the carpet design; and the clouds—if you looked at them long enough—often seemed like huge figures. But it was the wall-paper that bothered her the most; some roses and festoons on her bedroom wall seemed just like a man making a grimace if you looked at them one way. She had not liked to mention it to any one else—people *do* talk so; but she felt sure I would be quite frank with her.

I was. And the dear woman was much relieved to hear that we all find faces in our wall-paper when we have time to study it. And I managed to get her to stay to lunch. She said my re-assuring information had given her quite an appetite.

And throughout that meal Bella coughed in a most harrowing manner, obviously intended to enlist the stranger's sympathy. Miss Primkins expressed polite concern—though one could see she was no more in love with Bella than we were!

"You evidently caught cold through being out in that thin blouse last night," said Ursula.

Bella was indignant at such a suggestion. *She* knew where she had caught the cold—it was through being put into a damp bed the first night she arrived. She had felt it on her ever since.

I was speechless with amazement at the insinuation. But Virginia spoke up sharply—

"There wasn't a vestige of dampness about that bed, Miss Snoggs. I had been sleeping in it for several days before I turned out of it for you. And if it had been damp, you would have developed a cold before this."

Conversation was strained for the rest of the meal.

Bella was one of those people who, while they have not the slightest hesitation in asking for favours, promptly hate the one who bestows them. Jealousy is, of course, at the bottom of this objectionable characteristic; those who have benefited have not the Christian grace of gratitude which would prompt them to thank for any benefits received; they merely resent the fact that another person was in a position to bestow advantages which they themselves lacked. Likewise they hope, by belittling the kindness shown, to depreciate its worth and reduce the size of their obligation!

It is a despicable trait, but by no means rare; moreover, it lies behind a phrase one often hears in everyday life: "And to think she should treat me so, after all I did for her!"

It is worth noting, when we are apt to grow weary with attempts at casting bread upon the waters, that the promise is only that we shall find it after many days. It is a most exceptional case that turns up smilingly grateful in the immediate future!

I admit that sometimes one asks for trouble by being over-officious in one's good intentions. When I was in my teens I rather prided myself on my gifts as an Intermediary. I felt I was especially strong on explaining husbands and wives to each other, and helping them to adjust their differences; and also in getting family feuds amicably settled.

For some time I had desired to establish sisterly love between two mothers-in-law who were at daggers drawn. I felt sure it was embittering the lives of the son and daughter, just starting on their married career, to know that their respective mothers hadn't a good word to say for each other; and I marvelled how the young couple could go smiling on their way amid conditions so harrowing—and such clean respectable people, too!

At last my opportunity came. One mother-in-law was dangerously ill and not expected to recover. I was on my way to leave some flowers and beef-tea at her cottage, when I met the other in the lane. I told her how serious was the latest news of her enemy, and begged her to go with me to call, as a last kind act to the dying, enlarging on the remorse she would feel later if she did not make this advance towards reconciliation, before it was too late. Finally she agreed to accompany me, if I would wait a moment while she got into her new bonnet and best jacket. When we reached the sick woman's house, my companion paused outside the gate, and said to me—

"But looks 'ee here, miss; this visit ain't to count nothing if her gets better! I'm only agoin' on the understanding that her baint long for this world. But I'd like her to see this bonnet afore she goes."

Needless to say, her did get better; in fact, I believe it was the sight of her old enemy actually in her very bedroom that made her determine to get about again, so as to have the matter out with her!

Anyhow, the visit certainly didn't "count nothing"; they were more antagonistic than ever afterwards, and each blamed me for my kind offices.

The invalid said I had brought that hussy, all decked out up to the nines in her Sunday best on a Thursday morning, a-prying and a-spying on her when she was laid out helpless on her back.

The other said I had taken her there to be insulted black and blue to her very face as she never thought to be spoken to this side the grave.

And even the son and daughter only grudgingly forgave me, with this caution—

"I wouldn't meddle with 'em, miss, if I was you; it seems a pity to deprive the two old ladies of the one little pleasure they've got in life."

After dinner Bella came to me with a proposal that she should rent the cottage from me.

"I really feel too ill to go in search of rooms" (more violent coughing); "so if you will name your charges, I will pay you to let me remain here till I am fit to move." She finished with a pathetic sigh that bore silent testimony to my cruelty!

I told her I could not let her the house, as I had already promised to lend it to several people, and it would not be vacant for months; but I knew that

Mrs. Flabbers would be only too glad to accommodate her.

I realized in a flash that if she were once accepted as a paying tenant, I should never be able to get rid of her. And meanwhile my house might become the headquarters for no-one-knows-what undesirable clique! Bella was the type of person who would become organizing secretary for Bolshevist Lenin or the Ex-Kaiser himself, so long as a salary were guaranteed.

At teatime Abigail brought word that Miss Snoggs had gone to bed, as she didn't feel at all well, and she would like some tea and a poached egg.

Next morning the bulletin was to the effect that she was far too ill to get up. But as she ate a very good breakfast, looked quite normal, and only coughed when she heard footsteps in her vicinity, we did not think it serious.

When I went to her room to say good-bye to her before leaving for the mid-day train, I told her I was going to wire for the doctor, as I thought he ought to see her and advise. But at this she protested; said she would not see him if he came; assured me she only had a very slight cold (which was the truth!), and would be up and dressed by the afternoon.

I had guessed that her illness was merely feigned as a pretext for remaining on after I left. She seemed so certain that John's sisters were her allies, and that he himself would interfere, if the need arose, against her being turned adrift to face a callous, uncomfortable world, that would expect her to pay her way!

By the time the girls got back from seeing me off at the station, they found her downstairs all smiles, and very much better, thank you—in fact, nearly well.

"And now, what are we going to do?" she inquired, like a child who intends to have a good time now that its elders are cleared off the scene.

"That is just what I was going to ask you," said Virginia. "Of course, I don't want you to make your cold worse, but as you say yourself you are well enough to go out, I conclude you will be leaving to-morrow? Our hostess probably told you that the paper-hangers and white-washers are coming in on Monday and starting on your room first of all; so we must turn that out to-morrow."

