


A  
CHILD'S  
BOOK  
OF THE  
GARDEN




RANSOME



NATURE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN.



A  
Child's  
Book  
of the  
Garden



BY

ARTHUR RANSOME

TREHERNE

**NATURE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN**

1. THE CHILD'S BOOK OF THE SEASONS
2. THE GARDEN BOOK
3. THE BOOK OF POND AND STREAM
4. THE BOOK OF THE WOODS
5. THE BOOK OF THE FIELDS
6. THE BOOK OF THE COUNTRY LANE

**THE THINGS IN OUR  
GARDEN.**



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GARDEN**

BY  
**ARTHUR RANSOME**

Author of "The Souls of the Streets," etc.



Illustrated by Frances Craine

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FOR  
**Joyce and Kitty.**

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## I

### THE GARDEN

This is a little book all about two children who live in a grey house with ivy on its walls, set in the middle of a garden with an orchard at its back. It is going to tell you about some of the things that there are in the garden, things that the two children love, things that you may see, too, for yourself, and love also if you are lucky enough to live in a garden like theirs and can run about quietly and use your eyes. But first of all it is going to tell you about the two children and the other people who belong to the garden, and about the garden itself. When you have heard all this you shall know about the feathered people, and

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the plant people, and the insect people, that the two children love, and also about the two gardens that are theirs for their very own.

There are four people who belong to the garden and to whom the garden belongs—the Imp, and the Elf, and the old gardener, and me. Other people, of course, walk about in it sometimes, but we love it best, so that we are the real owners. Let me tell you about ourselves, one by one, beginning with the children.

The Elf is a little girl. She is sometimes very good and sometimes very bad. One day she really wants above everything to be good and the next she thinks it the most delicious thing in all the world to be naughty. In fact, she is very like most other little girls, and I have never known her to do an unkind thing to insect, or

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bird, or plant. She loves them all, and they seem to love her in return. She wears a pale-blue sun-bonnet, and a spotty pinafore or a brown holland overall, and sometimes, when her nurse has only just done with her, looks very neat indeed, while at other times, when the garden has just done with her, she is as grubby a little animal as you could find.

The Imp is very like the Elf only that he is a little boy, and wears knickerbockers instead of petticoats, and somehow manages to get even grubbier than his sister. When he is good he is about as good as the Elf, and when he is naughty he is not any worse. They are both very nice. The Imp wears a big straw hat and a holland overall like the Elf's. He tugs at the gardener's roller, and on hot days falls asleep in its shadow. He climbs all

the trees he can reach, and tumbles into every stream he knows, and discovers more ways of dirtying himself and his clothes than any other boy I have ever known.

Then there is the old gardener. He is very old—"older than the trees" the Elf says. He is a little bent with the damp in his bones, and he has a fluffy white beard growing all round his wrinkled brown face, and a wisp of white hair under his big cap. He knows everything that is to be known about the garden and the things in it, and often when he is walking up and down the garden of an evening watering the flowers, or kneeling on a sack on the damp grass planting seedlings in the beds, the Imp and the Elf walk with him or stand beside him with their hands behind their backs and ask questions, all kinds of questions.

And he gives them odd answers that are true, like the wise old man he is. And some of the queer things he has told them they have repeated to me, and you shall hear of them if you read this book.

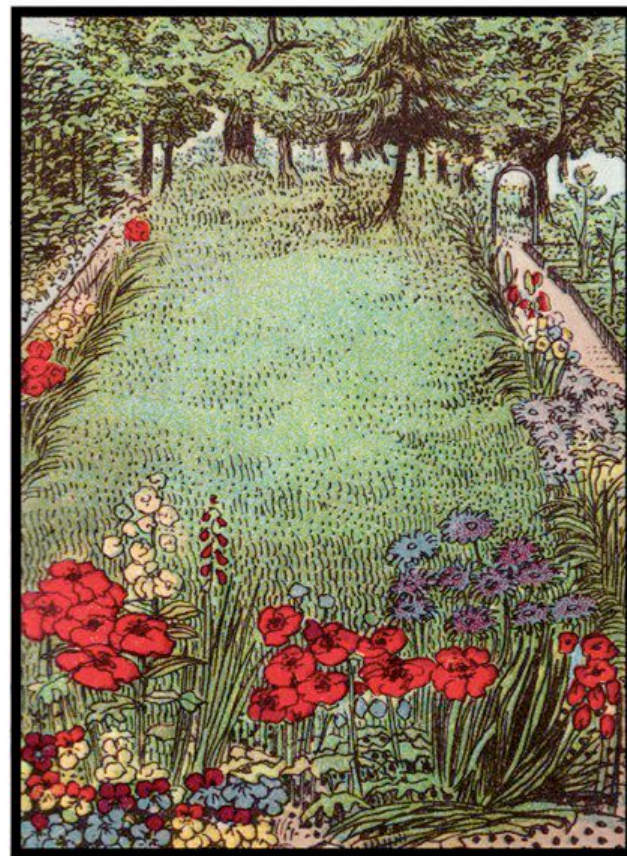
And then, also, the garden belongs to me. But the Imp and the Elf have far bigger shares in it than mine, for they are in it all day long in summer time, whenever they are not in the lanes, or the woods, or the meadows, or the heather, while I have to stay indoors and work, because I am a grown-up. Work is very like lessons—it just keeps you from the things you want to do.

