

IT would be a difficult matter to decide under which of its two summer aspects the Surrey common is more beautiful, in the time of the yellow gorse or of the purple heather: in the first bright glow of May and June, or in the richer and deeper splendour of July and August. Either season has its special admirers and advocates; and as of old in the Roman amphitheatre there used to be a faction of the yellow and a faction of the purple, so here too there is a contest of colours, neither of which is disposed to yield its claim to

supremacy. The peaceful student of Nature will probably consider it his wisest course to swear lasting allegiance neither to one party nor the other, but, even at the risk of being denounced as a time-server, to avow his opinion that "whatever is, is best." In the season when the gorse and broom are in the zenith of their glory, let us give our vote to the supporters of the yellow; but a couple of months later, when the common will be a rolling sea of purple heath and heather, what shall prevent us from quietly changing our opinion and wearing a purple favour in our buttonhole?

The gorse-time has at any rate this undeniable advantage over the heather-harvest, that it is accompanied by a far more vigorous expression of Nature's exuberance and joy. In the blazing days of the late summer and autumn a profound silence often reigns far and wide over the common, and the imperial pomp of the landscape cannot entirely exclude the increasing sense of pathos and decay. But in the gorse-time the year is in its full hey-day of song and merriment; and the common, so lately redeemed from wintry blackness and sterility, is filled with life and sound. The voice of birds is everywhere in the air; you cannot walk a dozen yards without hearing the cry of the cuckoo, the shrill scream of the peewit as he whirls and glances in the sun, the "clink" of the stone-chat, the song of innumerable skylarks, and perhaps the deep tones of the turtle-dove from the little copse on the edge of the common, or the ringing laugh of the green woodpecker from the solitary clump of Scotch firs. The nights are scarcely more silent than the days; for then the night-jar, a well-known bird wherever there are heath and fern, may be heard uttering its strange jarring note, while it sits on some projecting gorse-bush or fir-branch, every now and then quitting 'ts perch to flit like a huge moth across the twilight. From the marshy hollow, where a little stream flows down through the common, there rises nightly a weird



chorus of croaking frogs—a soothing sound enough if heard, as a rookery should also be heard, from a convenient distance, but apt to become annoying when the listener is very close. But the night has other and more pleasant melodies than these, for the nightingale, though a rare visitor on the open common, where there is a lack of deep cover and underwood, may be heard singing its best in the wooded dingles by the neighbouring river.

Lack of water is a fault which is justly laid to the charge of most Surrey scenery. But in the south-west corner of the county the landscape is not liable to this reproach, for, thanks partly to the hand of Nature, and partly to the liking for fish exhibited centuries ago by the monks of Waverley Abbey, near Farnham, the streams which run down from the great mass known as Hindhead Common have been transformed in many places into a series of large fish-ponds. Standing on the sandy shore of one of these large sheets of water, you may, at this time of year, watch the graceful flight of countless numbers of swifts and swallows. Few birds are so fearless of the presence of man as those of the swallow tribe; and if the intruder will stand motionless on the same spot for a few minutes, they will often pass and re-pass so close to his head, that he may hear and almost feel the whir of their wings, as they sweep by him in their undulating flight.

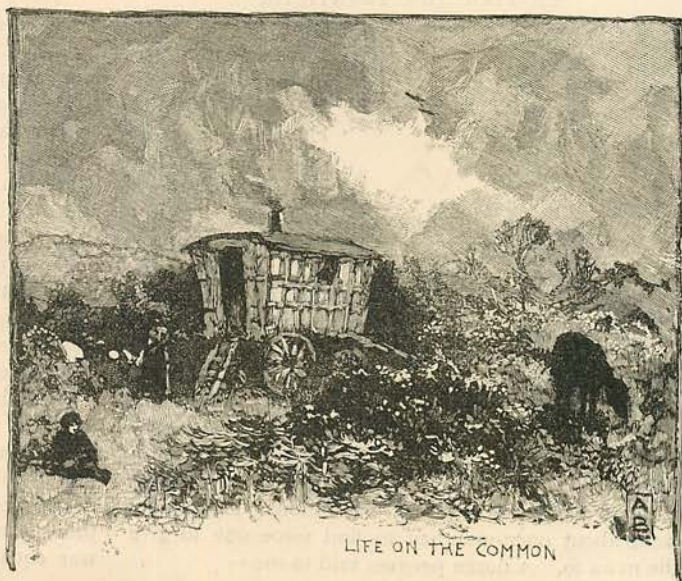
To the north and east of these ponds the common stretches right away for miles, the expanse of furze and heather being occasionally broken by bits of low marshy ground, overgrown with reeds and sedges, from which you may chance to scare a stray heron or snipe or wild-duck. Here and there are tracts where the soil is black and cindered, the result of some recent fire, which has swept away every vestige of the once knee-deep heather, and has left in its stead a bare and barren wilderness. The early spring is the time when these fires usually take place, it being the custom now and then to set fire to portions of the common, partly for the sake of the young shoots which soon come up in the place of the burnt vegetation, and supply a new "feed" for the cattle, and partly with the object of waging deadlier war on the rabbits. It is a fine sight to watch the long line of flame as it works its way steadily across the devoted space, licking up the gorse and heather with a mighty roar, and sending up vast volumes of smoke, until it is met and conquered in its turn by the party of watchers whose duty it is to beat down and extinguish the fire when it has reached its appointed limit. Sometimes the flames, escaping from all control, cause a veritable "prairie fire," which devastates a large extent of common, and smoulders on for days, or even weeks, according to the strength and direction of the wind; but this generally happens later in the season, when the heather has become as dry as

