A WALK IN MAY.

"Then came faire May, the fayrest Mayd on ground,
Deckt all with dainties of her season's pryde,
And throwing flowres out of her lap around:
Upon two Brethren's shoulders she did ride,
The Twinnes of Leda; which on eyther side
Supported her like to their soveraine queene:
And leapt and daunc't as they had ravisht beene!
Lord! how all creatures laught when her they spide, [sic]
And Cupid selfe about her fluttred all in greene."
—*Spenser*.

CUPID certainly, for have we not high authority to prove that Spring is the "only pretty ring time," and that "Sweet lovers love the Spring," and "when a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," what better opportunity for rustic courtship than the old May-day festivities, the setting up of the May-pole, the crowning of the May queen, and the pretty custom of "bringing in the May," a ceremony in which the noblest of the land would take their part, for Chaucer tells us

"Forth goeth al the court, both moste and leste,
To feche the floures freshe, and branche, and blome;
And namely (*especially*) hawthorn brought both page and grome."

Did not King Henry VIII. and Catherine of Aragon come from their palace of Greenwich one May-day morning to meet the heads of the Corporation of London, who had been into Kent to gather hawthorn? and the very name of St. Andrews Undershaft, in Cornhill, speaks of the time when the tall May-pole, "higher," says Stow, "than the church steeple," was erected in front of this church, and is indeed, the very "great shaft of Cornhill," mentioned by Chaucer, while another equally celebrated in prose and poetry stood in the Strand and gave its name to May-pole Alley. The children's games "All around the May-pole, trit,
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trit, trot," and the more familiar "Here we came [sic] gathering nuts in May," are survivals of the old May-pole ditties, as is the old Scottish

"Here we go by jingo ring
About the merry Ma tanzie."

Except for these poor remnants, the singing of the choir of Magdalene College on the roof of the tower at sun-rise, and the ceremonies at a few schools where the festivities of May-day are revived in a modified form, the old customs have completely died out,—the singing village children with their doll and garlands and May-day song, beginning

"Remember us poor Mayers all."

and the London chimney-sweepers' "Jack-in-the-green" are things of the past, but the joyousness of the season is with us still, for in the words of an old minstrel, "fields and plants become green again, and everything living recovers virtue, beauty, and force, hills and vales resound with the sweet songs of birds, and the hearts of all people, for the beauty of the weather and the season, rise up and gladden themselves," Nevertheless

"Flowery May, who from her green lap throws
The yellow cowslip and the pale primrose."

is a treacherous month, and most nations agree in the sensible if homely advice, "Cast not a clout till May be out," and "In April don't put off a thread, in May put on double"; an Italian version is

"Avril pa'un fil,
Maggie addagie,
Giung 'slargo l'pugna."

while invalids are warned that

"March will search, April will try,
May will tell if you live or die."

A French rhyme says

"Quand le buisson blanc entre en fleur,
Crains toujours quelque fraîcheur."

and the Germans

"Wenn der Mai den Maien bringet,
Ist es besser als wenn er ihn findet."

Now Corncrake, Quail, and Spotted Flycatcher arrive: the first, also called the Land-rail (*Crex pratensis*) is a brownish bird, rather smaller than a Partridge, whose curious cry, resembling the creaking of a gate on its hinges, is heard both day and night. The bird itself is seldom seen, as it lives among the tall grass, in
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which it builds its nest, and amid which it can run at a rapid pace; when driven from its haunts by the cutting of the hay it retires into the cornfields. The Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa grisola*) on the contrary, prefers to live in the open, where it can more readily seize the insects on which it lives, and for which it waits, sitting on branch or rail, and suddenly dashing out as its prey approaches. So quick and adroit is the bird that a pair have been seen to visit their nest with food for their young 537 times in one day. The Pied Flycatcher (*M. atricapilla*) is less

common and more of a woodland bird. The name of the genus is from the Latin *musca*, a fly, *capere*, to take.

Now the first broods of Thrushes and Blackbirds have already left their nests, the young Robins are preparing to follow their example, the mottled young of the Black-headed Gull, and the baby Lapwings or Plovers appear, and “the white-throat builds and all the swallows,” the latter making their nests under the caves of houses or outbuildings, while the Chimney Swallow will sometimes prefer a chimney or a beam in a barn; the nests are built of mud, and lined with feathers, the House-martin mixing soft grass with these, while the Swallow strengthens the mud with bits of straw. Each species returns to its old nest, and two broods are reared during the season. Other busy builders are the Pheasant, whose nest is a primitive heap of leaves and grasses, the Whinchat, Sedge Warbler, Greenfinch, Willow-wren, Blackcap, and Yellowhammer, the latter specially connected with this month by the mysterious couplet,

> “The brock, the toad, and the yellow, yellow yeorling,
> Get a drop of the devil’s blood every May morning.”