The Imp and the Elf are very lucky. For one thing they do very few lessons, and for another, whenever the ground is dry and the air warm they do their lessons out of doors. The grown-ups who look

after them think it much better that they should know all about the live things that are in the garden—like plants, and trees, and ants, and wasps, and worms, and birds, and slugs, and bats, and beetles—than about the dead things that are in books. So the Imp and the Elf are happy.

Really, it would be very odd if they were not full of laugh and fun, and all sorts of happiness, with a garden for a schoolroom, and an old gardener for a schoolmaster, and all the living things for lesson-books. Besides, you see, the old gardener teaches them the things they want to know, instead of the things that it is difficult to think useful.

The little grey house that is our home is full of crooks and corners and old gables with twisted rain spouts that make splendid homes for the birds. It is



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nearly covered with dark ivy, and high in this close green foliage we can see the little bits of straw sticking out that show where the nests are. We see the brown sparrows flit in and out, and now and again a bigger bird, stumpy and dark with a thick neck and a shimmer of green over his back and breast. He is a starling, and you shall hear about him presently.

All round the front and sides of the house spreads the garden. One of the front rooms of the house is the study where I work, and the children come after breakfast to drag me out for walks, and at night to make me tell them fairy stories. It has a big window looking out on a broad green lawn where the birds feed in winter, little black moving dots on the white snow. But now it is bright and green and the Imp is lying in his favourite

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place, in the shadow of the roller, looking very fat and hot. He has got a book with him full of pictures, and I suspect it is the little Book of Birds or else Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales, that have the very jolliest pictures.

Beyond the lawn is a group of trees, none of them very big, but quite big enough to make a little wood. And a little wood makes any garden perfect. The birds build their nests in it and sing in the branches of the trees, and the Imp and the Elf have built themselves a cave of sticks and greenery and make it into a robber camp or a cavern of sorcery in a magic wood, or a witch's hut in the depths of a forest, just whatever they may happen to want at the times when they are feeling like witches or wizards, magicians or brigands. In the little wood they play

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through all the stories that they know. The Imp becomes Jack the Giant Killer or the Enchanted Prince, and the Elf is the Sleeping Beauty or Cinderella and a hundred other heroines of fairy tales.

There is an oak in the little wood, stout and strong, with boughs growing straight out and then turning up like candles in chandeliers. There is a chestnut, almost the first tree to break into leaf in spring, with its big divided leaves and spikes of green flowers followed in the autumn by round hard nuts in prickly coats like little green hedgehogs. There are graceful birches with silver stems and clouds of delicate pale green leaves. There are bushy hazels that give us catkins and nuts and beautiful furry leaves. Perhaps dearest of all among the trees there is a little larch that glows every springtime

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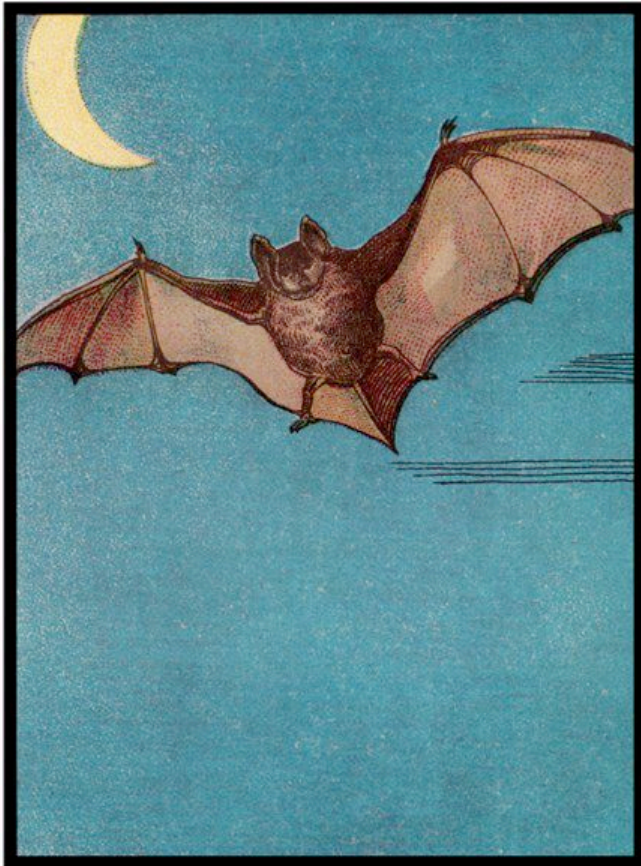
like a pale green flame in its new foliage and stands now a spire of vivid green among the more sombre colours of the other trees. Under the larch we have tea in summer when it is too hot to have it on the lawn.

