

"THE DIAL OF A SUMMER'S DAY."

By C. E. C. WEIGALL.

JUST one o'clock:  
In the meadows of hay,  
The reapers are reaping and singing to-day,  
And the swish of the scythe rings a glad  
roundelay.

Just two o'clock:  
Hush! yon babbling rill,  
The world lies a-drowsing, the reapers are still,  
And a shimmer of heat dances over the hill.

Just three o'clock:  
Said the hare by the stile,  
"The reapers are crafty—the reapers of Lisle."  
So he crept 'neath a dock-leaf and pondered  
awhile.

Just four o'clock:  
In the wild rose and clover  
The honey bee laughs, and dips over and over,  
And "peewit, 'tis hot!" pipes the petulant  
plover.

Just five o'clock:  
Twixt the moor and the sky,  
Where the far distant purple of heather doth lie,  
The arrowing curlews still hover and cry.

Just six o'clock:  
From the ivied church tower,  
The breeze carries upward the chime of the hour,  
Which the great bell is tolling with ponderous  
power.

Just seven o'clock:  
Drones the humble bee red,  
As he watches a cockchafer whizz over head,  
And fussily follows a neighbour to bed.

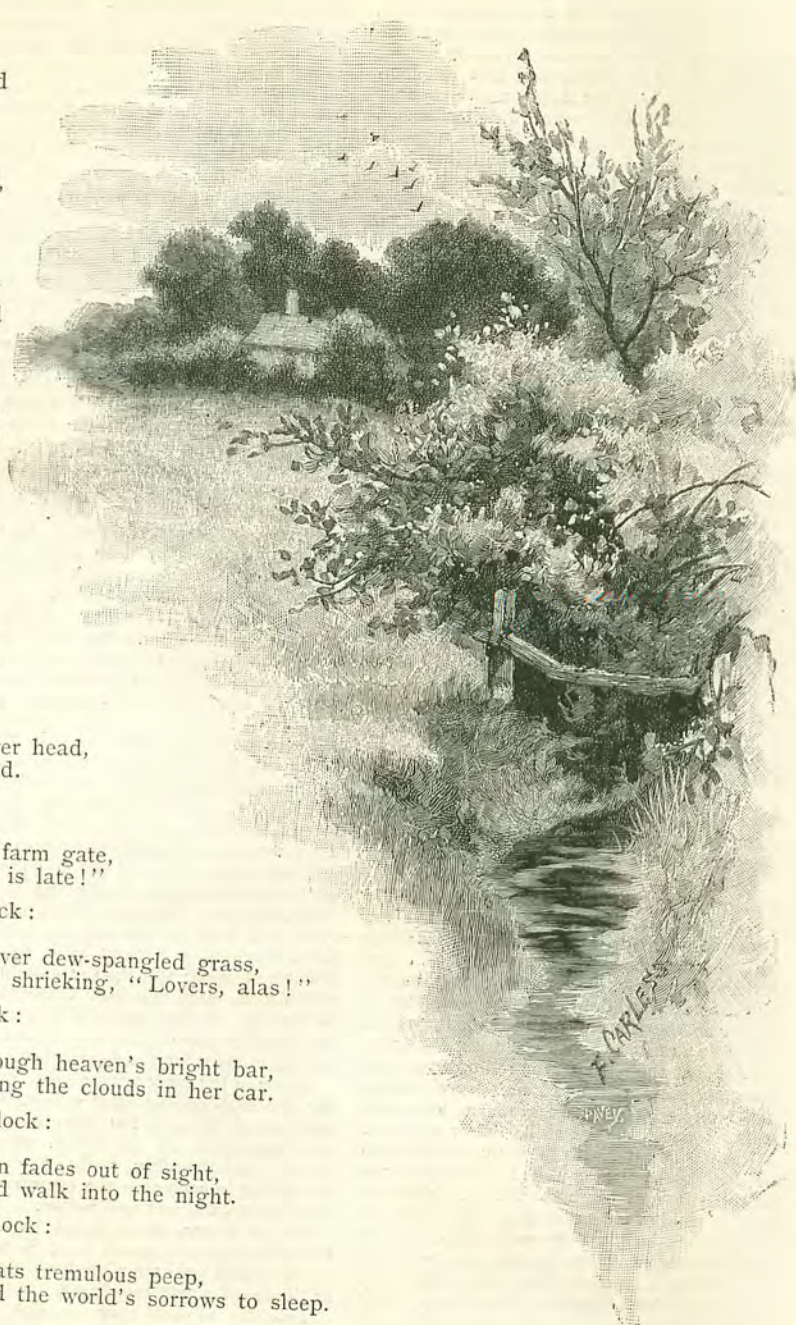
Just eight o'clock:  
As I watch and I wait  
In the gathering twilight, beside the farm gate,  
I know that the flowers say, "Mabel is late!"

