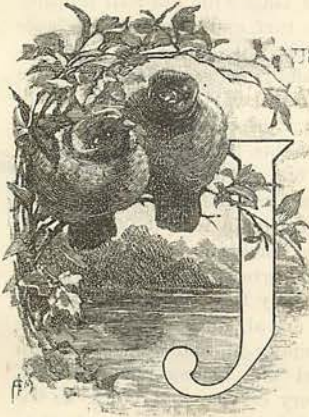
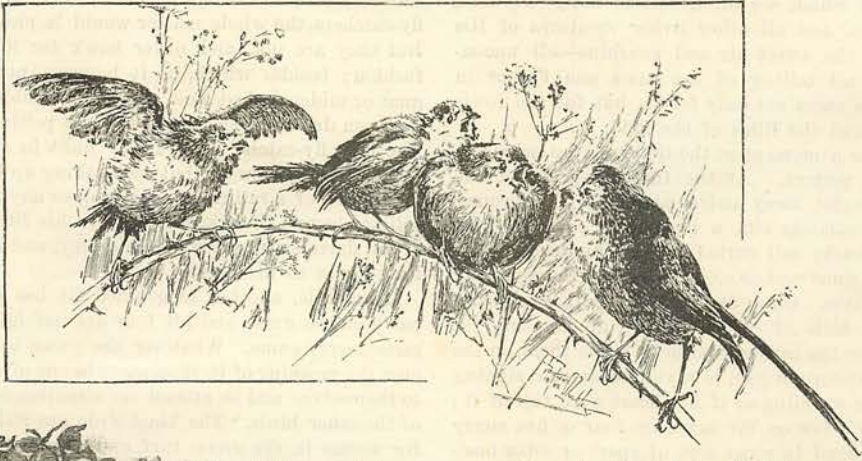


## OUT OF MY STUDY WINDOW.



JUST outside my window, along in front of the house, runs a narrow, winding gravel path, which divides the little flower-beds from the grass-plot, and stretches up to the laurel hedge that separates our garden from the old turnpike road to Winchester. A hundred yards away on the other side of this road is a grand

clump of Scotch firs, the tops of which just now stand out sharply against the blue sky, as the sun shines gaily down on my quiet domain—our first glimpse of him for many days past. I specially mention the fir-trees, as they were the cause of my starting up from my work and looking out to see what was going on up among their thick, leafy foliage. I was reading quietly by the fire, when all at once there came such a sudden chattering and screaming of birds—starlings, finches, blackbirds, and thrushes—as sometimes occurs when a hawk swoops down on some unfortunate chicken that has strayed away from the farmyard coop. I looked cautiously out of the window, so as not to attract attention, but for a moment could see nothing unusual. Presently, however, I noticed a great fluttering of wings, and swaying to and fro of branches, up in the tallest and thickest of the fir-trees; and, listening carefully, soon made out that some special gathering and confabulation was going on there altogether out of the common. But why, or what was the meaning of the turmoil, it was impossible to tell. Every bird seemed to have something to say, and to be saying it—in a language, too, which they all

seemed to understand, but which to me was wholly unintelligible. All at once, however, suddenly out of the midst of the assembly flew a large yellow-and-grey bird with wings like a hawk; and then the mystery was solved. He was unlike any English hawk I have ever seen, and possibly may have been some belated wanderer from another clime. But, be that as it may, on rapid and strong wing he now dashed away across the open fields in the valley, soared swiftly into the higher air, and was soon lost to sight. The tumult suddenly ceased; the starlings streamed down into the next ploughed field; and in a trice life in my quiet nook of garden was going on much as usual.



SQUIRREL AND BLACKBIRDS,

And what a quiet peace and beauty linger there, as God has made it; just one of the pages of the great Book of Nature which He opens to so many of us, and yet which we often fail to note. Flowers, plants, trees, and all other living creatures of His hand—nay, the sweet air and sunshine—all unconscious, yet all telling of the same one Father in heaven, who cares not only for us, but for the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field.