Beyond the trees there is a low hedge with holes in it, through which the Imp and the Elf crawl out into the meadow. But on either side there is a stone wall, shutting the garden and the house into a little country of its own. Close under the wall on one side is a shrubbery, with rhododendrons, big and thick and very dark green, with huge purple and violet and rose coloured blossoms. As the summer goes on the blossoms fall and carpet the ground under the shrubbery with burning colour. Close by, there is a yew tree, very old and thick, spreading out its

boughs and shade over a low seat made of a plank fixed on big stones. Here we often sit in the evenings, listening to people playing the piano in the house, or telling fairy stories to each other, or making plans for the next day, and the day after that, and all days, or just resting quietly after the heat of the sun, watching the bat that lives in the yew tree fly in and out, and slip past us in the air, like a wavy streak of black lightning. A queer little gentleman is the bat, half mouse, half bird. Indeed, some people call him flittermouse, and they are not far from the truth, for he is just a wee beastie like a mouse, only with very long toes on his forefeet, and thin webbing between them and his hind-legs, to make wings. He flies very quietly and skilfully, like a butterfly, with turns and darts and dashes, catching the little

insects that fly in the dusk. During the day he sleeps, hung up by his hind feet, somewhere in a hollow in the yew.

In the wall at the other side of the garden, there is a hollow built, with a broad flat shelf in it. And side by side in the shelf are two round things made of twisted straw, and shaped like porridge bowls upside down. All through the summer a great buzzing and humming sounds here, for the straw things are beehives of the old-fashioned sort, and we can watch the bees working busily throughout the daytime, flying out from the hives, and then from flower to flower, collecting the honey that you shall hear about later in the book, and flying back again heavily laden to store it in little waxen cells. But you shall hear all about the bees in the chapter on the Little People.



Fruit trees are trained on both the walls; pears and plums and greengages, and they are beautiful with blossom in early summer, and heavy with ripe fruit in autumn. In the summer blossom time, when clouds of delicate pale coloured flowers cling about their branches, the bees flit to and fro among them, but in autumn the wasps, striped angry black and yellow, eat their way into the soft fruit, and come buzzing out in very bad tempers when we touch the pear or the plum that they are enjoying.

Close where the wall comes away round the trees in the little wood at the end of the garden, are two oblong plots of ground, with a white rose tree in one and a red rose tree in the other, and round them a medley of plants, crimson and white bachelor's buttons that are really stout

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double daisies, pansies, yellow marigolds, and blue forget-me-nots, and London Pride, and red geraniums, and gaudy nasturtiums, and wallflowers, with borders of Virginian Stock, little wee flowers that grow close to the ground, in all shades of pinks and lilacs. These are the gardens that belong to the Imp and the Elf for their very own selves, and they do all the tending of them, planting the flowers, and sowing seeds, and hoeing and raking, and weeding, and watering out of little tin watering-cans, in the cool twilight, when the sun has gone to bed. There is a whole chapter about these two little gardens at the very end of the book.

Down each side of the lawn there are long flower beds, full of sweet simple flowers, lupins, and poppies, and all the flowers that ought to grow in a real Eng-

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lish garden, the flowers that our grandfathers and grandmothers loved to pluck and smell, and that our little grandchildren will love some day, the flowers that nobody can help loving. Under the walls there are beds too, with strawberries in them, and gooseberry and currant bushes, and rows of scarlet beans, and brightly-tinted sweet peas. And between the beds, on either side of the lawn, two gravel paths run the whole length of the garden. Standard roses bloom in the beds at the edge of the paths, and when we go along the walks, which are always kept free from grass or weed, we pass under arches, here and there, entwined with clematis, white and purple, or hop, or honeysuckle, or climbing roses, that make the garden one of the sweetest that I know. It is a pretty place, our garden, and the Elf and the Imp were

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wishing just now, as they put their heads in at the study window, that they could have all the children who are going to read this book to tea in it, two at a time, every day throughout the summer.

II

THE FEATHERED PEOPLE

The Imp and the Elf came in to rest and cool from the heat just when I was wondering which of the garden people to tell you about first, so I asked them for advice. "Tell them about the little feathered people," they said, and that is what I am going to do. You see, there are a great many people living in the garden. There are Mr. and Mrs. Blackbird, Mr. Thrush and his wife, a noisy couple of starlings, a robin, and a crowd of sparrows. These are the feathered people. Then there are the little folk, almost more of them than of the birds; there are spiders, snails, bees, wasps,

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earwigs, worms, caterpillars, and beetles, and all of them very pleasant people, too. And then there are the quiet folk, the plant people, who are as interesting and pretty as any of the rest. And, of course, there is the cat, who is really a very charming person, although he does go to sleep in the flower-beds and terribly frighten the birds.

Birds are really very like people. They have houses of their own and bring up their children and teach them how to fly and how to feed just like men and women with their little ones. I think it is that that makes us so fond of them. Why, we never talk of them as if they were other than companions and guests. We never think of them as simply birds, things different altogether from ourselves, they are always Mr. and Mrs. Thrush, and

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their cousins, Mr. and Mrs. Blackbird. And it is just for that reason, perhaps, that we are always very careful not to startle or frighten them, for we know they are just as full of fears and tremors as we, and we know that we should not at all like some great giant to poke his huge clumsy finger into our nest, which is the little grey house, and pull us about and very likely kill us, even if he only did it by accident. Even if he were sorry for it afterwards that would not make any difference to us.

