

MARCH AND APRIL.—No. 1.

AMONGST THE WILD FLOWERS.

The daisies peep from every field,
And violets sweet their odour yield;
The purple blossom paints the thorn,
And streams reflect the blush of morn.
Then lads and lasses all be gay,
For this is nature's holiday.

The change from winter to spring is like the change of the old sorceress we have seen in the play, who, feebly tottering upon crutches, decrepit with age and swathed in miserable tatters, at a given moment throws off her black and wretched rags, and displays herself as a glittering, dancing fairy, overflowing with youth and gaiety.

With March and April, spring has come indeed; the tale of its advent, like the old, old tale of love, never grows old. During March and April our woodlands and meadows are adorned with the first wild blossoms of the year; the earliest spring butterflies flit through the air; song-birds begin their deafening carols from every bush and tree; animals, reptiles and insects, so lately dormant, wake from their winter's sleep, to bask once more in the rays of the welcome sun; and the dead earth itself, no longer bound up with iron frost, is again impressible and fruitful. At this season all living nature joins with man in a song of hearty welcome to the happy spring time.

March, named from Mars, the God of War, is often a rough month of boisterous wind and driving hail and rain; in these storms of wild forest trees are uprooted, branches splintered off and hurled to the ground, homesteads are shaken from basement to roof, and Boreas is indeed the king. In normal seasons March is said to come in like a lion; like a lion he roars through the forests, and with more than the strength or cruelty of a lion he rushes over the seas and engulphs our brothers in the deep. Between these tempests of wind, hail, and rain we get gleams of warm sunshine that awaken the violets in the hedgerows and the wild hyacinths in the woods, that soften the horny winter-buds of the trees and send a thrill of new life through all living things; for, with all its rugged aspects, March is truly the first month of spring. To our boys and girls spring time in the country and spring time in the town are very different matters; the only equivalents our city youth get for bird's-nesting and fishing excursions, and rambles in the mossy woods and flowery pastures, are the very questionable ones of the Easter entertainments, gay theatricals, and popular lectures: the carols of the feathered songsters have to give place to the warbling of the favourite *cantatrice*. The town lover, unlike the country swain, unable to thread his way through the blossom-covered meadows of spring, must be content to take his lady through the dreary streets, perchance to find

a garden in her face,
Where roses and white lilies grow.

But to the poorer lads and lasses of towns, and, indeed, to many grown men and women, spring is a mere name quite unassociated with singing birds, stary blossoms, and youthful courtship; March, to them, truly comes in as a lion, roaring down the sooty chimney and terrifying the little ones, whistling and screaming through the keyhole and under the door, rattling the rickety window-frames, and strewing chimney-pots and slates in the court below. April they know by the festival of Momus held on the first day of the month, and by the overflowing gutter and steamy street; occasionally, too, by the sight of the fragment of a rainbow, cut off on both sides by grimy roofs and black chimney-stacks. In the country all is different; all natural objects, of late asleep, now appear to be bursting with new life, the spell of silence recently fastened on nature is broken, the hyemal stupor of animals is cast off, and the rigid nakedness of the forest, the orchard, and the roadside once more gives place to a rich mantle of foliage and flower.

With the blossoming of the snowdrop and the crocus we have the first songs of the newly-arrived birds; but it is not till March has gone and April fairly set in and passed that we have our whole happy feathered choir of songsters complete, and our woods and fields resounding with the sweet songs of the blackbird, thrush, and nightingale; the pleasant note of the cuckoo, the carolling of the lark, and the warbling of the redstart and the blackcap. Owing to its fine contrast of black, white, and scarlet colours, the bullfinch, in the spring, is one of the greatest ornaments of our gardens and woody places; it is, however, so fond of the deepest recesses of the woodlands and the most retired places of gardens that, notwithstanding its vivid colours, it often passes unobserved. All our bullfinches do not migrate in the autumn, but many remain with us during the whole winter; they then become very docile and affectionate, approaching our dwellings after the manner of the redbreast itself. It is not, however, welcomed to the same extent, for the bullfinch has acquired a bad name amongst country folk, who carry on a constant warfare with it, under the pretext (real or imaginary) of its destroying the fruit buds of the orchards. The memory of the bird is most remarkable, for not only, when in a state of captivity, does it recognise its friends from amongst strangers, but it can be readily taught to "pipe" the complete music of three or four tunes—this it does in a sweet, plaintive, flutelike note, very superior to its poor native song. Although it is an extremely frank

