Notes on the Flora of the Quantock Hills.

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THE geological formation and the historical associations of the Quantock Hills have been abundantly investigated under the auspices of this society. Their natural productions, animal or vegetable, have not yet, so far as I know, been described or catalogued, although they contain specimens in both branches of Natural History singularly rare and sought after, and though more than one zoologist or botanist of note gazes on them daily from the windows of his home. A paper whose conditions are that it should be "light and popular," and that it should not exceed ten minutes in the delivery, cannot throw much scientific light upon the plants of the most limited region ; but it may reveal sources of enjoyment

and raise individual enthusiasm, and it may remind this meeting that the time has possibly come when our society should use the means at its command to encourage the gradual creation of such a flora and fauna of the county, as no single naturalist, unassisted by a public body, can in any case trustworthily compile.

In this beautiful valley, fat with the rich red soil that countless millennia have seen washed down from the surrounding hills, the flora is everywhere so unusually rich as to win the envy and delight of strangers. It has been my lot to pilot botanists from all parts of England in search of local rarities, and I have found their chief raptures given not to the uncommon flower they had come to see, but to the profusion of form and colour which includes almost every English genus, manifest in the common turnpike roads which skirt the hills, but revealed in full perfection to those only who penetrate the interior of the range. In the sheltered lanes of the less wooded combes, in the road from Kilve to Parsons' Farm, the footpath from the Castle of Comfort to Over Stowey, above all in the lane from the Bell Inn to Aisholt, the hedge banks and the wide grass margins of the road are scarcely surpassed in beauty by the mosaic of a Swiss meadow or an Alpine slope. From the beginning to the end of June the colours are blue and yellow ; the blue represented by the *Ground Ivy*, the *Germander Speedwell*, the *Brooklime*, the late *Bugle* and the early *Self-heal*, the *Narrow-leaved Flax*, the long spikes of *Milkwort*, and the varieties of the *Violet;* the yellow by the *Bird's-foot Trefoil*, large and small, the *St. John's Wort*, *Golden Mugweed*, and *Hop-trefoil*, the *Agrimony*, the *Yellow Vetchling*, and the countless kinds of *Hawkweed*. In the hedges above are the *Mealtree* and *Guelder Rose*, the *Madder*, *White Campion* and *Lady's*

Bedstraw, half hidden by the twining tendrils, white blossoms, and tiny cucumbers of the *Bryony;* while here and there, where the hedge gives way to an old stone pit or deserted quarry, the tall *Foxglove* and the great yellow *Mullein* stand up, harmonious sisters, to fill the gap. By the middle of July the colours shift. The flora of early spring is gone, the *Milkwort* shows its pods, the *Speedwell* its bushy leaves;—the yellow still remains; but the blue has given way to pink; to the lovely *Musk Mallow*, the *Horehound*, *Dove's-foot Cranesbill*, *Restharrow*, *Painted Cup*, and *Calaminth*. With August a third change arrives; the small short clustering flowers are gone; instead of them we have the coarse straggling *Fleabanes*, *Ragworts*, and *Woodsage;* the great blue trusses of the *Tufted Vetch* and the pure white trumpets of the *Bindweed* take possession of the hedges; the yellow sagittate leaves of the *Black Bryony* and the red berries of the *Mountain Ash* warn us that summer is past. Our September visit marks the closing scene. The flowers are few and far between; but the *Ivy* bloom is musical with bees, the *Hazels* put forth clusters ruddy brown as those with which the Satyr wooed the faithful Shepherdess; the *Arum* pushes its poisonous scarlet fruit between the mats of dying grass; and the meadows which slope upwards from the brooks are blue with the flowers of the *Colchicum*.