"Oh, but I don't mind a little inconvenience like that," she replied cheerfully. "I can easily pack myself into another room, and I can give you a hand with the preparations."

Virginia smiled to herself; she had already seen Bella's method of giving a hand!

"I'm afraid there won't be another room available," she replied. "We shall be giving the house a thorough turn out, as our brother is coming down at the end of the month, and we want everything to be spic and span for his stay here, and this will make us very busy."

Bella became radiant (and entirely forgot to cough!). Of *course*, she must assist them with the work. She should start house-cleaning the very first thing in the morning. How delightful it would be to see him again! Would they be staying on with him? . . . *No!* . . . Then she should *certainly* stay to look after him. Mrs. Poddles would be no use without supervision. . . . Mrs. Poddles would not remain either? Then who *was* going to look after the house for him? He couldn't cook his own meals or do his own washing-up! . . . The servants were coming down from his flat? Well, they would need some one to oversight them, especially in a strange house.

And so on. Bella had an excellent reason at every turn as to why she should remain, and wound up with the kind assurance—

"I shall simply devote myself to making his stay pleasant for him. I know he will like to have me here, looking after things for him."

"I'm not so sure about that—though it is kind of you to offer," Virginia told her. "But as he is coming down here for his honeymoon, his wife will probably do all the necessary looking after."

Bella's cough returned with increased violence; and her health failed so rapidly that she soon retired once more to bed.

And all the while she was no nearer leaving. The two girls realized that they would have to devise new tactics if they were ever to get quit of her. But though they talked it over and over and over, no solution of the problem presented itself. And they went to sleep that night fully aware that Bella did not intend to budge for anything short of actual force; and when John and his bride arrived on the scene, they would probably find her waiting like a smiling hostess to receive them. Even the fact that John had married some one else would not deter Bella from clinging to any roof that was sheltering her free gratis.

Nevertheless a kindly fate was already working on our behalf. I had told the girls to open any letters that might come addressed to me, if they looked unimportant. Our life-long friendship has enabled them to recognize my private correspondence at a glance. Therefore, when a letter arrived for me

next morning, bearing a Bristol postmark and boldly emblazoned with the familiar letters F.E.W.V., they opened it without hesitation. It was from the dark lady, asking if Miss Snoggs was still with me; or, if not, could I supply her address?

"Since I saw you," the writer continued, "I have consulted our solicitors, and they strongly advise that we take action against Miss Snoggs to recover the money which she obtained from us by false representation." And some more to the same purpose.

The letter arrived at breakfast time, but, needless to say, Bella was not downstairs. She always came into the dining-room after every one else had left the table.

The girls conferred on the matter, and finally decided to leave the letter lying open on the table beside the tray, knowing that Bella's curiosity would compel her to read it when she came down to her own breakfast.

Leaving some hot coffee in readiness on the table, they placed the letter beside it, and then went off to dismantle one of the other rooms.

But that coffee was never touched. Bella seemed hardly to have got downstairs before they heard her hurry up again; and in an incredibly short space of time she slipped out of the back door, first with one suit-case and then another, leaving them at a cottage along the lane, while she got a wagonette from the village to take them and the rest of her luggage from the farm to the station.

And that was the last we saw of her.

Though not the last that we heard of her! A week or so later she sent a parting blessing in the form of two postcards that were most characteristic of the pettiness of her nature. Each bore her signature, but as the only address she gave was "London," it was evident they were sent merely with the hope that others might read them and thereby cause us annoyance.

One postcard was addressed to me at my office. It said: "I have been seriously ill with pneumonia owing to your treatment of me; I consider you should pay my heavy doctor's bill. And the *next* time you ask people to come and stay with you, I should advise you not to put them into a damp bed."

The second postcard was addressed to Ursula at the cottage. In a large, bold hand was written: "When you have quite done with my tea-gown that you borrowed, perhaps you will kindly return it to me, as I should like to have it back before you have quite worn it out."

Thus and thus was the passing of Bella.

Bee-Balm and Bergamot

Some people seem only to know three scents—Eau-de-Cologne, Lavender Water, and Parma Violet (or Wood Violet; it depends on the label on the bottle). Others appear to be even more circumscribed, and get no farther than Patchouli.

In addition, there is the lady who remarked, when I picked and handed her a purple-black shoot of the peppermint: “How strongly it is scented with bull’s-eyes!”

Yet in this England of ours, where the sun sets in a watery grave half the year, with large patches of fog and damp and grey-gloom spread about the other half, we crave bright colours and sweet scents nearly as much as we crave food and warmth. If you doubt this, notice how the average town girl, who is deprived of so much that is natural and wholesome, chases after gaudy garments and radiates strong perfume, good, bad, or indifferent, according to her taste and her purse. Think what abominable odours cities produce; the worst of all being the nameless stupefaction that is the result of air being used over and over again, by a legion of lungs. Is it any wonder that town dwellers try to stifle some of it with manufactured scents, since they are cut off so hopelessly from the scents of the open?

But even when gardens are available, it is surprising how limited is the general knowledge of nature’s perfumes. Of course we can all name violets, wallflowers, honeysuckle, hawthorn, hyacinths, lilies, and lilac; these have a popular reputation, and deserve every bit of it. But when you have added sweet peas, lavender and jasmine, you will find you have probably exhausted the list of flower-perfumes known to the generality of people—not forgetting to mention the rose. We are all sure we know the scent of the rose! But do we?

Roses have almost as many different scents as they have colours. That of the damask rose is warm, intense, and heavy, and is held in the leaves and stem as well as in the blossoms, so that your fingers are scented by the mere act of gathering a bunch. Some of the old-fashioned white roses are keenly sweet with almost an acid touch; moss-roses are spicily warm; the dear little white Scotch briar is wonderfully suggestive of bergamot; tea-roses have a clean refreshing scent; that of the pink wild rose is shy and delicate; certain deep crimson roses have an almost overpowering luxurious perfume that corresponds with the richness of their colouring; and one could devote pages

to the scent of roses alone, and then only come to a full-stop because of the difficulty of finding words that convey an adequate idea of perfumes.