and affectionate bird, yet, like the redbreast, to which we shall presently refer, it is a desperate fighter; bullfinches seldom associate with other birds, but at times engage in fearful and fatal conflicts with each other.

April (protean though it be) is, as its name indicates, the real opening of the year. The forest trees now put out their flowers, the orchards their blossoms, and the hedgerows their gay wild flowers; the air is laden with the songs of birds and the odours of spring, every living thing appears to be brim-full of happiness and delight. This month, above all others, and the tender passion have an inseparable alliance; the changeable weather, the wavering affection; April sunshine and April love; April showers and the passing quarrels peculiar to courtship, are so much alike. Comparisons like these are forced on the most unobservant; for instance, the sudden overclouding of the atmosphere (mental and aerial), when all things were looking so thoroughly serene; the copious showers, so soon followed by sunshine; the peculiar brilliancy of the horizon, the gorgeous rainbows (sometimes double), and the prevailing verdant hue of all nature, with other resemblances, at once suggest themselves to all

In that soft season, when descending showers
Call forth the greens, and wake the rising flowers.

How wonderful is the flowering and leafing of trees and flowers in the spring! how inexplicable the packing of the tiny flowers in the hard, resin-covered winter-buds of the trees! how mysterious the complicated doubling and folding of the incipient leaves, some outwards, some inwards, one within the other, or round and round in interminable volutes! not the least extraordinary part of the phenomenon being the unvarying precedence of the flowering and leafing of one tree or plant before the other, all appearing in due course without variation or change.

Some of our earliest spring flowers are shown in the accompanying picture. One of the first and commonest is the wood anemone, (*Anemone nemorosa*); it has a lovely white flower, with a golden centre, supported on a slender crimson stem; it abounds in woody places, and often grows in such abundance as to perfectly whiten the ground. The generic name, anemone, means "the wind," and the flowers are said to open only when buffeted by the wind. Flowering as it does in the windy month of March, it generally gets the full benefit of the north-easters of that season.

The sweet violet (*Viola odorata*), so fond of hiding itself on shady banks, is one of the greatest favourites of spring; its delicious but heavy fragrance always betrays its presence. It was at one time in great repute with the old herbalists, one of whom, in enumerating its virtues, says, amongst other strange things, that it "takes away the ruggedness of the windpipe and iawes" (jaws).

The bluebell or wild hyacinth (*Scilla nutans*) is another great ornament to our woods and shady places in spring. It often causes the very ground to look blue, as if covered with one complete carpet of its beautiful and fragrant blossoms. In old books we find it called "Blew English Hare-Bells" and "Iacint"! It was referred to the hyacinth tribe in honour of the boy Hyacinthus, who perished whilst playing with Apollo, and from whose blood this flower was said to have sprung. "The roote is Bulbus," says an old author, "ful of a slimy glewish juice, which will serve to set feathers vpon arrowes in steed of gliew, or to paste books with; wherof is made the best starche next vnto that of wake-robin." He also tells us that "it helpeth against the venomous bitings of the fieldie spider," and that it will "procure haire in beardless men."

Another extremely-graceful plant of our banks and woods is the wood-sorrel or shamrock (*Oxalis acetosella*); its delicate white flowers and tender green leaves are sensitive to a degree, both leaves and flowers drooping and closing as the evening approaches or during humid weather. The plant has a refreshing acid juice, hence its generic and specific names.

The beautiful white flower over the bullfinch's back is the broad-leaved garlic or "ramsons" (*Allium ursinum*); it has a rank and disagreeable smell, to which it perhaps owes its specific name.