These are all common flowers, whose names and habits, if education did her work, we should learn in childhood from our mother and our nurse. It is their immense profusion, not their rarity, that calls for notice, and they represent but a small part of the hill flora. To exhaust this fairly we must visit four different regions; the hill-tops, the bogs, the coppices, and the slopes toward the sea. Of the first it is difficult to speak without a rapturous

digression as their familiar sights and sounds occur to us; the breeze that "seems half conscious of the joy it brings," the musical hum of bees, the warble of invisible larks, the popping of the dry furze-pods in the stillness, the quivering air above the heather, the startled spiders with their appended egg-bags, the grasshoppers, the green hair-streaks, the gem-like tiger beetles on the wing,—in the distance the Mendips and the yellow sea, or the long rich valley, closed by Dunkery and Minehead.

Heath, *Furze*, *Bracken*, and *Whortle-berries*, are the four tetrarchs of the hill-tops, giving endless shades of red and green and yellow. The heaths are three and only three, the *Heather*, the *Cross-leaved Heath*, and the *Bottle Heath*, the last exhibiting rarely a white variety, which in the language of flowers tells the tenderest of tales. From beneath their shelter peep the *Eyebright*, the *Spring Potentil*, the *Heath Bedstraw*, and the *Creeping St. John's Wort*; amidst them springs the uncommon *Bristly Bent-grass*; everywhere the green paths which wind amongst them are carpeted with the *Mœnchia* and the little *Breakstone*, and bordered by the red and yellow *Sheep's-sorrel* and the pale yellow *Mouse-ear*. On many of the prickly furze beds grows the wiry leafless *Dodder;* every ditch is filled with masses of lemon-scented *Oreopteris*, and every patch of stones is hidden by the pink blossoms of the *Mountain Stone-crop*. At 800 feet above the sea we meet with *Mat-grass* and the *Cross-leaved Heath*. Higher still we find the slender *Deer's Hair*, first cousin to the Isolepis of our greenhouses, and highest of all grow for those who know their haunt two species of the *Stay-horn Club-moss*.

The bogs are very numerous. They form the summits of the combes, and some of them descend the hill until they join a deep-cut stream. All are covered with the turquoise

bloom of the *Forget-me-not*, and the glossy peltate leaves of the *Marsh Penny-wort*, and choked with the little *Water Blinks*. They all include *Liver-wort*, with its umbrella shaped fructification, *Sphagnum*, *Marsh-wort*, and *Pearl-wort;* and on their margins grow the *Ivy-leaved Hair-bell*, the *Lesser Spear-wort*, the *Louse-wort*, and the *Bog-Pimpernel*. In a few of them are found the *Oblong Pond-weed* and the *Marsh St. John's Wort;* in two combes only, as far as I know, grows, alone of its genus, the *Round-leaved Sun-dew*.

Of the coppices, Cockercombe and Seven Wells are the best known; but their large trees check the growth of flowers, and the botanist will find more to please him in Butterfly Combe and Holford Glen, which are smaller and less frequented. Here in early spring masses of the *White Wild Hyacinth* rise amid last year's dead leaves; here grow the *Cow-wheat*, *Woodrush*, *Golden-rod*, *Sheep's Scabious*, *Wood Pimpernel*, *Wild Raspberry*, *Sanicle*, and *Twayblade*. The *Helleborine* is found in Crowcombe; in Tetton woods the rare pink *Lily of the Valley;* in Cothelstone the *Adders' Tongue* and *Mountain Speedwell;* in Ashleigh Combe, *Thelypteris;* in Aisholt wood the *White Foxglove*, *White Herb Robert*, and *White Prunella;* while under the famous hollies of Alfoxden, sacred to the memory of "Peter Bell" and "We are Seven," grow the graceful *Millet-grass* and a rare variety of the Bramble.