I would suggest to those nature-lovers who have never given this matter especial thought, that a most fascinating pursuit is the tracking out of the lesser-known scents of our wild and garden flowers; and added zest lies in an endeavour to classify them; though the majority defy classification. Nevertheless, it is interesting to try to group them.

Take the clove-scented flowers, for instance. One immediately thinks of pinks and carnations, of course, though all pinks and carnations are not clove-scented; the modern varieties have had to forego something in order to develop in fresh directions; and in most cases the perfume has been sacrificed to size or colour. But if you can get hold of the old-time red or white clove-carnation, it has one of the most exquisite of flower perfumes.

In the same category, and belonging to the same family, is the Sweet William. One of the easiest flowers to rear, it ought to be cultivated extensively for its delightful scent, no less than for its beautiful flowers. Last year I had over a thousand blooms on my Flower-Patch among the hills, in nearly forty varieties of colours and markings, ranging from pure white with pale green stems and leaves, to the deepest claret-colour with dark purple stems, and rich red-veined leaves. And the scent when the sun was on them was something to be remembered. They seed themselves, and come up year after year in all sorts of places, including the paths and the crevices in the stone steps.

Another clove-scented flower to add to this list is the friendly Sweet Rocket—hardiest of the hardy, and generously liberal in the way it sows itself broadcast. And of course one could not overlook the clove-scented stocks; they are such old favourites. Also some of the petunias have a decidedly clove-like perfume.

The Bean and Pea family is more than generous in the matter of perfume. The bean field itself stands unrivalled, when its white and black blossoms are out, and the summer-wind sweeps lightly over its surface. The wistaria, which belongs to this family, is particularly lavish in the matter of scent. The laburnum is another delightful “grown-up” relation, and there is no need to do more than name sweet peas.

But there is one flower belonging to the bean tribe that is not cultivated as it deserves to be, and that is the Tree-Lupin. We cannot all accommodate bean-fields in our limited gardens; neither can we all afford space to grow the Catalpa tree, that fills the hot summer nights (when we have any) with a

scent so suggestive of the tropics. But the tree-lupin is a very good substitute, so far as perfume goes. It has the delicious sweetness of the broad-bean blossom, but gives more of it to the inch! One tree-lupin bush will give more scent for its size than most other bushes. Its tall spikes of bloom are so exceedingly handsome, and it will bear a second crop if the first is not allowed to seed, that one wishes it had a place in every garden. It seems to be a little delicate at times, but a slight protection for the roots in the winter will carry it through most. And if not, it produces such an abundance of seed, that new plants can be raised with little trouble. While speaking of lupins, the ordinary garden lupin has a warm scent that is pleasant, though it does not equal the tree variety.

In trying to classify scents, however, I think it is more interesting to group them according to quality rather than family, since flowers vary in their relations, as much as human beings do. You may get one really trying person in an otherwise quite pleasant family. Look at the ox-eye daisies, for instance. They are beautiful beyond description when gleaming dazzling white and gold in the sunshine, and their odour diluted and tempered in the outdoor air; but once they are gathered and taken indoors, they can make themselves very difficult for some people to live with! The camomile, again, is not always beloved in private life; yet if you come upon a field thick with camomile, basking in the September sunshine, the scent of it is anything but unpleasant, and the unknowing passer-by will sniff the air and say, “Most delightful! I wonder what it is?”

When you classify according to the quality or special characterization of the perfume, you find the botanical divisions often count for little. Take almond-scented flowers. One of the loveliest is a little wild flower belonging to the bean family, called white melilot. Yellow melilot is very plentiful, but the scented white is far less common so far as my observation goes; and few people seem to know it (apart from those who have made a special study of wild flowers). Unfortunately, it is a biennial, hence it disappears after its second summer. But the charm of this plant is its powerful fragrance when it is dry. Like the woodruff, it gives its best after death. Sometimes I have suddenly come upon a wonderful almond-like scent in a country lane; a little search reveals a spike of white melilot in the hedge bank, with small flowers, like a tiny vetch, often so inconspicuous that it might easily be ignored. But the bees never miss it!

Another almond-scented flower is the lovely little field convolvulus, that creeps unobtrusively along the ground, spreading its blooms in all directions.

Certain yellow calceolarias have an almond scent; likewise cinerarias; and some members of the Guelder Rose family. The small Sweet Clematis has an almond perfume. And this does not exhaust the list. Candy-tuft might come under this heading; and some would include hawthorn.

Lemon scents are less noticeable in flowers than in leaves; and surely there is nothing in the way of scented foliage quite so lovely as that of the bee-balm? The lemon-verbena is also a perennial joy; but the old-world balm is so persevering, so cheerful, and so accommodating; willing to grow anyhow and anywhere—it is the very embodiment of all the best of the homely virtues, with much grace of living thrown in!

Honey-scented flowers are fairly numerous; white clover and sweet alyssum come to mind at once, also lime blossoms and snap-dragons. And one particularly interesting flower, with the sweetest of honey-sweet scent, is the blossom of the beet; little-known to most of us, it will arouse memories in those who saw it, and smelt it, growing by the acre near the war-wrecked fields of Flanders and France.

The violet, we sometimes think, has no rival in the way of perfume. Yet the scent of the tall yellow mullein might easily be mistaken for the scent of the violet, were the two ever in bloom together (which they are not), so alike are they. A late flowering mignonette may be mistaken easily for an early-flowering violet, especially in the evening. Many a time in a misty September I have searched among the violet-leaves—themselves faintly scented in the early autumn and in the spring—thinking to find violets, and instead have discovered some late-lingering mignonette, mostly dangling little green seed-lanterns, but with here and there a tuft of flower.

I must not pass the mullein without saying a very special word in its favour. It is so beautiful (if it can be kept fairly free from soot!) When its thick milky-green leaves develop from the centre of a big rosette, shimmering with silvery hairs, it is unlike any other plant in the garden. And then, as it goes on lengthening, up and up, everything connected with it is interesting. Its stem is unlike the average plant, for there is no stem visible in the ordinary meaning of the word; the central “pillar” is formed throughout by the base of the leaves. This feature in itself is well worth noting. True, the tall spikes may not flower with the luxuriance of the foxglove and the larkspur, sometimes the yellow stars only open half a dozen at a time, and they close again before nightfall; but the combination of the yellow and the peculiar green of the foliage is particularly beautiful; and the scent of the flowers entitles them to special regard.