The Imp and the Elf know every bird in the garden, and the birds know them, so that they are quite tame and quiet and not at all frightened when we walk about, but are ready to perch on twigs just above our heads, and almost to settle on our hands. Some day, perhaps, they will do

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that, when they know us even better than they do now.

While we are having breakfast we watch them pecking about on the lawn, standing quite still for a moment and then hopping in quick eager jumps a few feet one way or the other and then peck, peck, pecking down with their strong beaks and pulling up a fat juicy red worm. Often the worm does not come quite comfortably into their beaks, and then they have to twist and toss him up and down until at last they get the whole of him inside. That is the way the blackbirds and thrushes get their breakfast. But really they have been up long before we were out of bed. If we wake early on a summer's morning we can hear them making no end of a noise almost as soon as it is light. I expect that the meal we see them making while we are

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supping our porridge is really about their fourth breakfast, and not the first. They eat all sorts of other things besides worms, and are very fond of snails. But snails are fortunate things, for they have hard shells, so that many of the smaller birds cannot get them out to eat them. But when the snails are disobliging enough to squeeze themselves into their shells the blackbirds and thrushes have a short way with them. They pick the snail up, shell and all, and bang it again and again against a stone until the shell is broken to pieces and the soft snail is ready to be eaten in comfort.

The starlings eat worms and grubs, too, and fruit when there is any to be had. The sparrows are just like them in that, for they love caterpillars, but are so well content with seeds and buds that we are

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forced to cover our seed-beds with black cotton stretched on twigs so that they may know that our particular seeds are things to be left alone.

The children know all their nests and pay calls regularly in the beginning of the year to see how they are getting on. They come to me in the study every day to tell me how far the blackbird has got with his building, and how many of the twigs they have laid near by as a help to him he has seen fit to use, and when there are eggs in the thrush's nest, and how many homes of the sparrows they can count by the straws sticking out of the ivy.

This year the blackbirds and their lively cousins, the thrushes, both nested in the bottom of the garden, the thrushes in the shrubbery and the blackbirds in the thickest part of the hedge between the garden and

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the meadow. The Imp and the Elf watched the building of both nests and collected little pieces of straw and grass and feathers and hung them invitingly on the twigs near by so that the little feathered people might use them if they wished. They are quite proud of having had a hand in the building of such important homes. A day or two after the nest building was over the children came joyously to the study and banged on the door, and came tumbling in and found me smoking a pipe. "The Ogre's not working," they said, "so that's all right." Then they told me to come down and visit the blackbirds and the thrushes, and we set off down the long gravel path under the arches, on the side of the garden opposite to the beehives. The Imp walked in front. How careful he was not to

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disturb the mother bird! He began to make us walk on tiptoe long before we got near the shrubbery. The cock thrush was perched on the oak in the little wood sending a merry song into the garden air that was fresh and moist with a shower of rain that had fallen in the night. He did not stop singing as he saw us coming, for he knew that we were friends. We twisted in among the bushes in the shrubbery and the Imp peeped before us into the heart of an evergreen laurel and whispered, "Mrs. Thrush is at home." But just as he said it she flew out and joined her husband in the boughs of the oak. "So that we can see in. How kind of her," said the Elf. So, while she and her mate were flitting and singing in the oak branches, we peeped into her home, and there were four greeny-blue eggs, spotted

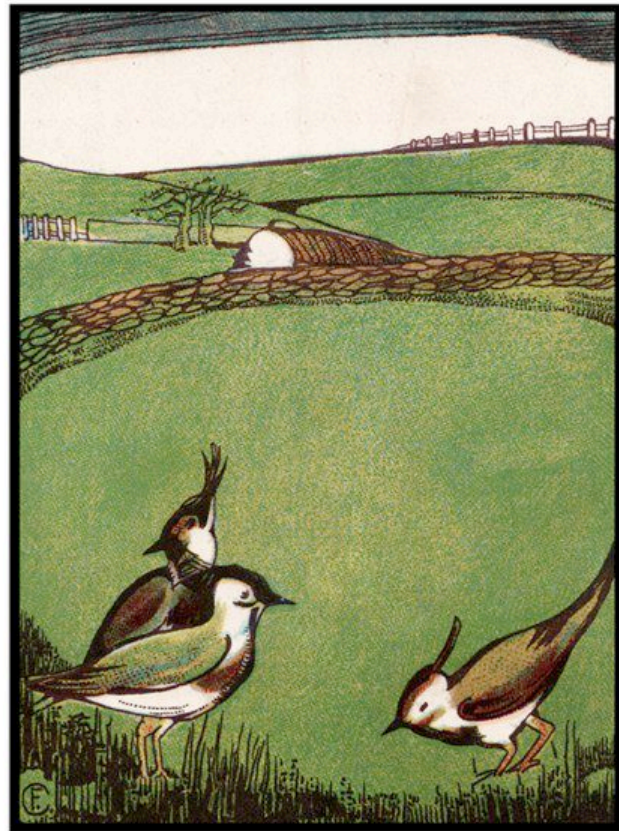
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with dark brown. Mr. and Mrs. Thrush are splendid builders. Their nest was firm and strong, and very steadily fixed between the laurel boughs with walls of grass and twigs wonderfully woven together with a smooth coat of mud inside like plaster on the walls in a house. We just looked and went away, for nothing is so rude as to make a visit last too long. And as soon as we were gone we saw the mother bird fly back again straight into her nest, to keep the eggs comfortable and warm till the little birds should break through and fill their home with squeaking open beaks.