Glance for a moment at the little picture, which in its way is perfect. At the further corner of the sunny grass-plot, away under the shadow of the young beech-tree, sedately sits a nut-brown squirrel, with his white, bushy tail curled up over his back, busily nibbling at some root or seed he has just found among the dead leaves. Close by, a couple of hungry blackbirds, with bills of bright yellow, are hunting for worms under the barberry bushes; above them, on the branch of mountain ash, is a yellowhammer, singing away in the sunshine as if his heart were full of it; while down below on the lawn are four or five merry titmice, engaged in some sort of sport or sober business, the exact nature of which it is hard to make out. As you watch them, you will see that, besides being busily at work in the grass, and along the edge of the flower-bed, in search of a stray breakfast on insects or

other small dainties—fluttering and darting this way and that on eager, swift wing—every now and then one rises suddenly a foot or so into the air, and as suddenly drops down again to the grass. If they were fly-catchers the whole matter would be clear enough. But they are not, and never hawk for flies in this fashion; besides which, as it happens, not a single gnat or midge is just now anywhere visible, all having been driven to shelter by the last pelting shower. The true fly-catchers, too, never hunt in couples, or threes, in this manner; but each taking up his station on the top of a railing, an old post, or any projecting solitary bough, there keenly surveys his little domain of air, darts swiftly down on his prey, and as quickly back again to his perch.

Meanwhile, another long-tailed tit has joined the party on the grass, and all four are indulging in the same merry game. Whatever the game be, or whatever the meaning of it, it seems to be one of enjoyment to themselves, and to attract no attention on the part of the other birds. The blackbirds are still hunting for worms in the green turf, and the squirrel is beating sharply with his hinder paw on the grass, as if intent on his own private affairs. Presently, however, he stops in his drumming, eagerly digs up the grass, unearths a little brown beech-nut of last year's growth, sits up again on his hind legs, and makes a hearty meal, scattering bits of the ripe husk on either side of him. A fieldfare creeps in from the neighbouring hedge, and after a moment's hesitation attempts to join the blackbirds at breakfast; but they fly at him with great fury, and drive him out of the garden. By this time the tits have left the grass, and are all up in the thick of the barberry bush, creeping up and down the main trunk and in and out among the branches, busily clearing every crevice and crack in the brown stems and branches of insects, flies, and grubs visible only to their sharp eyes. Oddly enough, at the end of one of the branches still hangs, suspended by a string, a piece of dried skin and fat, hung up there for their express benefit in the days of wintry snow. *Then* they clung to and feasted on it, as it swayed to and fro in the frozen air; but *now* not a single bird goes near it. In fact, it seems to be a sort of scarecrow, which had better be avoided.

After having watched this little interlude in the garden for a while, I went quietly out through the ivied porch, across the garden, up to the grassy mound under the clump of firs. All along under their shadow grows a thick mass of ragged and stunted bushes of blackthorn, coarse grass, and thistles; but all alive with small birds of one sort or another, and just now full of noisy and chattering musicians. The blue sky overhead is all but cloudless, and, as we stand and listen, there falls on the ear a faint and far-off sound, like the murmur of the sea breaking gently on the sand. It is the sighing of the soft breeze among the tall tree-tops overhead, the tiny rustle of countless needle-like leaves as they tremble in the warm air.

Presently, up springs a woodlark from the open ploughed field, swiftly mounting aloft in a circling flight, away and away, higher and still higher, until



WOODLARK. W. H. H. 1872

he becomes a mere tiny speck in the azure expanse; but ever singing as he mounts, and with such keen notes of eager and rapid joy as may be heard clearly by the listening ear when he is no longer visible. He will mount and sing thus, at times, by the hour together. To whom can he be pouring out this long strain of joyous melody?

Not to me or you, for he knows nothing of our presence under the fir-clump. Not to his mate, who is keeping watch over her half-fledged brood in the grassy nest in the next field of clover; but surely to Him, the Unseen, who built up the lofty heaven, "at whose gate the minstrel sings;" who gave strength to the tiny wings, and infinite melody and grace to the joyous song. That same song the woodlark sang as the first morning dawned in Paradise. Our first parents heard it, as they walked in the garden of unclouded peace and beauty, where, as yet, no cloud of evil had fallen, and all was still "very good." All through the long ages since then, the great song of praise has gone up with unbroken voice from the fields and woods of the green earth, and the chant of the joyous birds has remained unchanged.