But this is not the end of its good qualities; it seems quite indifferent to such trifles as lack of soil, or a scarcity of moisture; and it seeds itself and comes up smiling elsewhere in due course, keeping itself permanently in any garden that will give it foothold, despite the fact that it is only a biennial. In the very middle of a firmly-rolled gravel path in my London garden a mullein seedling poked up a woolly-looking silver-green tuft of leaves. The gardener, being a man of great discernment, and knowing the peculiarities of my ideas on the subject of gardening, kindly left it there, and carefully steered the garden roller round it, rather than over it, as a less intelligent gardener would undoubtedly have done—or else he would have pulled it up. The mullein in question grew and grew, till it was five feet in height; and it blossomed energetically throughout the summer, and was the admiration of every visitor. Yet it had to forage for its own food somewhere down below the hot gravel path, for it had nothing else to live on!

And when it had finished flowering it scattered its seed in all directions, with the result that the paths and grass lawn and rock gardens bristled with young mulleins the following spring—no disadvantage, as they can easily be removed if not needed. But as it happened, the following year brought the worst drought I have known in London, and the poor garden almost disappeared. We had talked about weeding the multitude of mulleins from the paths and rockeries; but it did not get done, which was fortunate, for the only plants that throve in the furnace-like heat were the mulleins; they even did better than the geraniums. They did not make more than three feet of growth, but they spread themselves out over the hot, parched earth, beautiful both in foliage and in flower. And the only plants that survived on the rock gardens were those that managed to shelter under their thick, spreading leaves.

There is a large section of flowers with a light perfume, by no means overpowering in one solitary bloom, perhaps, but in the aggregate helping to make the air of the countryside a perpetual feast of incense. Primroses, violas, polyanthus, snowdrops would come under this heading. Sometimes apple-blossom has a very marked perfume, sometimes it belongs to the light evanescent order.

Other flowers, again, have hot scents, such as the geranium, or spicily aromatic like the beautiful bergamot—another flower that ought to be seen in every garden, both for its rich colouring and its equally rich scent.

Fruit loads the air with a quality quite distinct from the scent of flowers; raspberry canes will tell you this; wild strawberries fairly shout aloud of the lusciousness of the spoils, merely waiting to be gathered; and the scent of apples, when the first touch of autumn mist damps the grass in the orchard, is a real delight.

It is worth remembering that one of the advantages of a moist climate is the profusion of perfume it releases, not only from the flowers themselves, but also from buds and trees, grass and leaves, and from the very sand and soil of the earth itself. While it is true that the sun draws out scent from certain blooms, it is nevertheless a fact that a dry summer is a scentless summer, or one that is comparatively scentless. Have you ever sniffed the air near a sweetbriar bush after a shower of rain? If so, you will know what a difference the moisture can make.

Another point which helps to make the country air deliciously fragrant, is the fact that the larger proportion of flower scents are pleasant; only a few are unpleasant; and even these may not be disliked by all. My own two aversions are privet blossom and the horehound; the last I will not even touch with a glove on, so nauseating is its odour to me. Yet some people tell me they think the scent of the privet when in bloom is very beautiful; and I was walking in the woods with a friend gathering wild flowers, who handed me a spike of horehound, saying: “What is that? It has a delightfully aromatic scent.”

Tastes differ! as I said to a London school-boy who was visiting me at the Flower-Patch. I was commiserating with him on the number of nettle-stings that he had collected on his person during his first day’s tour of exploration.

“Oh, but I love ’em,” he said. “I think it’s simply ripping to lie in bed at night and feel nettle-stings all over your knees and hands; because then a fellow knows he’s in the real country, and won’t have to turn up and swat at school next morning.”

I don’t think anything could induce me to love the horehound, not even the joy of knowing that I had turned my back on town and was in the real country!

The dislike is ingrained with me, like my objection to the colour known as terra-cotta, which also makes me nearly bilious. And, as though to punish me for my unreasonable dislike, I was doomed for several years to work in a

large office that had a terra-cotta paper on the walls. And nothing I could do would lift the weight of those walls off my brain. No flowers looked well in the room, save white ones. And I had to buy white flowers twice a week from a near-by florist, in order to preserve my sanity.

But on one occasion I was away ill for a fortnight, and the lady proprietor of the florist's shop missed her regular customer who would never take anything but white flowers. When I returned, she politely hoped that all had been well with me, adding in a suitably lowered tone of voice, "Of course we would always send the flowers to the grave for you, if you were not able to take them yourself."

Various types of flower-scents develop, as a rule, in cycles. In our climate the year starts with faint wafts of delicate perfume from snowdrops and primroses. But Nature has important work to do at this season, and she needs the bees. Therefore, as soon as the weather is mild enough for them to come out, she calls aloud to them—not in words but in odours; she flings abroad a powerful penetrating perfume, a special spring incense, that predominates in the early sunshine months. You will know well the particular type of scent I mean. It is very decisive and full-bodied, "an ample odour," as I once heard it designated, with that peculiarly heavy quality that we associate with certain hot-house flowers. It is a type of scent that nearly vanishes in the summer months, giving place to those that are more lusciously sweet; though we find it occasionally in our summer garden—in the jasmine, for instance.

In spring-time, however, penetrating, heavy scents are found in many of the flowers, such as the hyacinth, mountain ash, lilac, narcissus, wistaria, and a little later in the syringa. Not that these scents resemble one another; they do not; but each has that strong far-carrying ingredient that sometimes makes the flowers oppressive in a small room. They are actually too overpowering when confined in a limited space.

But out of doors, where the wind flings them to right and to left, while the bluebells mingle their perfume with that of wallflowers, and blossoming hawthorns and mountain ash toss fountains of lovely odours to and fro across the garden beds, it seems as though nothing can equal this special gift of spring. And the bees feel this urgent summons; it is so insistent that it penetrates their hives, and urges one and all to bestir themselves without waiting for the weather to get warmer.