We will complete our description with a reference to the orchid figured (*Orehis mascula*), the Greek word "orchis" has reference to the two remarkable tubers at the base of these plants. Although the orchis tribe greatly attracted the attention of our old herbalists, they appear to have ascribed no extraordinary properties to it; one writer, for instance, in speaking of a British orchid, says, "We haue nothing to write, being not sufficiently knowne to the old writers; *no, nor to the new*," which we should imagine to be the case, for one of the best authorities refers a certain species of orchid (*Corallorhiza*) to the fungus tribe, and compares it with (which to him was also a fungus) the "toothwort" of our hazel hedges with these words:—"there is also another sort hereof founde, not differing from the precedent; the chiefe difference consisteth in that, that this plant is altogether lesser; in other respects like." *Orehis mascula* is the earliest blooming orchis of the year, it bears an odor which is at certain times agreeable, but at others, especially in the evening, very disagreeable; it is, however, one of the handsomest plants of our spring flora. The author above quoted says, "There is no great vse of these in phisicke;" but as he immediately afterwards says (whilst speaking of a patent), "after he endured fower and fortie fits (44) was cured therewith" we think "great vse" must have been made of the orchids in some occult way. W. G. S.

JULY AND AUGUST.—No. 2.

AMONGST THE CORN.

IN July we have the full splendour of summer. Now the trees are in the fullest leaf, the gardens fullest of flowers, and the orchards most laden with fruit; morning and evening, all our song birds carol in the woodlands, and during the day the air is alive with bees and brilliant insects. An English corn-field at this season may be truly called a "field of the cloth of gold;" for, as seen from the downs, a corn-field looks like one great woven covering of that precious metal, its scarlet poppies and blue corn-flowers bearing comparison with jewelled work in rubies and sapphires, its twining convolvuluses with intricate filigree; as the summer wind disturbs the golden surface, the rustling of the ears is like a song of prosperity and plenty sung by Ceres. At this season the fields and woods, the hedges and heaths, are richest with wild flowers; they blossom everywhere. How grand is the noble spike of the foxglove in the woods! how sweet the honeysuckle! how graceful the bracken and wild convolvulus! how snowy white and pure the lilies of the rivers! July is the carnival of the year, when all things put on their gayest and best attire; the summer has now reached its highest point of beauty, the flowers are full of odour and colour, and all nature is brimful of health and vigour; the insect world is at its prime, the members working and enjoying themselves as they flit from flower to flower, grope and grovel in their underground dens, or wait for prey in cracks in old walls, slaying each other and being slain in the most business-like manner.

Few creatures, with the exception of butterflies, bees, and a small number of insects, can bear, without inconvenience, the heat of the noonday sun: its rays in July are often so intensely hot as to render the study of natural history less pleasant during the hours of day than in the evening, or, indeed, the night. As mid-day approaches, the air becomes oppressive and silent, the birds cease their singing and retire to their most shady nooks; even such animals as squirrels and dormice will not venture out; flowers and leaves droop, and life seems to have temporarily ceased. Towards sunset, however, the birds begin to challenge each other, the dormice peep from their nests, or quick as thought dart out only to dart back with equal alacrity, squirrels scamper up the beechen-trunks and fly from branch to branch, the shrew comes out, the mole's snout emerges from the ground, the flowers revive, night-flowering blossoms gradually open, and when the evening breeze stirs the leaves life appears to have taken a fresh start.