The language of man has been broken into countless dialects. New words have sprung up as new ideas came into the human mind, or as new wants and new sensations demanded some new form of expression. Nations and tribes separated or mingled, and, apart or together, framed new speech. But to the living creatures of the earth, and the birds of

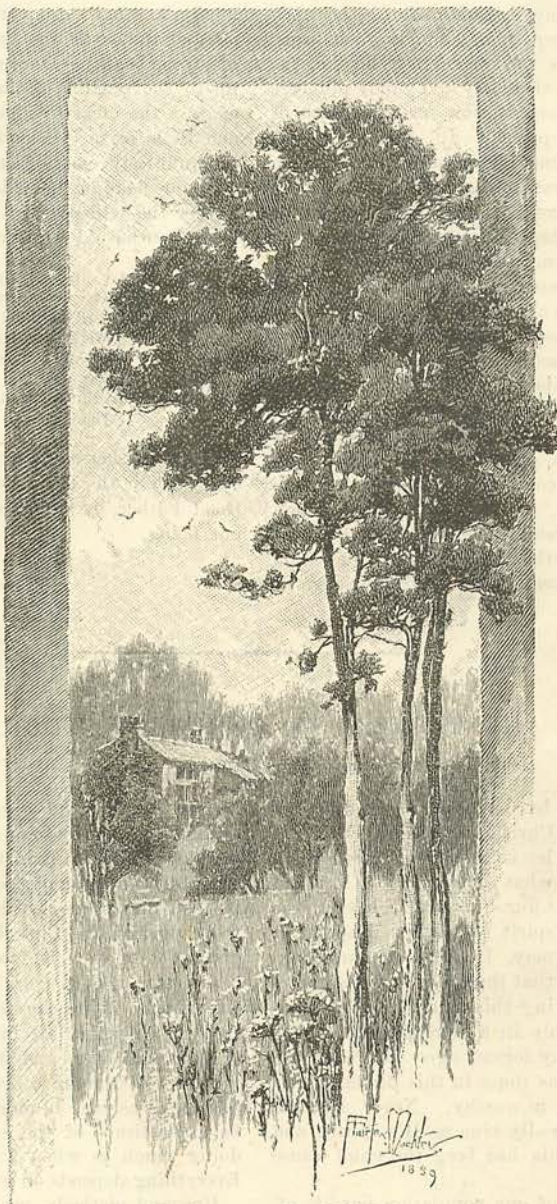
the air, came no new wants, ideas, or feelings; nor any need of new converse, from the very dawn of life until now. As they first sang in the olden days of innocence, over the wide earth, so they still sing.

But every bird has his own song, his own range of notes, his own key and expression; understood only by his own mate, or by others of a like genus. One only cry is there common to, and understood by, all birds alike, and that is the cry of warning and danger. Let a hawk appear, however suddenly, and in a trice a crowd of swallows dart shrieking through the air, calling up the whole troop of *Hirundines* far and near, and scattering sounds of terror on all sides. Every finch, and every sparrow, titmouse, and wren hears the terrible note of alarm, and all join in the hue and cry of trouble and terror.

Yet the song of the birds is not wholly unchanged throughout the year, for each, by law Divine, has his own song for the season. The spring voice changes in compass and variety as the summer comes on; and again in sober autumn, when summer's joys, cares, and excitements, and monitions are past and gone; until, by degrees, the song becomes more and more scanty, and less varied, at the approach of icy and

solemn winter, when the one great want and care will be for food, as the stormy blast sweeps over hill and valley, the desolate fields and lonely woodlands.