No one can resist this most pronounced, and at the same time the most subtle, call of spring. When once Nature's barometers, the gay yellow crocuses, their flowers have unfurled, proclaiming with mirth that the heart of the world is gold, pure gold, despite the rain and the cold, and the dark brown earth, then the incense of spring is upon us. It affects different creatures in different ways, though they all converge to the same end. The Brimstone butterfly flings aside its winter wraps and shakes out its yellow silk wings in the sunshine, just as the spring flowers shake out their fragile-looking petals. Yet it is worth noting, that whether it be the velvet of the pansy or the silk of the polyanthus, here you have material that never "spots" with the wet, never shrinks, never spoils in the rain; but after an April shower-bath, dries itself in the sun, and behold, in a few minutes, it is like new!—the most wonderful texture that was ever seen.

I, too, when the lilac suddenly shouts to me through the window, shake out my last summer's frocks, and wonder what renovations will be needed in order to make them serve another season—which is my poor feeble method of striving to bring myself into line with the beauty that is awakening around me.

The wasp sniffs the breeze that has blown over the bluebells, and busies herself about the building of an entirely new house, scraping away energetically at the wood of the old gate-post, in order to get the particular type of building material that she most fancies.

And the housewife, sensing the fact that the wallflowers are out, only wishes that she could renovate on equally drastic lines, for then she would cut her house down to two floors; eliminate half the stairs; put the sink near a window; move the dungeon that holds the kitchener somewhere into the light; have an electric switch in every cupboard; every shelf within hand-reach; pipes where they couldn't burst; a patent copper as per advertisements, where the clothes wash and rinse and blue and starch themselves, and then hang themselves out on a bright always sunny clothes-line, while the owner (feminine gender) reclines in a hammock and reads an entrancing book—and many other such-like useful improvements. But failing this, she sends off to the house decorator; and then, because every other woman has done the same, owing to the spring incense, she drags through weary weeks of "nothing doing," with a house turned upside down, while a few men take a leisurely but an all-enveloping possession of her premises.

"Oh, to be a wasp!" she sighs (if she knows anything about the simplified methods pursued by these creatures). In reality she is more of a

wasp than she quite realizes; we women all are at spring-cleaning time! Nevertheless it is our poor feeble way of voicing our desire for purity and sanity and healthy living, combined, if possible, with new beauty and added brightness. We are striving after ideals that the incense of spring has awakened in our hearts and minds (and the man of the house would do well to make a note of this!).

With the oncoming of the warmer weather there is no need for the flowers to call lustily to the bees to leave their snuggeries in the hives. They are out from early till late, thousands upon thousands of them. No need for the summer flowers to call them. Whereas the spring flowers are soon over; the apple-blossom may fall in a week, ten days seems about the life-limit of the average spring flower, and unlike the roses and canterbury bells, the violas and the sweet peas, there is no succession of bloom on the hyacinths or mountain ash; no hope of a further crop of blossoms if the bees fail to fertilize the first. Hence the need for that peremptory summons so soon as the blossoms open.

Softer scents will answer for the summer when the bees are all abroad and keenly alert to everything appertaining to the flower world. But such delicate odours might not reach the bees when congregated in the hive, or if they did, they might be mistaken for the scent of the newly-turned earth; whereas no one, not even a human, would confuse the penetrating essence of the may-tree with the more subdued fragrance of rich brown furrows.

Scents are the most potent of all reminders. They hold the longest memories, and will carry one back to scenes long forgotten, and conjure up sights and sounds, from the dim past, with an instantaneous accuracy that is nothing short of amazing.

On one occasion, we had a visitor at the Flower-Patch, a grey-haired man whose life is spent in the pursuit of learning of an irreproachable character, combined with the organization of good works that are world-wide in their fame. His face was kindly polite, but absolutely non-committal, when he arrived at the Flower-Patch. He looked attentively at anything I pointed out in the way of scenery or vegetation; he agreed instantly with everything I said, but volunteered no opinion of his own. I concluded he was bored but resigned.

As I was taking him round the place, our walk led us along a narrow path which, like most of our paths, was bordered with a low wall on one

hand to keep the earth above from rolling down the steep hillside. Of course the wall is well stocked, as are most of the local walls. This one supports a tall red ribes, quite a colony of sweet-williams, a black-currant bush, bunches of purple and white honesty, a velvety wine-coloured snapdragon, a clump of horseradish (that waved its charming white flowers above the black-currant bush that served as support), several evening primroses, little knots of wild strawberries, money-wort (better known as "penny pies"), with a variety of other lovely trimmings growing on top, or sprouting from the many interstices among the stones. The path itself is three feet lower than the top of the wall, whereas the garden above is level with the top; hence the soil washes down and into the wall, and you cannot tell where the flowerbed ends and the wall begins.

My guest was courteously walking close to the wall, in order to give me the centre of the path, when he suddenly stopped, and said, "What is that?"

As he was merely looking into space and sniffing, I was unable to assist him without more details; but I hastily wondered whether he had seen a hedgehog or a stoat. Or had he been stung by a wasp? and if so, would he know how to apply the blue-bag if I gave it to him? He really looked too learned to know anything.

But he remained at a stand-still gazing round, remarking, "I wonder *what* it is? Most delightful! Indeed, I don't know when I have come across it before—not since I was a boy!" (I wished he would give the mystery a name!) "It reminds me of the time——" (sniff). "There it is again. Don't you notice it? So fragrant and aromatic. Why, it takes me right back to my childhood, and the rare occasions when we had roast duck for dinner; my mother would open the oven door and let us watch while she turned the baking-dish round. I can recall the scent of it to this day."

Then I understood.

"You are leaning half against the sage and half against the thyme," I pointed out to him. "Our sage bush on the wall is getting itself quite renowned. It spreads for fifteen feet in one direction, and is nine feet across. All this is sage, you see." And I ran my hand over the big sweep of lovely grey leaves that completely clothed the stones, thereby raising fresh reminiscences of the delights of pre-war cookery. "And this mass of pale mauve bloom is our thyme bush; it measures about three feet each way, but gives a tremendous amount of flavour and scent for its size. Put this in your coat pocket"—as I gathered a handful of the wiry stems.