Then we went through the little wood close under the oak, where the thrush was singing proudly because of his handsome wife, and neat house, and beautiful family of eggs, and because of the jolliness of

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life. We passed underneath him and through to the hedge that runs across the low end of the garden to keep the cows out. Cows are nice things in the field, but not at all the sort of people that one wants to invite into the garden. So the hedge is there to tell them, quite politely, to stay where they are. In the middle of the hedge was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Blackbird. Mrs. Blackbird was sitting on her nest with her head up at one side and her tail cocked into the air at the other. She looked at us as if she were asking a question with her little bright eyes, and then flew out and on the top of the hedge while we looked in at her eggs. She had five eggs, pale, bluish-green, mottled like the thrush's eggs, only paler. Her nest was very nice, but not quite so neat as her cousin's. She had not plastered her



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walls but had lined them instead with soft grass. "I call it laziness," said the Imp. But the Elf defended her. "It isn't laziness," she said, "it's just because she's a kind old thing. She does it to make the walls soft like cushions for her little young ones."

Of course, after that day we were very eager to see the little birds as soon as they should come out of the shells. Every day after breakfast the Imp and the Elf would slip off to visit the nests and see how the eggs were doing. Every day they would come back smiling. "All quite well!" they would shout from the lawn.

At last one morning, just as I was settling down to work, the door burst open and the Imp came running in. "They're out!" he shouted, "they're out! The thrush's four chickens have all come out

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in the night!" I was getting up to go out with him and see the little thrushes when we saw the Elf come running across the lawn too excited even to shout. She climbed panting through my window, which has a big flowerpot upside down outside, placed there so that she can reach. At first she had not enough breath to speak, and all the time the Imp was tugging at me to come and see the thrushes. At last she gasped out, "Little blackies, all naked and red inside," and the Imp tumbled somehow out of the window and was off like a curly-headed bullet.

We ran after him as fast as we could go, and caught him up just as he peeped into the hedge. There they were in the blackbird's nest, five little skinny baby birds with beaks wide open like red lined pill

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boxes. The thrushes were just the same. We did not dare to look at them for more than a moment for fear of frightening the old birds. For very often if people pry too closely into birds' family matters when the little ones are just out of the eggs, the old ones fly away, even if they are friendly with the people, and leave their naked little ones to starve. We did not want that to happen. So for several days we left them alone, only watching the old birds as they flew away from the nests to collect food, and came flying back with worms and fat grubs to drop into those open scarlet throats.

When we looked again the little birds had put on their first rough feathery coats. And when we saw them we were made quite sure that the blackbirds and the thrushes must be cousins. "Mrs. Thrush

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and Mrs. Blackbird have dressed their children just alike," said the Elf, and so they had. There were the four young thrushes all speckled brown, and the five little blackies speckled, too.

We wondered how that was, and then I told the children a fairy story about the blackbird that was told me by my old nurse when I was a very little boy. She said that in the very beginning the blackbird was brown and mottled with a dark bill like the thrush, and that he spent all his spare time poking about in dead and fallen leaves. One autumn when he was digging about in the ruddy leaves that had been blown into heaps along the ground, he found some gold that had been hidden there by one of the gnomes. He stole it and hid it for himself. The poor gnome who had lost his gold went to the

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King of the Fairies and said, "Your Majesty, this kind of thing will not do at all. One of the birds has stolen my gold." So the fairy King called all the birds together, and the blackbird came with the others, very perky and bright. The King said, "Which of you feathered folk has stolen the gnome's gold?" And the blackbird said nothing but just bobbed his head this way and that as if he were looking for the thief. But, as it happened, some of the gold had stuck to his brown beak, and the King saw it. "Hi, you rascal," said the King, "you are the thief!" He held him by the neck and shook him before all the other birds. "For punishment his coat shall be black to show that he is a rascal, and his bill shall be yellow so that everyone may know he stole gold." And so it has been ever since. But the black-

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bird has long ago forgotten that he is being punished, and is as cheerful and happy as any other bird.

The sparrows' nests are usually far harder to see than those of the thrushes and blackbirds. We can only tell where they are because sparrows are untidy little people and leave long pieces of straw dangling out of the ivy. But, in spite of their untidiness, their nests look very comfortable indeed. The sparrows are people who do not mind about appearances. Last year a pair built in the ivy that grows thick and green just under the Elf's window, and we could see it beautifully when with care, and someone holding on behind, we leant over the sill. It was built of straw with soft walls made of feathers, and in it, when we first looked, were five very pale-blue eggs with brownish

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spots on them. Later the eggs hatched out, and what a noise the little sparrows made, to be sure.