With the approach of night the owl leaves its haunts and sails through the air, its large eyes gleaming with light; the bats leave the barns and out-houses to flap about after nocturnal insects; the frog croaks, and cockchafers and beetles fly blindly hither and thither. When the night has fairly set in we notice the meteors and the summer lightning, and the trees jet black against the sky. The grass is now wet, and a stroll in the dense woods is both delightful and instructive. In the open places, before the forest is reached, the glow-worms first attract attention; they shine in the grass at our feet with the brilliancy of stars. If we are fortunate, we may see threads of fire writhing at our feet, or if stones be turned aside these phosphorescent centipedes, for such they are, may be descried snugly ensconced beneath them. We have seen them several times at night in the Highgate woods, and, indeed, in suburban gardens. Many other objects are luminous at night, notoriously the common crane-fly, or "Jacky-longlegs;" several species of fungi, too, give out a phosphorescent glare; and we once found a dead rat surrounded by a perfect halo of light. Stale fish and stale potatoes are often very luminous, and the hands of sensitive, nervous persons, as we know from experience, on being briskly rubbed at night will become slightly luminous; many flowers are known to possess the same property to a considerable degree; but whilst observing flowers at midnight in the dark, either in the woods or in gardens, it is difficult to understand, or, indeed, to catch, the luminous appearance they put on, for we have observed that many flowers, especially the red ones, become totally invisible; whilst others, such as purple, blue, and white flowers, will at intervals appear to be illumined with a faint light, which either passes off immediately or remains for a long time. It has been, too, our common experience in the woods at night to see a shining stationary object in the distance, which, on being approached, could not be found. The midnight sounds in the woods are very remarkable; in oak woods in the autumn the brisk clattering of the falling acorns has at night a very sonorous and indeed startling sound, and many sounds that would not be noticed in the day time have now a peculiar attraction; at times a branch or some other object will be heard to descend with a sudden crash, then comes a noise as of quarrelling amongst the feathered tribes, or sounds precisely resembling measured footsteps in the paths, the whirring and droning of the night-flying moths and beetles, the wind sighing amongst the leaves, and the branches of one tree scraping the branches of some neighbouring tree—all tend to make a night in the woods both impressive and instructive.

August is perhaps the most splendid month in the English year. Now the leaves, waving in billows in the storms of early autumn, show the first inclination to change from green to yellow, red, purple, russet, or black; the yellow corn-fields blaze with scarlet poppies, blue corn-flowers, white campions, and purple corn-cockles; the sky overhead is at sunset one gorgeous display of colour, at

night a blue depth illumined with countless stars; but no sooner does the summer reach its prime than the harbingers of decay appear; the mornings are chilly and damp, the evenings draw in, a few of the birds have already left us, and the summer flowers are gradually but surely giving place to the fruits of autumn. In the woods we now see the stately foxglove and the autumnal orchids; in the pastures the grass of Parnassus; and on the surface of the waters the noble white and yellow river-lilies. By the end of the month insects will become lazy and less abundant, and animals will make preparations for their winter's sleep.

A corn-field in August is a world in itself. It literally swarms with animal and vegetable life; the insects and weeds are innumerable, and it is difficult to say whether the weeds or the animals prove most ruinous. Foremost amongst the latter are rats and mice; the corn is attacked as soon as it is sown by the field mice, and during summer, autumn, and winter alike, whether the corn be newly sown, in full ear, or stored in barns, these animals systematically prey upon and destroy it; thanks, however, to weasels, hawks, owls, and other creatures, who so constantly hunt them down, their numbers are not quite so unlimited as they would otherwise be. The mice of our fields are so small in size and so quick of action that they can only be recognised with difficulty at the best of times; added to this, their colours so assimilate with surrounding objects that the difficulty of seeing the marauders at all is increased tenfold. The very smallest of all British quadrupeds is the little black-eyed harvest mouse shown in our Picture, which is more than six times as small as the common mouse of our houses, and builds its little slight plaited nest amidst the stems of corn and grasses. When the corn is cut the tiny animals are taken into the barns and corn-ricks with the grain; here they sometimes congregate in vast numbers, carrying on the work of destruction to their hearts' content. The different rodents so destructive to our corn crops were at one time supposed to possess marvellous curative properties—for instance, we read: "Mice, but especially those of Africke, having their skinne pulled off and so well steeped in oil, and rubbed with salt, and so boyled and afterwards taken in drinke, are very medicinal for those which have any paine or trouble in their lights or lungs." We imagine that in these sparrow-club days it would be very difficult to induce a farmer to spare the lives of rats and mice in consideration of any benefits that might accrue to his "lights and lungs." Another supposed valuable property of the mouse is expressed in the following words: "The water wherein a mouse has been sod or boyled is very wholesome and profitable for those who are troubled with the inflammation of the iawes (jaws)," an ailment seemingly very prevalent two hundred years ago; but, as if to prove that there is no bane without an accompanying antidote, we have the following rich recipe for getting quit of the mice of our houses, how much more conveniently and effectually a cat could and would answer the same purpose we leave our readers to imagine:—"If the braines of a weasell be sprinkled vpon cheese or any other meate (!) whereunto mice resort, they not only forbear to eate thereof, but also to come in the place." It must be borne in mind that the mouse was looked upon as not only a very destructive but also a very venomous animal; for it was believed that the bite of a mouse was so dangerous that it could be healed "by no other meanes but by green figs and garlike being mixed or mingled together, and so annoynted thereupon." Another very common and pretty little creature abundant in cultivated fields is the shrew-mouse; it does not attack the crops, but feeds wholly upon insects, worms, and similar diet; its whole aspect is so weak, harmless, and innocent that it is really wonderful that an evil name could ever become attached to it. Even at the present day it is looked upon with suspicion and dread; but this is what our forefathers thought of it: "It is a rauening beast, feyngning itselfe to be gentle and tame, but being touched it biteth deepe and poisoneth deadly. It beareth a cruel mind, desiring to hurt any thing; neither is there any creature that it loueth, or it loueth him, because it is feared of all."