Just nine o'clock:  
As we wander and pass,  
Hand in hand, lip to lip, over dew-spangled grass,  
We can hear the white owl shrieking, "Lovers, alas!"

Just ten o'clock:  
As we part 'neath a star,  
The angels are smiling through heaven's bright bar,  
And the new moon is rocking the clouds in her car.

Just eleven o'clock:  
In her window the light  
Flares redly an instant, then fades out of sight,  
And I turn with a sigh, and walk into the night.

Just twelve o'clock:  
On the motionless deep  
The lights of the fishing-boats tremulous peep,  
And the angels have hushed the world's sorrows to sleep.



THE WEALTH OF A WOOD IN JULY.

It is quite an ordinary wood; fifty or sixty acres clothing the northern slope of a high hill where it is too steep, and too barren to cultivate, but although only a few inches of soil clothes the solid chalk rock, hazels rise tall and lithe, mixed with ash, elder, guelder rose, and other constituent parts of what is called underwood. A few acres of this is cut close to the ground every year, and sold in the form of the rustic fagots which light the fire and heat the brick ovens of the country folk; for underwood is as much one of the farmer's

crops as corn, but he must only expect to realise on his woodland once in eight or ten years instead of annually.

When the dense, sheltering underwood is cut away we see one of nature's miracles. The ground beneath the bushes has been bare soil, strewn with stones, sticks, dead leaves, and dead, white-bleached snail shells, with perhaps a few fly orchises or straggling seeded bluebells, as the only ground vegetation.

But when the hazels with their heavy foliage are cut, and the blessed sunshine, free air, and

evening dews fall unhindered on the barren soil, germs long hidden start into sudden life. Blue bugle, yellow mellilot, spotted orchis, nettle-leaved bell-flower, St. John's wort, red briony, agrimony, purple nightshade, ploughman's spikenard, and wild strawberries quickly cover the ground, live snails and insects appear, and the birds who find little food among tall underwood, take up their quarters again upon it. Gradually the cope wood rises; year by year you find less undergrowth until the time to cut arrives and the process is repeated.

How full of unsuspected roots and seeds that brown uninteresting soil must be! We see the same miracle in a lesser degree yearly. There is a certain open, grassy bank without so much as a thorn bush to shelter it, which in winter and spring is covered with dead, weather-beaten, drab-coloured grass, but protected from the winter's frost by this multitude of germs of life lie latent, until that desolate-looking bank becomes in July a perfect blaze of purple and gold, covered with knapweed, scabious, scented orchis, blue rampion, ragwort, birdsfoot trefoil, hyppocrepis, and that rare, yellow daisy-shaped flower, the field senecis.

There was a story which was very popular in the past generation called, "eyes and no eyes," the moral being that to people who have the habit of observation there lies open a vast field of pleasure and profit even in commonplace surroundings. Let us all be "eyes" for a brief ramble through this large, solitary wood on a July afternoon, and see what treasures it contains.

A board, ancient and weather-beaten, declares that, "Trespassers will be prosecuted," but country neighbours have favour to go where town excursionists are excluded.