"Really delicious," he murmured dreamily, as he held the little bunch to his nose and then put it almost reverently into his pocket "*How* it takes me back! And another thing interests me about it"—returning suddenly to earth again—"I never knew before that herbs were assessed by lineal measure. If you had asked me, I should have concluded that they were assessed by avoirdupois."

One very curious point about the perfume of flowers is the fact that it may vary, or disappear entirely, sometimes for no apparent reason.

I have already mentioned that scent has often been sacrificed to some abnormal development. We know that Nature invariably strikes an even balance, and if a plant is asked for excess production in one direction, it has to retrench or economize in another.

If we require very large chrysanthemum blooms, we can only obtain a few from each plant; if we require each plant to produce a great number of blooms, then the individual flowers will be small. If a fruit tree bears an unusually large crop one year, the probability is that it will have next to no fruit the following year. And by the same law of balance, if a scented flower is required to expend special energy on some new development—perhaps a single flower is required to spend extra strength on growing double blooms, or an effort is being made to increase the size of the flowers—then the probability is that the perfume will disappear; Each plant has only a certain amount of strength allotted to it, and if an extra amount be used in one direction, it will show weakness in another.

Of course, it is possible to concentrate on the perfume; but, unfortunately, in seeking to develop size and unusual colours in flowers, horticulturists have sadly neglected to watch their perfume and save this from deterioration. As a result, many flowers that formerly emitted a very pronounced perfume, are now largely scentless, owing to specialized cultivation.

More remarkable, however, is the case of the musk. Here we have a plant that for generations has been celebrated for its very distinctive odour—a pot of musk used to be something quite apart from every other plant indoors or out. It was developed in some directions, and the scent

diminished in the new varieties, which was not surprising, since size was increased.

But one day some one noticed that the old original small musk had not so much odour as in the past. Presently it was found that the scent of our English musk had disappeared entirely, even the old-fashioned musk that had not been developed. Growers in various districts compared notes, and found that they were all in the same predicament. Beds of musk, which formerly had been very fragrant, with one accord became scentless!

At first it was thought that something in our soil, or in our air, had wrought the change. But further investigation revealed the astonishing fact that musk all over the world seemed to lose its scent at the same time, and specimens obtained from the United States of America, the original home of our English musk were equally scentless.

Enquiries have been made in all parts of the country in order to try and discover some plant with the old-time perfume; some horticulturists have offered rewards for plants. The children sent into the country through the agency of certain Holiday Funds have all been asked to try to find some scented musk. I myself have inquired for it in all sorts of out of the way places—and I have received many gifts of musk in response to my inquiries; but they were all odourless, and so far I have not heard of a solitary specimen of scented musk being found, despite the search.

And the cause of the disappearance of this unique perfume remains a total mystery.

Beautiful as are the odours of the flowers—whether they are the virile scents of spring blossoms, or the sweeter and more spicy perfumes of the summer flowers, or those of the slightly bitter quality that prevail in the autumn, there comes a time when the nature-lover discovers that there are other scents that excel even these, and that Divine Skill works in wonderfully varied ways, adding perfection to perfection, and giving beauty for ashes in a thousand unsuspected directions.

The scent of the mown grass is in itself a benediction to the town-weary soul; we have all met it at one time or another, though every one may not know that the special perfume of new mown hay is due to the presence of Sweet Vernal grass, which is known officially as *Anthoxanthum odoratum*—an alarming-looking name for so sweet and innocent a plant! I only mention it here in case any reader, who loves the scent as much as I do, might care to

purchase some seed and sow a little grass plot specially for its most delectable odour when cut.

Then there is a whole range of aromatic scents that will outlast most of the summer flowers. When we have to say good-bye to our Flower-Patch and return to London, my husband's last act is always to go round the garden and gather a bouquet, which consists of sprigs of rosemary, lavender, sage, thyme, majoram, bee-balm, myrtle, and cotton lavender. We leave the sweetbriar and the bay, because we have plenty of those in London. That bouquet lasts us many days; and still more lingering is the perfume of the rosemary and balm which we always put in our coat pockets. These are scents that carry remembrance and healing indeed!

Rosemary and balm are so easily grown, I often wonder that they are not given more space in the town garden, since every one does not crave an unbroken expanse of scarlet geraniums for their garden plot! If you grow rosemary, remember that the way to sample its perfume is to take a spray in your hand near its base; then draw the hand upwards, stroking the backs of the leaves all the way up the stem. This does not injure the plant if done carefully and not too frequently. Meanwhile your hand will be saturated with its wonderful aroma.

It is a good plan to grow such aromatic plants near your door; a leaf is then always available in passing. I have known many people who kept a favourite scent near at hand in this way. One friend has a walnut tree in her garden for the sake of its scented leaves; another I know, who has a bay tree trained against the wall beside her door; and yet a third has peppermint and thyme near the edge of the border, because the perfume of each is so appealing in the outdoor air.

Other delightful scents are to be found in the vicinity of a field of turnips; in the smoke of burning apple wood; also when the spring sap rises in the larches and the sun draws out their characteristic odour.

The opening leaf-buds of spring exhale a tonic that has revived many a fainting heart. The summer dew on moss and fern gives rise to a perfume that is all its own.

Most people have a favourite perfume; and it is well that we do not all choose alike, otherwise the world would soon be lacking its present fascinating variety. If I were asked to name mine, I should select two—though it is hard to make a selection from so much that is lovely.

First I would name the scent of the wood of the deodar tree.

Many people lay lavender among their linen, others prefer orris root. Both are delightfully reminiscent of flower gardens. But I myself have a special affection for the scent of deodar and the other cedar woods. It is so refreshing and suggestive of forests of old, with ancient trees that have lived for centuries aloof from men, and utterly apart from all man-made futilities. Coming down the years it seems to have gathered to itself the unmatchable odour of the earth, and the combined scents of a thousand flowers that would have sprung from the earth, if a tree had not been there instead. To these delicious perfumes it adds a touch of far-off sea-breezes, and the clear air of distant moorlands, brought perhaps by the wind that is for ever tossing its branches—but who can tell where the scent of the cedar was garnered?