Just above the Elf's window there is a gable. The ivy runs close up under it and in the corner live a pair of starlings, black and mottled, with shimmerings of green and purple. The starlings wake the Elf every morning, crying angrily, "Get up now and go down, my dear, get up now and go down." Starlings make almost more noise than any other of the birds. They seem to find something to chatter about in everything, and if they have nothing to say they say so. Their eggs are clear blue all over, and their nests are often very nice indeed, with moss in them as well as wool and feathers.

Under the eaves of the house and along an old drain pipe for the rain, which is now

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worn out and not used, live a lot of noisy little pretty people, the swallows and martins. Their nests are like little bowls of mud and clay, and the martin's is shaped almost like a cup, with a little hole at the top. You know the difference between swallows and martins, don't you? The martin is smaller than the swallow and is whiter underneath. Also, and this is the best way of telling him, he is not so spiky when he flies. The flying swallow looks like a spread-out bundle of spikes with his long thin wings and forked tail, while the martin is a blunter bird, and his tail is not so deeply cleft. The swallow lays speckled eggs and the martin white ones. They have some cousins, the sand martins, who have pure white eggs, and make their nests at the inside end of long tunnels, which they burrow into banks.

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They all fly away in autumn, far over the blue seas to warmer countries, where they can spend the winter comfortably. But they come back to us at the end of every spring, and when the Imp and the Elf first see them they come running to tell me, for it means that summer is very near at hand. And in the autumn, when the nests are deserted and the birds fly away, we know that winter is only round the corner.

These are all the birds who nest regularly in the garden or about the house. But we have plenty of visitors. In the summer time we see blue tits searching for grubs on the little trees in the wood, but only very seldom, while in winter they come greedily to feed at a cocoanut outside the study window. You will hear all about that in the "Child's Book of the

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Seasons." And then there are chaffinches with their grey backs and pink breasts and the white splashes on their wings. You will hear all about them in the "Book of the Country Lane." And there are many others, huge rooks, black and greedy and noisy, who dig about the lawn and perch on the topmost branches of the trees and then fly away over the meadows calling to each other in their great hoarse voices. There are great tits who are fine to look at and rather like big blue tits. They make a noise like hitting two pieces of tin together, when it is going to rain. These and many more.

And then, of course, and most important, there is Mr. Robin, of the red shirt front. I am going to tell you why the Imp and the Elf like him almost best of all the birds. They love him because he

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is cheeky and naughty and bold and bad like themselves. They like him because of his gay shirt front, his pale knickerbockers, and pretty brown coat. They like him because he is not afraid even of the cook. Do you know, he comes gaily into the kitchen, where even I, who am grown up, am afraid to go? He often flies in at the pantry window, and makes such a noise, chirruping and chirruping, that I can hear him in my study with the door shut. And once, when I was writing at the table, and the Imp and the Elf were curled up on a cushion looking at the robin's picture in Morris's "Book of British Birds," which is such a big book that the only way to look at it comfortably is to lay it on the floor, the robin came hopping along the lawn and up on the window sill, as if he knew we were thinking of him.

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He flew into the room, perching first on my table, and then on the mantelshelf, and then on the coal-scuttle, and then on the floor close by the book, just as if he wanted to see whether his portrait was a good likeness. Mr. Redbreast is very free with his voice. He just chirrup and chirrup without stopping and without any particular tune. But his chirruping is so cheerful that one day when I asked the Imp what the robin's song was like, he said, "Oh, he doesn't sing. He is just like me. He shouts because he is happy." Robin has not got a nest in the garden, but he has a very comfortable one hidden in the bank of a lane close by. He chooses all kinds of places for his house-buildings. The Imp found a robin's nest last year, when he was looking for something quite different, in a hole in the wall

**THE FEATHERED PEOPLE 47**

of a ruined barn. The Elf found one once, with the eggs, the tiniest little eggs you can imagine, white with little reddy brown spots over the thicker ends of them, beautifully built in a cleft between two branches of a little hawthorn tree.

**III**

**THE PLANT PEOPLE**

For quite a long time the Imp and the Elf did not care very much for flowers and plants, or at least not so much as for the other things. "The birds are people," says the Elf, "the plants are only things." They liked the bright colours and sweet smells of the gardens, but did not love them as they loved the feathered folk or even the insect people.

And then one day as I sat in the study looking out across the lawn and down the garden paths, I saw the gardener kneeling on the ground by a flower-bed, and the Imp and the Elf lying flat on the grass beside him, with their chins propped on

their hands. Something very interesting was being told them, I guessed, and put away my papers and slipped out to join them.

They were watching a bee on a clump of yellow and purple pansies. "What do you think he's doing?" asked the old gardener, and the Imp and the Elf just watched and said nothing. "Look at his legs," said the gardener, and they looked. The bee's legs and part of his body were golden with fine yellow dust. The old gardener rubbed his finger into one or two of the big marigolds, and showed the tip of it covered with dust in the same way as the legs of the bee. "Does he go to get the dust?" asked the Imp. "Not he," said the gardener; "that is pollen dust, that is, and the flowers want the bee to come to them to carry it about to other

flowers, for unless the pollen is carried about from flower to flower the seeds do not ripen." "Oh," said the Imp. "Yes, but how does the bee make the flower do its work for it like that? How does it persuade it to come?" asked the Elf. "You wait a minute," said the old man, and picked a pansy flower, and showed them that behind the pansy face there was a horn-shaped tube into which the bee had been poking his head. "You taste what is in this," he said, and the two children picked pansies and pulled off the horns and put them between their lips. "It's sweet," said the Imp. "It's honey," said the Elf.