In Scotland the Yellowhammer is known as the Devil’s bird, while a North Country rhyme designates it as “Horrid yellow yeowling.” Besides the numerous variants of its name, Goldhammer, Yellow Yorling, Yeldring, etc., it is known as the Scribbling or Writing Lark from the purple streaks on its eggs.

Caterpillars of species too numerous to particularize are feeding on leaves and grasses, while Butterflies and Moths disport themselves in the still air. It is easy to distinguish between the two if we remember that a butterfly, when resting, closes its wings over its back at right angles to its body, and a moth either spreads them, or folds them longitudinally. These closed wings afford a striking example of the theory of protective colouring; the mingled shades of brown on the under surface of the wings of Tortoiseshell or Peacock Butterfly, for instance, blend perfectly
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with their surroundings, and the mottled green on the underside of the Orangetip, resting on some umbelliferous flower, corresponds so exactly with the colouring of the plant that it is difficult to distinguish the two. In the same way the tints on the folded wings of a moth melt perfectly into the greys and yellows of the tree trunks, and, in the case of such insects as the Tiger, Cinnabar, or Red or Yellow Underwing moths, completely hide the brilliant colours of the lower pair. Again, the antennæ of a butterfly are thickened at the tip, while those of a moth are bare at the end, in the case of the larger moths the antennæ are often plumed. The Caterpillar of a butterfly changes into a hanging chrysallis with rigid sides, tinged with the metallic lustre that gives it its name, from the Greek χρυσός, gold, whereas that of a moth becomes a round pupa, frequently inclosed in a cocoon; though some caterpillars, as that of the Death’s Head Moth, bury themselves in the ground when approaching the pupal state, and others, as that of the Magpie Moth, simply fasten themselves by a few threads to leaf or paling.

Among the noticeable butterflies of the month are the Swallow Tail, largest of British butterflies, and the Little Blue (*Lycœna minima*) the smallest, with a wing expanse of ¾ of an inch from tip to tip, the Scarlet Admiral, with broad red band and white spots, the Large and the Small White (*Pieris brassicæ* and *P. rapæ*), the Dingy and the Grizzled Skipper, the Speckled

Wood Butterfly or Wood Argus (*Pararge Ægeria*), so called from the eye-like spots round the margin of its lower rings, the Glanville, and the Heath Fritillary. Among the moths are the Emperor Moth, with the beautiful eye-like spots which have given it its scientific name *Saturnia pavonia*, from *pavo*, a peacock, the Eyed and the Elephant Hawk Moths, the Cinnabar, and the Peppered moth (*Amphidasys betularia*). The Hawkmoths are so called from their strong and rapid flight, the Eyed Hawkmoth (*Smerinthus ocellatus*) is easily recognised by the spots on the lower wing, the Elephant Hawkmoth takes its name from a curious resemblance of the fore-part of the body of its larva to the trunk of an elephant.

The well-known Cockchafer or May-bug belongs to the genus of *Scarabæidæ* or Chafers, with legs especially adapted for digging; the Clock, Dor, or Watchman Beetle (*Geotrupes stercorarius*), with shiny wing-cases, is also a member of this order, as is the sacred Scarabæus of Egypt. The eggs of the Common Cockchafer (*Melolontha vulgaris*) are laid in soft soil, and for three
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years the grub lives underground, feeding on the roots of grasses and other plants, and so destructive is it that whole meadows have been ruined in this way. In Winter the grubs hibernate, and in their third year they enter the pupal state; the beetle is developed some months before it appears, as it remains underground till Spring, when it proceeds to work further havoc, this time among trees, the leaves of which it devours voraciously for the few remaining weeks of its life.