Owners of land are often blamed for shutting up the pleasant places where their lines have fallen from the public enjoyment, but alas, the people have brought this exclusion on themselves by their own selfish thoughtlessness. Fences are broken down, gates left open, allowing cattle to stray, tree trunks permanently scarred, not only with initials, but with mere wanton hacking, uncontrolled dogs chase sheep and game, eggshells, and melon rinds, and greasy papers are left strewn the ground in all the prettiest spots. What does the excursionist care? He will not be likely to come this way again until the next bank holiday!

But we, who can slip quietly among the trees and leave no trace are welcome to traverse the winding path which runs sloping downward to the farthest corner of the wood.

Before entering it we cross the breezy hill-top, cropped into lawn-like fineness by the round, compact, little sheep, for which these Downs are famous, but even among this close turf we may find botanical treasures. The little milkwort with its varied tints, crimson, blue, pink and white, the dainty eyebright, or euphrasia, the dark blue round-headed rampion, which is a rarity in most countries, but abundant here, the cream white dropwort with drooping coral red buds, the dwarf thistle, which on an inch of stalk grows as large and showy a purple flower as its loftier relatives. The hill is covered with the little prickly stars of this thistle. How well I remember one morning in early autumn when I, an enterprising child of ten or eleven, sallied forth at four o'clock in quest of mushrooms for the family breakfast, when the dew was so heavy that, fearing a reprimand for soaked shoes and stockings, I took them off, placed them in my basket, and ran over the hills on my little bare feet. It would have been delightful but for these dwarf thistles, which are quite capable of giving a sharp prick although hardly of leaving a thorn in the skin.

Among the patches of gorse, just without the wood, are masses of fragrant, buff-coloured honeysuckle, and beds of the tall crimson rosebay which is sometimes cultivated as a garden flower. The entrance to the wood is under a group of tall hazels, their glossy, mahogany-coloured stems, and large green leaves making a dense shade above us. Few feet tread the path. It is carpeted deeply with moss, and where the wood parts a little fringed with clumps of the bright, glossy green leaves of the pretty wood sanicle. A few yards from the gateway a strong, sweet scent greets our nostrils. It can be nothing else than butterfly orchis, and following it up

through the low bushes as a hound follows its quarry we find the lovely white flowers from which the perfume is given forth. Half a dozen heads stand together in the space of a square yard. We gather a couple, and examine them more closely. It needs a vivid imagination to trace the resemblance to a butterfly, the wings are narrow, the body very long, shaded with green, and semi-transparent. Its relative, the slender, velvet brown fly orchis is near by, and also the green tway-blade, and the lavender spotted orchis, a hardly species, and one of the commonest of this family.

A few stunted oaks and ashes, which are spared when the underwood is cut, stand together, and in these are several nests of the true carrion crow, who makes himself a nuisance in the country around by eating eggs and young partridges. In size and colour of gleaming metallic black this bird resembles the rook; but the latter has a whitish beak, and is a gregarious bird, flying, feeding, and nesting in large communities, while you seldom see more than a pair of crows together. As we stand in a small open glade looking over the tops of the trees on the steep hill-side below us, there is a clash of wings, and four or five wood pigeons sweep out, with their strong rapid flight, indignant that their solitude should be invaded. Their large blue grey bodies and white-ringed necks show distinctly against the deep green of a clump of beech trees, their favourite haunt, and the tallest trees in all the woodland.

From this opening we see on the right a peep of lovely blue distance, the well-wooded garden-like Weald of Sussex, and on the left over a deep valley to another hill, crowned with the faintly defined outline of a Roman camp.

There are several such camps in this neighbourhood, the trenches and ramparts still visible, and allowing for the softening and sinking of many centuries we know what formidable defences they must have been. They were grand outlooks, commanding many miles of country around; but how in the world did the garrison supply itself with that necessary of life, water? They could have had no large roofs and tank for utilising the rainfall, and must have made a daily sally, armed with buckets of some sort, to the unfailing spring which wells up in that little copse at the foot of the hill. To the barn which, with its yards and sheds, stands on the slope below the camp a more modern interest is attached.