"Honey, it is," said the old gardener smiling, "and that's what the bees are after." And then he told them how hundreds of the flowers keep a little honey



stored in a private pantry inside themselves and invite the bee by sending a sweet scent into the air, and by showing their bright colour, like the flags at the doors of tents. Some of the flowers, like the pansy, even have lines marked on their petals, so that when the bee has come it is shown the quickest way to the pantry. By the time he gets inside to the honey some of the pollen dust has brushed itself off on his legs, or head, or body, and he has left behind him some of the dust from one of the other flowers he has visited. You can see the lines for yourself on any pansy in the garden.

Well, from that day the Imp and the Elf began to grow as fond of the flowers as of the birds, and just as inquisitive about their ways. They wanted to know how plants fed and all about the children

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of the plants, indeed, everything about them. They were delighted at the clever way in which the plants managed all the difficult things they wanted to do. When they had noticed that the plants who use bees to carry the pollen are bright and gay and awake during the day, they were very interested to hear that other flowers use moths, and were puzzled when they remembered that moths only come out at night. "How do they find their way to the flowers?" they asked, and the Elf kissed an evening primrose for joy one night when she understood that it was so wise that it only opened in the evening when the moths came out and the bees had gone to bed, and that it had a pale colour so as to be easily seen in the dark, and a very strong scent to make things still easier. The old gardener told her

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that nearly all the night flowers were white and pale, and she laughed. "Of course," she said, "they are just like me when I have a white dress on. Then it's no use trying to hide from you, for you can always see me even in the dusk." We walked round the garden in the twilight, when she ought to have been in bed, so that she could see the flat, white flowers of the tobacco plant, and the moths fluttering heavily about the pale blossoms of the evening primrose.

"I wish the plants had eggs," said the Imp one day. "I wish they had eggs like the birds." Of course they have, only that the plant eggs are called seeds. We were in the garden when he said it and we pulled a withered pansy to pieces and found a round, greenish knob. We broke it open with a knife and saw that

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the inside was full of wee green eggs that would some day grow hard and brown, and be sown in the earth and perhaps grow into purple pansies. In the autumn it is great fun to watch the pansy mothers sowing their seeds. The round knob that is left when the flower is withered away grows brown and splits into pods like half open pea pods with a row of little seeds in each, and the sides of the pods grown closer and closer together, tighter and tighter, squeezing out the seeds, and at last shooting them away over the ground. That is the way the pansy mother sows her children.

Other plants do it in other ways. You know dandelions when the golden toothed petals have left them and they are masses of white fluff? If you pick one and puff at it some of the fluffiness blows away

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down the wind, and if you catch it you will see that it is made of hundreds of tiny seeds, each hanging from a wee umbrella-shaped wheel of fine white hairs. It is so light that wind blows it easily away, and the fluffy umbrella at the top of it keeps it floating for a time, so the wind can carry it a long way from home before letting it drop. That is the way the dandelion sows his seeds. He calls in good brother wind to help.

Cherry trees, like many other fruit trees, call the birds to help them in the same way as the wind helps the dandelion, by carrying their seeds some distance away so that they may have a better chance of growing. All round the cherry stone, that is the seed, is soft juicy flesh that is good and sweet to the taste. Birds are very fond of eating it, quite as fond as

Imps and Elves. When the birds carry off the cherry fruits they drop the stones after eating the fruity parts, and so give them their chances of growing up into cherry trees.

Almost every plant and flower in the garden has some delightful plan of its own for scattering its seeds so that they will not be too crowded. The Imp and the Elf love watching them, and you had better do the same. Watch a poppy head turn upside down, and swing to and fro in the wind, shaking its little black seeds out of a row of wee holes round its top. Watch the sweet pea-pods open. Watch any flower you like, and find out all about it.

Plants are very fortunate, for they have other ways of making little ones besides seeding. Birds can only lay eggs. We