The common scarlet poppy (Papaver rhoeas) is disliked by the farmer for occupying the room that might be more profitably held by the corn itself; but it is indeed the glory of the autumn and one of the gayest wild plants we have. The juice of the leaves was at one time considered a specific for the disease called "argema—which disease, when it happeneth on the blacke of the eie, it apereth white; and, contrariwise, when it is on the white it apereth blacke." But, if our old doctors are to be believed, it was at best a questionable remedy; for, though "it mitigath all kindes of paines," yet we are coolly told that "it leveh behind it oftentimes a mischiefe worse than the disease it self, and that hard to be cured, as a dead palsie and such like." One of the very loveliest flowers of the autumnal corn-field is the corn bluebottle (Centaurea cyanus); both in form and colour it is one of the most beautiful flowers in the whole vegetable kingdom.

Many other lovely plants frequent our corn-fields, far too numerous to even name: one of the loveliest, perhaps, being the purple Devil's-bit Scabious (Scabiosa succisa), the remarkably abrupt termination of the root when the plant is more than one year old gave rise to the strange superstition that "the diuell, for the eniue that he beareth to mankind, bit it off because it would be otherwise good for many vses;" one of these uses being a remedy against the "bitings of serpentes and the stinging of venomous beastes."

W. G. S.

NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER.—No 3.

AMONGST THE DEAD LEAVES.