And now the woodlark, whom we watched some half-hour ago swiftly rising up into the summer air,



"The fir-trees tall and high."

is rapidly descending in long, sweeping curves of flight, still singing as he gets nearer and nearer to his grassy nest. As he reaches it, up from the long, tangled, heathy grass by the hedgerow—with a loud, harsh cry—there rises a golden and purple pheasant, his noisy wings flashing in the sunlight as he makes his way towards the wood. With the exception of the peacock and the jay, his is perhaps the most harsh and discordant cry of all our English birds. Perhaps to *them*—as to their foreign relatives, the whole tribe of parrots—their gay and gaudy plumage may be some sort of compensation for their lack of musical ability. In spite of all their gorgeous plumage, one's ear can find no pleasure in the scream of the peacock, the harsh screech of the jay or the pheasant, though we have learned to tolerate chanticleer—at a moderate distance—when his shrill clarion awakes us at early dawn.

And now, for a few moments, there comes a short lull in the happy chorus of summer sound. The noisy pheasant is away in the depth of the green woodland; the lark is at peace in his nest; the thrushes are silent; the busy "tits" are still busy round the ruddy stems of the fir-trees, but they are songless, and intent only on their search for the tiny insects which lie hidden in the crevices of the bark; each tiny insect perfect and complete by Divine creation, exact in his own way, habits, and life, of which we know so little, and perhaps conscious of his own exact use and place in the scale of being, of which we know still less. Forethought and knowledge of

some kind we know they have. There, in the crevice of the rough bark, or on the blade of grass below, or under its root, or in the mud of the pool, was the tiny egg of that tiny insect once carefully laid, with infinite skill, and many precautions against possible enemies; and there, through the dark days of winter, as of death, it lay until the days of springtide resurrection and new life, as the full flush of summer came on, and the earth was again crowned with her robes of joyous beauty. Once more, before we go, let us look up to the outline of dark-grey and green tree-tops against the clear blue sky, across which there floats one little feathery cloud of white. How far away, how infinitely remote, seems the cloudlet; small almost as a snowflake in the wide expanse! How remote and silvery the whisper of the trembling, leafy needles! recalling the old well-known and pathetic words—

"I remember, I remember  
The fir-trees tall and high,  
I used to think their slender tops  
Were close against the sky.  
It was a childish ignorance,  
But now 't is little joy  
To think I'm further off from Heaven  
Than when I was a boy."\*

Yet, not further off, after all. For round about us on every side is the invisible presence of the Great and Good Father, by whom we live and move and have our being.

B. G. JOHNS.

\* Thomas Hood.

## GENTLENESS IN CHRISTIAN WORK.

BY THE REV. GEORGE BROOKS.



WE have considered the Spirit of Christ, the Gentle Worker; let us now ask ourselves in what degree the Christian Church is exemplifying the spirit of Christ. Happily it may, I think, be answered that the Church is exemplifying this spirit in a very considerable degree: probably in a more perfect degree, on the whole, than in any former age. But even the best that the Church has done in this direction has been all too poor and unworthy. Never has the Church of Christ been really true to His spirit; and where she has failed this has been the chief cause of her failure.

Why are the masses of our population outside of, and more or less hostile to, Christianity? Because Christianity has been corrupted by the admixture of worldly elements contrary to the spirit of Christ. Christian people have often been selfish and proud, instead of being self-sacrificing and humble; they have frequently been more anxious to gain social and political patronage than to do spiritual work in the faith of God; they have cultivated the friendship of

certain classes, and neglected others. We are now awakening to a sense of our responsibility in relation to those who have been too long neglected; awakening also to a sense of the danger which threatens us if this policy of neglect be continued. And this very movement of the Church's heart, so cheering from one point of view, is from another perceived to be a real peril. The danger is lest we should rush from the extreme of inaction to the extreme of over-action: from the slumber of indifference to the excitement of an unreal life; and thus, instead of correcting the mistakes of the past, aggravate the case by adding equally disastrous blunders in the present. We may be as destitute of the spirit of Christ when we are doing much as when we are doing nothing at all. Everything depends on *what* we do and *how* we do it.

Unsound methods, which seem to promise speedy and brilliant success, have a fatal fascination for the unthinking. This is an age of ultra-sensationalism, not only in religion, but in everything else. There is a feverish craving for excitement, induced largely by the conditions of our modern life. Men are not content to live as their fathers did, by steady hard work, relieved and sweetened by quiet and rational pleasures. In commerce, in professional life, in industrial pursuits,