stubble under the fierce heat and long drought of the summer months.

But to-day no fire is visible, except in the fiery glow of the yellow gorse, contrasting strongly with its dark surroundings of pine and heather. It is very pleasant to sit on one of the many patches of greensward that intersect the turf, and to watch the fleecy white clouds sailing swiftly overhead across a sky of stainless blue.

I once met with an enthusiastic lover of the Surrey common who insisted that there is no out-of-door seat so comfortable as a low, compact, thick-grown gorse-bush; you have merely to sit down, he said, fearlessly and without hesitation, and you will find yourself ensconced in a natural arm-chair, with springs that equal those of the most sumptuous divan. It may be so; and as I have had no personal experience of such a seat, I will not say it is not so. But, pending fuller investigation, it seems wiser not to commit oneself too hastily to a position that might conceivably become precarious, but to be content, for the present, with a seat on yonder sloping bank of turf and heather.

The most fastidious eye could scarcely desire a more charming view than that which is unfolded before us. Far away is the blue line of the Hampshire hills; the middle of the landscape is filled up by broken ground, wooded knolls, and rounded fir-clumps; while close below us, in a little valley, nestles a small cluster of cottages, near a pond fringed with rushes; a sort of oasis in the surrounding desert of the common, each cottage having its own bit of garden-ground which by years of patient labour has been converted into fairly good soil from a mere waste of sand. They are a homely, simple race, these Surrey cottagers, making a hard but honest livelihood as agricultural labourers or wood-cutters, and cultivating their own garden-plots as best they can in the spare hours of their work. Their life, monotonous though it is, has several advantages over that of their brother-workmen of the crowded city, since they have at least



LIFE ON THE COMMON



plenty of fresh air and elbow-room, and, if they are wise, can generally manage to keep their own pigs and goats and geese, the latter especially being a frequent ornament of the Surrey farmstead. The right of cutting the peaty turf that clings round the roots of the heather is an invaluable privilege to those cottagers who are fortunate enough to possess it, as the turf, or "face of the earth," as it is sometimes quaintly called, makes excellent fuel for the winter time, and can generally be obtained in plenty.

In addition to the resident cottagers there are those "birds of passage," the gipsies and strolling

traders, who, with their wagon-houses ready at their beck and call, probably enjoy life on the common, at any rate in the summer months, more than any other class of persons. You may see them in the evening pitching their camp in some quiet corner of the common, and preparing their supper with much business and satisfaction. If the gamekeepers are to be believed, "wild chicken" too often forms one of the courses of these open-air entertainments, but, however that may be, there is no doubt these people look much happier and more contented when thus encamped on a Surrey common than when hanging about the suburbs of some provincial town. H. S. S.

BY MISADVENTURE.

By FRANK BARRETT, Author of "Harlowe's Helpmate," "Hidden Gold," "The Great Hesper," &c.

"Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long, back on itself recoils."—MILTON.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH. GETTING EVIDENCE.



THE examination resulted in this:—

Whether accidentally or otherwise, enough of a noxious substance had found its way into Flexmore's body to have decidedly accelerated his death.

The news spread like a plague: within twenty-four hours every one had it—man, woman, and child—

without distinction of rank or station. Every one went about open-mouthed to find some one to give the news to. A dozen persons said to me—

"Have you heard the result of the examination? Dr. Awdrey *did* hasten Flexmore's end."

"Then why is he at large?" I asked. "Why has no warrant for his arrest been issued?"

They could only shrug their shoulders; but I could explain the matter to them—*Flexmore had not been affected by the poison at all.* The powder was found in his mouth, it had not touched the digestive apparatus, and for this reason: it had been administered after the life had left his body. This was the report made by the authorised doctors who made the examination.

Upon this report no one could be accused of any crime legally, nor at the present juncture could a charge be instituted. That the poison had not been given in the form of a potion, such as Miss Dalrymple had been charged by Dr. Awdrey to administer, was clear from the fact that it was found in the form of a powder, and must have been put into my old friend's mouth when his jaw dropped after death. Still, it had clearly been given with a view to prevent any possibility of a return to life; and it was equally evident to the majority of people that