The pretty little Lady-bird was probably originally Our Lady's Bug, that is, beetle, indeed it is still known as Ladybug, both in the United States and some parts of England, while the German name is Marienkäfer, Marienwürmchen, Mai Katt, or Maikaferchen; in Bretagne it is "la petite vache du bon Dieu," the Good God's little cow; in Spain, too, it is Vaca de Dios, and White calls it Lady-cow in his *Calendar*, in Sussex it is God-almighty cow; Swedish names are "Our Holy Virgin's Bower-maid," or "Gold Cow," and another German name is Guldvogel, gold bird, while in Holland it is "Our Dear Lady's little beast."
The children's rhyme

"Lady-bird, lady-bird, fly away home,
Your house is on fire, your children all gone,
All but one that lies under a stone,
Fly away, lady-bird, ere it be gone."

is said to be derived from the German folk-song, of which the second verse runs

"Marienwürmchen, fliege weg;
Dein Hauschen [sic], die Kinder schrei'n
So sehre! wie so sehre!
Die böse Spinne spinnt sie ein,
Marienwürmchen, flieg hinein;
Deine Kinder schreien sehre."

A Prussian version may be translated "May-bird, fly, thy father is at the war, thy mother is in

Pomerania, Pomerania is burnt, May-bird, fly.” To see a Ladybird is lucky, and the more one sees, the greater the luck. If it crawls over a girl’s hands it is measuring them for her wedding gloves, and a south country rhyme adjures it

> “Bishop, Bishop Barnabee,
> Tell me when my wedding’s to be,
> If it be to-morrow day,
> Open your wings and fly away.”

The largest British species is the Eyed Lady-Bird (*Anatis ocellata*) with yellow-ringed black spots on its red wing-cases; unlike most Lady-birds, which prey on Aphides, it is a vegetable feeder.
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The small Twenty-four Spot Lady-bird (*Subcoccinella* 24-*punctata*) is about an eighth of an inch long, its thick red down spotted with various black dots and patches, in rare cases absent. The Ten Spot Lady-bird (*Coccinella* 10-*punctata*) is rather larger than the twenty-four Spot, but less than a sixth of an inch in length, the number of spots varies, as does the colour, but the insect may be recognised by its yellow legs. The Seven-Spot Lady-Bird (*Coccinella* 7-*punctata*) has black legs, three black spots on each wing case and one at the base common to both; the Thirteen-Spot Lady-bird, with yellow or orange back, is not often seen.

The Common May-fly (*Ephemera*), like the Cock-chafer, passes the major portion of its life in the larval state, for it may be two or three years before the larva becomes a pupa, emerging, not a perfect insect, but still encumbered by a delicate robe. In this state, known as the sub-imago, the creature, the Green and the Grey Drake of Anglers, rests upon a stem or tree-trunk for a time, then, casting off its final covering emerges as the perfect insect, with gauzy wings, and three delicate bristles for tail. Its life now is short, for after a day or so of happy aerial dances it drops its eggs into the water in which it lived so long as a grub and dies. The May-fly is of ancient lineage, tracing its ancestors to the Devonian period.

The old adage

> “March winds and April showers
> Bring forth May flowers.”

is abundantly justified, for so numerous are the different varieties of blossom on every hand that it is impossible to name more than a selection, and fore-most among these stands the Hawthorn, the May flower par excellence, though the Lady’s Smock sometimes takes that name, and the Lily of the Valley was formerly the May Lily, and is still the Maiblume of the Germans. The Hawthorn or Whitethorn (*Cratœgus oxyacantha*) always figured so prominently among the various blossoms employed for “bringing in the May,” that by a natural transition the name of the month was bestowed upon the plant. Though Herrick’s invitation to Corinna is so well-known one can hardly forbear to quote his description of

> “How each field turns a street, each street a park,
> Made green, and trimmed with trees; see how
> Devotion gives each house a bough

Or branch: each porch, each door, ere this
An ark, a tabernacle is
Made up of white-thorn neatly interwove."

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and Spenser writes

"Youngthes folke now flocken in everywhere,
To gather May-buskets and smelling brere;
And home they hasten the postes to dight,
And all the kirk-pillows eare day-light,
With hawthorn buds, and sweet eglantine,
And girlands of roses, and soppes in wine (carnations)."
". . . . . O that I were there
To helpen the Ladyes their Maybush beare."
(*The Shepheards Calender*).

This bough of Hawthorn over door or window was considered a protection against witches, but, on the other hand, it is unlucky to "sweep with a broom of May," for if you do "you'll sweep the head of the house away." Neither must one dig up a Hawthorn bush, for, like the Lady Fern, these are under the special protection of the fairy folk; old and lonely trees are their favourite trysting places and

"Is any man so daring
As dig one up in spite,
He shall find the thornies set
In his bed at night."