On the St. Audries slope the changed soil and the influence of the sea give birth to several new plants. The *Autumn Gentian*, the *Tufted Centaury*, the *Roundheaded Garlic*, and the *Sea Star-wort* are abundant near the cliffs; the *Perfoliate Yellow-wort* is common; *Fluellen* grows in the stubbles, the *Lady's tresses* near the lime-kiln, the *Sea Pimpernel* between the stones, the *Arrow-grass* and *Hard-*

grass just above the sea, to which we descend between banks, covered as no other banks are covered, by the magnificent *Large-flowered Tutsan.*

A few rare plants remain, which come under neither of the groups described. The *Cornish Money-wort* abounds in a small nameless combe near Quantoxhead; the rare *White Stone-crop* is indigenous or naturalised at Over Stowey; the *White Climbing Corydalis* is found close to Mr. Esdaile's lodge; the *Lady's Mantle, Goldilocks,* and *Bistort,* grow in the Aisholt meadows; the *Stinking Groundsel* hard by the remains of Coleridge's holly-bower. In the same neighbourhood I have twice found the *Purple Broom Rape;* and *Wilson's Film-fern,* one of the rarest of British ferns, is established in the Poet's Glen.

I venture to hope that there is no one present to whom this catalogue of plants is a catalogue and nothing more. Our English wild flowers are so charming in themselves, they awake in all of us so many associations, they hold so large a place in our poetical literature, their popular names reveal so many an etymological secret and recal so many a striking superstition, that almost every one, whatever be the line of his mental culture, is willing to own their interest and to linger over their recital. To the Shakspearian scholar they bring memories of Perdita at the shearing-feast, of Ophelia in her madness, of Imogen sung to her untimely grave, of the grey discrowned head of Lear, with its chaplet of "rank Fumiter's and Furrow-weeds." The lover of Milton points to the "rathe primrose," the eye-purging *Euphrasy,* and the *Amaranth* which was twined in the crowns of worshipping archangels. The historian of the long-buried past sees in the *Cornish Money-wort,* the *Film-fern,* and the *Lusitanian Butter-wort* of our hills evidence distinct and graphic of the time when Scot-

land, Ireland, and Spain formed with our own peninsula portions of a single continent. The student of Folk-lore tells his tales of the ceremonies which surrounded the *Vervain*, the *St. John's Wort*, and the *Rowan*, and of the strange beliefs which clung to the *Celandine*, the *Hawkweed*, and the *Fumitory*. The etymologist will elevate the names familiar to us all into evidence of the origin and habits of our remote forefathers ; he will disinter the fragments of myth and history which lie embalmed in the *Centaury*, the *Pæony*, the *Carline Thistle*, the *Flower de Luce*, and the *Herb Robert;* he will tell us how the *Laburnum* closes its petals nightly like a tired Labourer, how the *Campion* crowned the Champions of the tournament ; how the *Foxglove*, the *Troll-flower*, and the *Pixie-stool*, bring messages from fairyland ; how the *Scabious*, the *Lung-wort*, the *Scrophularia*, and the *Wound-wort* bear witness to the grotesque beliefs of a pre-scientific medical community. Of the botanist I need not speak. Not a flower that blows but will furnish him with the text of an eloquent discourse. Forms, that yield to other men artistic and sensuous enjoyment only, lay bare before him secrets of structure and of function as wonderful as those which characterise his own bodily frame ; suggesting each its truth of design, and natural selection, and adapted change, and mysterious organic force. In the fructification of the orchid, the stamens of the barberry, the hairs of the nettle, the leaf of the sundew, he reads lessons as profound and similes as graceful as were taught to Chaucer and Southey and Wordsworth by the daisy and the holly and the lesser celandine. Year after year he greets the early spring with an enthusiasm which his neighbours know not, as one by one his friends of many years, the snowdrop, and the violet, and the crimson hazel stigma, and the stitchwort,

and the daffodil, and the coltsfoot, come back to him like swallows from their winter sojourn out of sight. Year after year, as the seasons die away and the earth is once more bare, he looks back delighted on the pleasant months along which he has walked hand-in-hand with nature; for he feels that his intelligence has been strengthened, his temper sweetened, and his love of God increased, by fellowship with her changes, study of her secrets, and reverence for her works.