Twice in the early years of this century has the peaceful-looking little village, whose red roofs peep through the trees in the valley, been attacked by pestilence, in one case cholera, and the other small-pox, and we have heard that in each case the Chantry Barn was used as hospital and sanatorium.

But to return to our wood path. Where the sunbeams can reach it it is in patches crimson with wild strawberries, some as large as the tip of a woman's finger.

Luscious morsels they are, rich and ripe, as our garden strawberries have little chance of being while the unprincipled blackbirds insist on making all their meals on the beds. Why cannot they come and feast on this unforbidden fruit, which is here wasting its sweetness on the desert air? They do not seem to patronise the wild fruit; but here is a trace of bird-life. In the path lies a small flint, with a sharp ridge turned upwards. This a thrush has evidently been using as an anvil on which to crack the shells of the snails which he devours. We have often heard the "tap, tap," and watched the bird with his sharp beak thrust into the soft body of the unfortunate snail, striking it again and again on the sharp ridge of the flint. This particular thrush is a dainty creature, as the fragments of shell betray, for he has cracked no coarse common snail, but only the brightly varnished small wood snail

which varies so much in colour, some specimens being striped with brown, others a plain golden yellow, or the fashionable shade called "old pink."

If it is at all damp we may find crawling on the herbage the pretty little purple-tipped "Elegant Cyclostome," which looks more like a sea than a land snail. It is the only British species which possesses an operculum, or trap-door. This is folded back when it crawls; but pick it up, and snap—the door is shut and the tiny mollusc is safe within its fortress.

A year or two back we happened to diverge from our usual path into a part of the wood where the hazels had been recently cut, and there found to our astonishment a perfect bed of purple columbines—dozens of tall plants in full blossom. Our first thought was that they were indigenous, for the columbine undoubtedly grows wild on a common five miles away; but we noticed a slight difference in the shape of the flowers, and then a lady of our party remembered that twenty years ago she had as a child come over the hills with a pocketful of the glossy black seeds of the columbine, collected in the old-fashioned garden of her home, strewed it about in this wood and forgotten it. Here, after so many years was the living witness of the child's bright thought. This happened long before Mrs. Ewing had written her charming story, "Mary's Meadow," suggesting that wild places might be beautified with hardy garden flowers.

Another surprise of our wood. Where the copse had been recently cut, about half an acre was found covered with the tall spikes of the vivid sky-blue viper's bugloss, which is commonly found in chalk-pits or on barren open ground.

Ferns do not love this soil. There may be a few shuttlecock-shaped plants of the male fern, and in a little opening at the foot of the hill, with a ruined grass-grown sawpit, you may find the adder's-tongue—a humble relation of the magnificent royal fern—consisting only of a small spike growing in front of a single flat green leaf. Why should this innocent fern and the brilliant bugloss be named after the only venomous reptile which exists in England? We never happened to meet a viper in this particular wood, but doubtless they exist, as they are only too common in the neighbourhood, in spite of the price set upon their heads by some of the farmers. Not unfrequently sheep are killed by the bite of a viper on the nose while grazing, and we have known three cases of children being bitten, happily, not fatally, but causing much and prolonged pain.

It is well that children should have a wholesome dread of everything snake-shape until they can distinguish the graceful slow-worm and the long, yellow-tinged grass-snake from the poisonous adder. One bright day in early spring, we saw on the warm south bank at the edge of our wood four of the harmless snakes, sunning their lithe grey bodies side by side after their winter sleep.

Rabbits abound on this southern bank. You may see them frisking their little white tails in and out of their snug burrows, or sitting up saucily on their haunches to listen if a step approaches. Here, too, comes the rabbit's natural enemy the fox. In the midst of the thick underwood a small cemented pond has been made for the benefit of the pheasants, and one summer evening we saw a little fox-cub, with a tail no thicker than that of an ordinary kitten, slink away among the bushes after he had slaked his thirst. Once, by the disused sawpit above mentioned, we came upon a fine, ruddy-coloured fox, fast asleep in the warm sunshine; the way he vanished when our steps aroused him was not slow! A graceful, light-footed creature is Reynard.

MAUDE MORRISON.