I only know that when I place a log from our old tree in the fender near the fire, the whole house is redolent of powerful incense. And if I put in my linen cupboard and drawers no more than a few chips or a handful of the sawdust from the heap in the woodhouse, made when the tree was sawn up, the very towels seem to soothe and caress the tired lines from one's forehead, and transport one right away from life's turmoil—and such annoyances as the modern laundry—to the dim, silent woods, steeped in the fragrance of which only the conifers and cedars know the secret.

And when at night the faint thrill of the cedar wood comes to one from pillow-slips and sheets, sleep seems such an easy, natural process, and the insomnia that haunts one in London becomes nothing more than a far-off nightmare, so wondrously does the scent appeal to tired brain and weary body.

And as a final selection, is there anything more delicately beautiful than the scent of newly-turned sweet earth, especially earth that is rich in leaf mould? I do not mean the sad dank stuff we have in towns, nor the morbid odour of a half-decayed heap of vegetation! Anything but this! Neither do I refer to the bitter tang of newly-fallen leaves that are drenched with autumn rains.

To know the scent of the earth at its best, one needs to walk behind the plough on a sunny spring day, following the freshly-turned furrows. Or one should dig deep in garden soil that has been lying, through the winter, open to clean air, which means in addition clean rain; and if there be mixed with this some of the mahogany-brown mould that results from layer upon layer of the leaves of beech, oak, birch, and elm—but especially beech and oak—that have been left in nature's hands for a few years, to be softened by the

snow and rain, purified by the wind, and pulverized by the frost, the scent arising from this can be equalled by no other compound, for it seems to speak, in some subtle way, of the hopes and longings of the ages, suggesting desires that go beyond the material things of the moment, reaching out to unknown shores.

God placed man first of all in a world teeming with beauty, that called neither for intervention nor production on his part. But when he failed to be satisfied with the wealth of loveliness with which he had been surrounded, his environment was changed. Yet he was not utterly deprived of beauty. It was still to be had for the seeking, but it had to be sought diligently and often with tears.

Man's first task, we are told, was to dig; but what is not recorded is the fact that the Lord deliberately provided balm and recompense even here; for in turning the sod man released beauty in various directions. And still to-day, the earth gives back to us far more than we put into it of labour; and not the least of its gifts is the warm, invigorating scent that suggests the perfume of all that grows therefrom. For the essence of the sweetness of all flowers is in the earth from which they spring.

To some it may seem that the scents and colours and quiet aspects of Nature are too trivial to be worth any special attention, apart from their utilitarian and commercial uses. And others may say that while there are such serious problems demanding solution, as those with which we are faced at the moment, it is but waste of valuable time to be discussing the pleasant sights and sounds and scents of the outdoors.

Nevertheless, the only remedy for the present world-sickness—absolutely the only remedy—is a return to the simple rules for living as laid down by our Lord Jesus Christ. And among the few that He formulated for humanity's guidance (and they were amazingly few in number considering how far-reaching and comprehensive was their purpose!) none is more necessary at this time than His injunction to study God's work in Nature, rather than spend one's life in chasing after glare, and clutching at tinsel, and worrying about the acquisition of possessions, that bring little but anxiety in their train.

And such was the marvellous depth in all our Lord's utterances, that now, nearly two thousand years after He told His followers to study the flowers and watch the birds, we are discovering that the health and mental sanity of the civilized races depends largely on their opportunities for considering the lilies and beholding the birds of the air. If the seething masses, hemmed in by city walls, could but be given space and air and all that goes to the making of flowers and the upkeep of the wild birds, a good deal of the social ferment, the revolt and the unrest, of to-day would vanish; and though one knows that here and there a diseased mind would still seek to disseminate anarchial poison, if the bulk of the population could have clean air, wholesome surroundings, and the chance to indulge in Adam's trade—for a love of digging and gardening is inherent in most of us, as witness the allotment boom during the war—the majority of people would be healthier and consequently happier, and less prone to hunt for grievances.

Although some distance may seem to separate the growing of potatoes on an allotment from the cultivation of the æsthetic enjoyment of flowers and their perfumes, the two things are more nearly related than is at first apparent; and many an allotment holder of recent years, in addition to producing food (always a desirable objective), has found new and absorbing interest in studying the methods and the vagaries of plant life.

Not only those in straitened circumstances, but also the wealthy and the worldly-wise need to leave the clang and clamour of modern social conditions and listen for the still, small Voice that speaks to us through God's Handiwork in the quiet places of the earth.

There is no cure for the hysteria, the excitability, the restlessness, and the highly strung nerves, that flood our cities as the result of the unwise spending of too much money, other than a course of outdoor life; and if the over-wrought mind can be induced to detach itself from artificial pleasures and centre on the natural beauty that abounds in any flower-strewn spot, the cure will be rapid, and a normal balance soon regained. But, unfortunately, the disease in time makes the victim unable to recognize natural beauty, or to see aught but the dullest of boredom in a life spent in healthy pursuits.

Yet it occasionally happens that a sick person has a real craving for the very medicine it actually needs. And at the present time there is a universal craving for things appertaining to outdoors and rural scenes—for anything, in fact, that is suggestive of the simple enjoyments of country life. Manufacturers and advertisers are always alert to note the trend of public taste; hence we find the old-fashioned country cottage taken as the model for most furnishing items, with wheel-back chairs, Welsh dresser, gate-legged

table, rush mats, and a warming-pan all complete; while no sketch of an interior so much as recognizes that the modern sash window exists! Every architect's drawing, even of a proposed workman's model dwelling for Bethnal Green, will show diamond-paned casement windows with extensive moorland or lake-side scenery beyond! While the condensed town flat has its electric light disguised in an old horn lantern, a pair of bellows hanging beside the gas fire in the drawing-room, and its electric fire simulating larch logs in the grate (a truly pathetic substitute, no matter how labour-saving it may be!).

Equally with a desire to fall into line with the present craving for Nature, our dress colours are no longer "nigger" or "rust," they have become "Autumn leaves," "fuchsia," "Kingfisher," and "watercress." Our tea-shops in the most exclusive quarters strive after the "farm-house kitchen" effect; while occasionally an enterprising tradesman sends round the milkman wearing a smock, or labels his margarine "woodpigeon brand."