NOVEMBER in town and November in the country are very different from each other. It is not easy to write words in praise of the smoky, damp gloom of a November day in London, set off though it may be by the brilliancy of the theatre in the evening; but November in the country is only a continuation of and end of autumn, for as yet winter has not fairly set in, and the trees are not quite leafless: truly, the first chills of October may have scattered the leaves of the ash in a golden shower to the ground, but the majestic oak is still in full foliage, and will be so till the December frosts have crystallised it with silver from top to bottom. When, however, winter sets in in earnest, and the wind howls through the woodlands, most of the trees become leafless, and the dead leaves—yellow, red, and brown—whirl in billows through the woods and down the roads, and dance, without ceasing, a weird dance of death. These leaves have innumerable enemies ready to prey upon their decaying tissues and reduce them to the earth from which they sprang. The hard fruits and seeds suffer in a similar manner, for not only do animals and insects prey largely upon them, but nature has provided special vegetable scavengers whose duty is utterly to destroy the fruits of the year: one takes the acorns of the oak in hand, another the mast of the birch, a third the keys of the ash, a fourth the cones of the fir, and so on from beginning to end through all the fruits of the year. These seeds of utter death are often sown whilst the fruit is hanging on the tree, apparently sound and healthy; the parasite only awaiting the autumnal fall to convert the substance of the seed into a loathsome mass. How alike is this with the ailments and sorrows of mankind! how often, under an appearance of health and strength, are the seeds of some insidious disease working their sure way to the destruction and death of the person passively affected! If the autumn has been mild, we shall be able to gather an abundance of fungi in the month of November. These curious plants find a suitable habitat on which to germinate in the dead leaves of the previous year. They abound most in woody places and in rich pastures, a large number being highly nutritious and delicate objects of food, whilst others deservedly bear a bad name, and are without doubt very deleterious. They do not come "of the slime of trees," as some old authors affirm; but all spring from seeds or spores of inconceivable minuteness. These seeds vary in size and colour in nearly every species, some being so small that when placed side by side 200 millions would be required to cover a square inch, one plant producing no less than 24,000 millions of seeds. The largest seeds or spores the writer of these lines has ever measured (and that, too, out of several hundreds of varieties systematically examined) were so small as to require two millions to cover a square inch. Many species of fungi are extremely curious, mimicking in shape and colour various natural objects: one taking the precise form of the tongue of an ox and lolling out of oak-trees, another of the human mesentery; one resembling a miniature mortar; another exactly counterfeiting a human ear or an animal's brain; but, says Gerard, "they are unprofitable and nothing worth," and "do approach unto a venomous and murdering faculty, I give my simple advice unto those that love such strange and newe fangled meates, to beware of loking homie among thornes." "Poisonous mushrooms growe where old rustie iron lieth, or rotten clouts, or neere to serpents dens, or roots of trees that bring forth venomous fruit." Such, however, we are fain to say, has not been our experience.

Of all native birds the robin is our greatest favourite; during the severest frosts of winter we constantly see his red breast and hear his sweet plaintive notes; he sings before daylight in the morning till twilight fairly sets in in the evening, he sings through summer and winter alike, and is more friendly with man than any other bird. He often nests close to our houses, and at times even within the doors: his innocent frankness endears him to everyone: the rough country boy even sparing his eggs. When berries are scarce, and the snow is falling, he does not silently die in the woods like other birds, but resorts for help to man; so he hops on our sills and taps at our window panes, the quaint and quiet appeal of his pretty jet-black eyes seldom remaining unanswered. As he comes in at the open window and settles on the shoulder or in the hand of one of our little ones, does he not look the sweetest and most loving of all birds? How pretty is the hopping of his curious slender legs! how affected, yet naive; the sidelong glance of his brilliant black eyes! how gay his ruddy breast! how sweet his familiar note! Although robins so commonly frequent our gardens for worms and insects, and our houses for warmth and crumbs, yet, it is in the deep and shady forests that they most delight; there they greet us with a joyful chorus from every tree, always ready to hop in advance, or, if a few answering notes be whistled, to follow us from one end of the wood to the other. But if robins can coquet and play, they are not without courage and pugnacity, for when engaged they may be numbered amongst the most determined fighters of the whole feathered tribe. In the autumn, when they don their gayest livery, they get very quarrelsome, and deadly conflicts ensue amongst them.

In the month of December all our native trees and wild flowers are at rest or dead: the sap has fallen in the trees, the branches are bare, the annual stems of perennial plants have died down to the