In the East the Hawthorn is an emblem of Hope, the Greeks used its wood for bridal torches, and Athenian brides wore it as a garland. The plant, too, has sacred associations, for the Crown of Thorns is said to have been woven from it,[1] hence the French call it L'epine noble, and the Germans Christdorn, while, according to a French tradition, the tree moans and sighs on the Eve of Good Friday. The Glastonbury Thorn (variety *præcox*) which blooms about Christmas time and again in Spring, has its own special story; the original tree was destroyed by the Puritans. The name Hawthorn is derived from Anglo-Saxon *haga*, English *haw*, a hedged enclosure, the scientific title from the Greek κρατος, strength, from the hardness of the wood.

Other trees and shrubs in flower this month are the Horse Chestnut, Sycamore, Hornbeam, Crab Apple, Wild Cherry, Mountain Ash or Rowan, Scots Fir or Pine, Spindle-tree, Holly, Guelder Rose and Barberry, while Oak and Ash are racing to unfold their leaves, eagerly watched by those who hold that

"If the oak is out before the ash
Then the earth will get a splash;
If the ash is out before the oak

Then the earth will get a soak."

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The custom of wearing a sprig of oak on May 29th, the anniversary of the restoration of the House of Stuart, was general throughout England till quite recent years, and many who read this will doubtless remember their anxiety to obtain the necessary twig for "Royal Oak" or "Oak-apple Day." The Crab-apple (*Pyrus Malus*) and Wild Cherry are the ancestors of our cultivated fruits, the sieder of the ancient Britons was probably a form of cider, and the original pomatum was prepared from apples, hence, it is suggested, the names pomade and pomatum, from the Latin *pomum*, an apple. The Morella Cherry is a descendant of the Wild Cherry or Gean (*Prunus avium*), the sweet varieties have been obtained from the Dwarf or Red Cherry (*P. cerasus*), which may be distinguished by its smaller size and smooth leaves, those of the Wild Cherry being downy on the under surface. The Bird Cherry (*P. padus*) has its flowers in hanging clusters, and is less common. The greenish-yellow flowers of the Sycamore or Greater Maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) are also pendulous, those of the Field Maple (*A. campestre*) erect. The name Sycamore was given in mistaken identification of this tree with the Sycamore Fig of Palestine; it is the Plane of Scotland, though the real Plane tree, which also flowers this month, is the Oriental Plane, so familiar to dwellers in cities, whose round fruit has earned for the tree its American names of Buttonwood, and Buttonball tree.

In the hedges we find the sweet-scented Wild Clematis, Virgin's Bower, or Travellers' Joy, as Gerarde calls it, the only British species; also known as Old Man's Beard, from its white-tufted seeds; the Black Bryony (*Tamus communis*) with heart-shaped, and the White (*Bryonia dioica*) with five-lobed leaves; various Vetches and Vetchlings, the Tufted Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*) with yellow flowers and pods resembling a string of horseshoes placed end to end; the Crimson or Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) with grass-like leaves, no tendrils, and deep red flowers, is uncommon, the Hairy Tare (*Vicia hirsuta*) has pale blue flowers, while the Bitter Vetch (*V. orobus*) with purplish white blossoms, grows in rocky woods. In woods, too, we find the exquisite Lily of the Valley, the old "Ladders to Heaven," a decoction of the blossoms, says Gerarde, is "good against the gout and comforteth the heart." Solomon's Seal is possibly so-called from the resemblance of its greenish-white flower clusters to an old-fashioned bunch of seals, but another explanation is that it took its name from its efficacy in "knitting
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together, soddering or sealing" broken bones, etc., and Gerarde tells us that "the roote of Solomon's Seale stamped while it is greene, and applied, taketh away in one night, or two at most, any bruise, blacke or blue spots gotten by falls…" The pretty blue flowers of the Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) contrast with the blossoms of the Yellow Pimpernel or Wood Loosestrife (*Lysimachia nemorum*); Wood Germander or Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) is easily recognised by its wrinkled, sage-like leaves, and strong scent. Unmistakable, too, is the Broad-leaved Garlic or Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), spite of the strong resemblance of its leaves to those of the Lily of the Valley. It is the most common of the Garlics, of which there are ten species, most of these bearing red or pink flowers. The Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*), like others of its genus,—five species flower this month—may be recognised by the whorls of golden-green bracts united into a round cap. The Sweet Wood-ruff (*Asperula

odorata) with tiny jessamine-like flowers, and whorls of pointed leaves, was so called because, when dried, it yields a pleasant scent of new-mown hay. Anne Pratt tells us that "the leaves will preserve their odour for years, and if laid among clothes, are an excellent preservative from moths. Old records found in the books of London churches show that they were once hung up in garlands within their walls." The Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) is also called True Love Knot from the whorl of four equal leaves which give it its scientific name from *pars*, equal. The plant is unmistakable, as is the Twayblade, an orchis with two broad, strongly ribbed leaves opposite one another. The Green-winged Meadow Orchis blooms this month, and the rarer Fly Orchis, and various others.