All such tendencies (even though the worked-out result is sometimes ludicrous) are welcome indications of a desire on the part of a large section of the community to return to life that is less hectic than that engendered by war-profits! Anything that will help people to develop an interest in Nature should be fostered; and one of the surest and most direct appeals is that made through the sense of smell. Give any one a bunch of jasmine or a handful of honeysuckle, and watch the result!

It is very easy to specialize on the cultivation of scented flowers, since many of our sweetest perfumes belong to sturdy, easily-grown plants—such as the wallflower, lilac, sweet alyssum, and syringa. Even a window-box will provide delight the summer through if it be filled with heliotrope or mignonette.

From time immemorial, the scent of the cedars of Lebanon, and the odours of spikenard, frankincense, and myrrh, have been reckoned among Earth's most precious things. And whether one grows scents oneself, or can only track them when growing out of doors, there is immense pleasure to be derived from either recreation. For in seeking the scent of the wild flowers, one finds, unfailingly—balm; while in providing perfume that can be shared by others, one is shedding broadcast—bergamot.

THE END

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Mrs. Florence L. Barclay said:

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especially, this book would be a great favourite. But, speaking for myself, I have read it with great pleasure."

Coulson Kernahan says:

" 'The Flower-Patch among the Hills' (I have found it infinitely more interesting than a novel) is as little like a biography as a public meeting is like an intimate visit to some beautiful and notable English home. By the magic of her pen the accomplished writer charms and carries us as directly away to the lovely flowerland and fairyland of her cottage among the hills and valleys of the Wye, as of old men and women were whisked across the sea and land by placing themselves on the magic carpet about which we read in the pages of the 'Arabian Nights.' To write of one's self, one's surroundings, one's very furniture and possessions, one's friends, one's thoughts and dreams, as well as of one's occupation (as everyone knows, Miss Klickmann's is that of the editor of the oldest and most successful of all the magazines for women and girls); and while writing, with never so much as a suspicion of egotism, to make the homely record intensely interesting, and even fascinating, is no easy task. It is a task which the editor of *The Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine* has accomplished triumphantly. Her book sparkles from cover to cover with exquisite and delightful humour, and with rare insight into character."

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"It is a book that I want to keep on my desk to dip into in odd moments, more especially when one is depressed. I congratulate you most sincerely and heartily upon a truly beautiful piece of work."

Dr. T. N. Kelynack says in "The Child":

"Here is a book for the needs of to-day. Miss Klickmann, amidst her strenuous journalistic endeavours, has found time to provide a work of high literary merit and one full of balm and healing for the many workers who are giving of their best in heart and head and hand. This happy, humorous, vivacious book is full of the scent of flowers, the hum of bees, the whims and fancies of cottagers, and through all its pages there are the restoring breezes of the hills and the gaieties of a heart at rest with God and all His creatures. There is in all a love and glory of life and an understanding of its opportunities and purposes. The book is one both for holidays and times of stress and strain, and for days of festivity and nights of sorrow. This charming volume is unique, and there is a fascination about its simple stories which no lover of England can resist. From first to last the book

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The "Spectator" says:

"Can any one imagine a more delectable place to live in than cottage perched on the hills overlooking the Wye Valley? We do not wonder that Miss Klickmann delighted in it, and felt constrained to write a book on its beauties. This she has done very pleasantly."

The "Athenæum" says:

"This is a cheerful book. The writer's friendly and unconventional manner, and her happy gift of humour, are likely to make a popular appeal."

The "London Quarterly Review" says:

"A breezy book. It sparkles from beginning to end with fun and kindly feeling, and the way in which the reader is taken into the author's confidence is delightful. We do not wonder that the book had to be reprinted within a fortnight after it was first issued."

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"Miss Klickmann cultivates country cottages and flower-gardens besides readers. One may predict with some confidence that the number of the latter will be increased materially after her last book has been perused. The author has not only a fluent pen and an agreeable style; she touches upon just those topics of work-a-day concern that appeal to the average mind, adding a flavour of homely philosophy and quiet humour, which save her reflections from any taint of dulness. Here she is at her best, for she writes of country life with all the spontaneous zest of the uncaged Londoner, and yet with the knowledge of life which only a capital city can provide. Those racked with the problems of war and business might seek many worse palliatives than a volume which transports the reader into a haven of peace which is quite unfaked."

The “Graphic” says:

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The “Western Morning News” says:

“It is a volume of well nigh unique charm, breezy, scent-laden and eminently delightful.”

The “Scotsman” says:

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The “Guardian” says:

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The “Saturday Review” says:

“An enthusiastic gardener, the author has also a great love for Nature. The rich flora of the Wye Valley affords her an opportunity for displaying her gifts of observation and description to much advantage.”

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“It is a pleasantly written, refreshing volume, and shows anew Flora Klickmann’s thorough knowledge of both Nature and human nature.”

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A Book for would-be Authors.

By FLORA KLICKMANN,

Author of “The Flower-Patch among the Hills,” “Between the Larch-woods and the Weir,” “The Trail of the Ragged Robin,” etc.

MATTERS TOUCHED UPON.

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“Great Thoughts” says:

“As one who was for many years himself an Editor, I have added not a little to my editorial knowledge by reading *The Lure of the Pen*. Equally as one who was once—and still in a sense is—a literary aspirant, and never too old to learn, I hope to prove a more capable and less troublesome contributor to my own many editors, as a result of studying Miss Klickmann’s summary of editorial requirement and responsibilities.”

Robert Benchley, in the “New York World,” comparing R. L. Stevenson’s “Learning to Write” with “The Lure of the Pen,” says:

“At first glance one might say that the betting would be at least eight to one on Stevenson. But for real, solid, sensible advice in the matter of writing and selling stories in the modern market, Miss Klickmann romps in an easy winner.”

London: 4, Bouverie Street, E.C.4, and at all Bookshops.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected or standardised.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been corrected or standardised.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustration by C. J. Vine has been omitted from this etext.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

[The end of *The Trail of the Ragged Robin* by Flora Klickman]