ground, and the plants that live for one summer only have perished for ever. Many animals and insects are resting under ground or in hidden nooks and corners, in their deep winter's sleep, quietly awaiting the warm days of spring to make their pulses throb once more. Now, like the winding-sheet of the year, descends the snow; softly and silently it falls on hill and valley, wood and field, city and homestead, till at last all nature, torpid and inanimate, is covered with a death-pall. In the majority of instances this apparent death, under the semblance of dissolution, is merely a long winter's sleep: nature is merely resting, soon to awake with fresh vigour, very different from the complete extinction of life that all plants and animals undergo, and from which there is no awakening; true, the lifeless materials remain, and decompose and are reconstructed; but this is no resurrection of the original animal or thing from death, and cannot be compared with the vegetation of a new plant in the spring from the old (but living) root-stock in the ground, the squirrel waking from its winter trance, the young tree springing from the horny seed, or the butterfly emerging from the transparent case of the chrysalis: in all these life and identity have never departed. When the animals, insects, trees, and flowers revive in spring, they appear in a certain regular succession. The trees and flowers wake first, followed by the animals and insects, at the time when their proper food has appeared. The winter sleep of the squirrel and the dormouse is precisely the same with the winter sleep of the tree, both rest during an inclement season to start with a fresher and newer life in the resurrection of the year, provided, always, they are strong enough to cope with the destroyers of life that are so powerful during the winter months and the last days of autumn. Omitting frost and wet altogether, not the least curious is perhaps the crimson club-like parasite that fastens on hibernating caterpillars when in the chrysalis state; the seeds of this plant (*Cordiceps militaris*) fall upon the living victim, take root, suck its juices, and wholly transform the sleeping creature into a scarlet, club-shaped fungus which grows boldly out of the grave of the immolated creature.

Should December set in with any severity few wild plants will be found in flower, the exceptions generally resting with the snowdrop, the Christmas rose, the winter aconite (*Erantius hyemalis*), and a few others. The two latter are essentially winter plants and highly poisonous withal, the last being described as the "moist poisonest herbe of all others" so that "if the scorpion passe by, and touch the same, presently he becometh dull, heauie, and senselesse."

The holly, the mistletoe, and the ivy are essentially Christmas plants, and always fresh and robust at this season of the year. In heathen times the boughs of the former were supposed to afford shelter to the sylvan spirits, who took refuge in them till the forest trees again put forth their leaves. The early Christians retained this curious custom at "Christ-tide" to "decke up the houses withal," believing the plant would protect them from evil spirits. The birdlime made from this plant is as dangerous as the same material made from the mistletoe. And old writer says it "inflameth and setteth the toong on fire;" if "inwardly taken it is mortall, and bringeth most greuous accidents; the toong is inflamed and swoine, the mind is distraughted, the strength of the hart and wits faile." The mistletoe (*Viscum album*) is a true winter plant, giving additional beauty to the apple-trees of our orchards. Like the last plant, it has been associated with religious rites from the earliest times, the use made of the mistletoe by the Druids being well known to all. It was considered in ancient times to be a protector from evil spirits, an antidote to poisons, and a promoter of fertility: it was hung about our houses to ensure good luck, and the Christmas custom of kissing under the magic mistletoe is of very ancient date. It is parasitic on a great many trees, rarely growing on the oak.

The ivy (*Hedera helix*), like the holly and mistletoe, has been used for festive rites from the most remote times: it formed a common chaplet for the heathen gods, and has always been used in our houses as a Christmas garland, although more than one canon could be quoted "forbidding Christians to decke up their houses with yvie."

December is noted above all other months for its Christmas festival, for its happy meetings, its merry-makings, its mummers, and its minstrels. It is the season when, after long parting, brothers and sisters clasp hands; when, after weary absence, sons and daughters turn homewards; when parents and grandparents, white-haired and advanced in years, more than at any other time, embrace and re-embrace their children and grandchildren; when lovers whisper "soft nothings" under the enchanted "kissing-bush;" when the spotless little ones are kissed and fondled as they were never caressed before. It is the season of frost and snow, of cold winds and naked trees, of furs and wrappers, of wintry walks over hard roads and crisp snow, of manly games, kindly feeling, and hospitality. To the boys and girls it brings the happy romping parties, the merry-makings, the bazaars, and the pantomimes. To the poor and suffering it too often brings despair, starvation, and death. In our mercy let us remember the poor as we sit over our Christmas fires; let us remember the little children, for they are our own flesh and blood.

Winter is no sooner fully upon us than we see signs of the approaching spring in the vanishing snow-drifts, in the early flowers peeping out of the ground, in the enlarging leaf-buds on the trees, in the piping of the birds.

W. G. S.