The meadows are gay with the "Buttercup, the little children's dower," the Bouton d'or of France. The reflexed sepals of the Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) distinguish it from the Common Buttercup (*R. acris*) with spreading calyx, and the Creeping Buttercup (*R. repens*) so troublesome in gardens. The Clover or Trefoil is so called from the Anglo-Saxon *cloeferwort*, in reference to its cleft leaves, which triple leaves were formerly in high repute as a charm against witchcraft or other evil—

"Woe, woe to the wight who meets the green knight,
Except on his faulchion arm,
Spell-proof he bear, like the brave St. Clair,
The holy Trefoil's charm."

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The White Clover is used as Shamrock in some parts of Ireland, but the Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*) is the plant most usually worn on St. Patrick's Day. The Ragged Robin is of the Campion genus, its Latin name *Flos-cuculi* means Cuckoo Flower, for this, and not the Lady's Smock, was the Cuckoo Flower of our ancestors, and the plant referred to by Shakespeare in *King Lear, Act IV., sc. 4.*

"Harlocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers."

Harlock may be Charlock or Wild Mustard, or perhaps Hardock, thought to be the Burdock. Drayton, in his *Eclogues*, speaks of

"The honey-suckle, the harlocke,
The lily, and the lady-smocke."

By the road-side grow the Tormentil, Yarrow, Pansy or Heartsease, Scarlet Pimpernel, Fumitory, Red Campion or Bachelor's Button, Mouse-ear Hawkweed, Earth—or Pignut, Beaked Parsley, Goose-grass or Cleavers, Tower Mustard, various Cresses, and the Greater and the Ribwort Plantain, the former distinguished from the latter by its broader leaves and purple anthers, those of the Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) being white. Another name for the Greater Plantain (*P. major*) is Waybread, probably a corruption of its old Saxon name of Wabret. The Common Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla vulgaris*) is abundant on moist, and the smaller Parsley Piert or Field Lady's Mantle (*A. arvensis*) on dry soil. On waste land

“Like budding bullion the spiny Gorse
Is thick with fragrant bloom beloved of bees,”

and the Broom adds its quota of cheerfulness. This plant (*Cytisus scoparius*) gives its name to the domestic implement originally made from its twigs, but it must not be gathered this month for

“If you pluck the Broom in May
Every good housekeeper rues the day.”

the result being a drought all through the summer and “to sweep the house with blossomed Broom in May” entails a similar fate to the sweeping with a hawthorn broom previously mentioned.

The curious parasitic Toothwort (*Lathræa squamaria*) may be found among dead leaves and on the roots of trees; on moist ground grows the Buck—or Bog Bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) the Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) with violet flower and rosette of pale-green oily looking leaves, and the Marsh

Rattle. In streams and standing water are the Water Crow-foots and in the former the Watercress; on banks and margins flourish the Yellow Iris or Corn Flag, the Common Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) the Water Avens, the Brooklime, and the For-get-me-not, with its romantic tradition of the gallant lover, when

“The blossoms blue to the bank he threw
Ere he sank in the eddying tide;
And ‘Lady, I’m gone, thine own knight true,
Forget me not,’ he cried.
“The farewell pledge the lady caught,
And hence, as legends say,
The flower is a sign to awaken thought
Of friends who are far away.”

By the sea shore we find the Wild Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) forerunner of all our garden varieties, the various species of Scurvy grass so invaluable in olden days to sailors deprived of fresh vegetables, and the pretty little Sea Pink or Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) sometimes called Sea Gilliflower, though more appropriate to its bunch of rosy blossoms is its other old English name of Ladies’ Cushions.

[1] Then was our Lord yled into a gardyn, and there the Jewes scorned hym, and made hym a crown of the branches of the Albiespyne, that is Whitethorn, that grew in the same gardyn, and settin yt upon hys hed” [sic] (*Sir John Maundeville*).