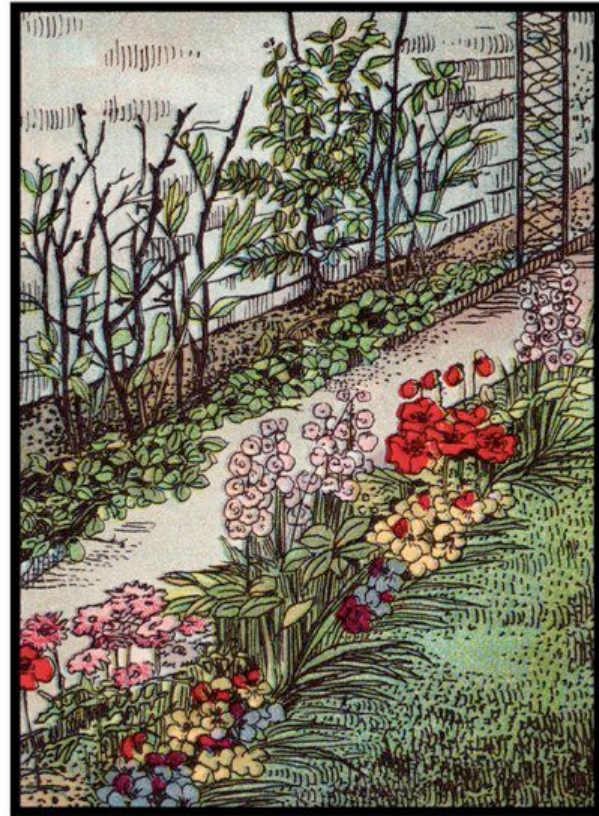
should be very surprised if we saw one little bird sprouting out of another. But that is what many plants do.

When the Imp and the Elf go to divide their pansies so as to spread them along the border next year, they dig them up and find that what was only one plant last year is now two or three. For the pansy roots have spread under the earth and blossomed up into fresh plants close to the first, that can easily be pulled apart without hurting either. If we watch the strawberry beds, we can watch the very same thing happening, only above the ground. The Imp and the Elf love watching the strawberry plants throwing out runners, as the gardener calls them, long threads that creep along the ground and take root and start new plants. And then the new plants grow runners and

start new plants again. So that one or two strawberries, left long enough, can cover a whole bed.

Then the children love watching the climbing plants, who can clamber up walls that they could not possibly manage, even helped by me. The plants, some of them, are so clever at climbing, that they can creep up a quite straight smooth wall, and up any kind of stick. The Imp and the Elf began to notice all these things soon after that first day when the gardener showed them that there was a reason for all the things the plants did, and that they were not stupid folk at all, but very clever people indeed.

I was sitting on the garden seat by the shrubbery reading, when suddenly the Imp, who was sitting by my side, said, "I could never climb up the wall of a



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house, could you, Ogre?" I said, "No, not without a ladder." "Well," said the Imp, "how does the Ivy do it?" So we left my books and things on the seat and went up to the house to see. When we pulled aside the leaves we saw that the Ivy had made a ladder for itself. And how do you think it had managed it? You go and look at the ivy on your own house and see for yourself. The ivy stems were quite covered with clusters of little roots that clung tight to the wall, so tight that we had to pull quite hard to get them away. When we went upstairs and leant out of an attic window where the ivy had only just climbed, we saw the new ivy shoots fastening to the wall. They put out little sticky roots that fastened on the wall, and would soon make a firm strong ladder for the plant

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to climb on, and go even higher. "That's not the way the plums do it," said the Imp. It is not. For the plums are not really climbing trees. They do not want to climb, and do not take the trouble to learn how, so that the gardener does it for them by fastening them up to the wall by nailing little strips of cloth across their branches.

Then we went to look at the sweet peas. They are delicate little people, and climb in quite a different manner. They throw out fine green tendrils that sway round and round and round till they happen to meet a stick or anything that they can cling to, and then, going on swaying round, they twist themselves tightly about it, and make a firm hold for the plant. The tendril between the main stem and the support twirls itself

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into a spiral half one way and half the other, so that the plant is not fixed rigidly, but can bend and swing with the wind. "What a clever little thing it is," said the Elf, who had joined us in the garden.

We began to see how every plant was made so as to grow best in its own fashion; how the climbing plants, like the sweet pea and the honeysuckle had delicate stems, and how the sturdy plants that stand upright by themselves, like gooseberry bushes or Michaelmas daisies or marigolds, have fine solid stems that are easier to break than to bend; how the creeping plants that run along the ground, like strawberries or violets, have small leaves on short stalks and never grow to any great height. There was no end to the things we noticed and I do not think there

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ever will be an end, for the more we notice the more secrets there seem to be that we are just going to discover.

The Elf noticed that the flowers looked one way in the morning and another way at night, and that puzzled us until the old gardener explained that they always follow the sun. Then, of course, we remembered how the ferns in a room always slanted towards the light. It really is interesting to see the flowers leaning up out of the foliage, like the marigolds, or the purple periwinkles, or the asters, or the great sunflowers bending sweetly towards the sun in the morning and bowing after him as he sinks in the west at night.

That is just one of the things we notice. Then there was the joyous discovery that we ought not to be cross with the prickles

**THE PLANT PEOPLE 63**

on the roses in the lane, for they were not meant to prick us, but only as hooks to catch tight hold of any branch across which the rose might climb and make it impossible for the rose to slip down again or back. You can try this by seeing how easy it is to push a prickle over a pencil, pushing it in the way the plant grows, and then trying to pull it back. The prickle catches tight hold of the pencil just as it would catch a branch in a hedge or your finger or anything else that happened to be there. The Elf keeps a little garden book and writes down in it in a big round hand all the plant secrets that she finds out, and sometimes queer little stories to show how a plant came to grow in its own way.

**IV**

**THE LITTLE PEOPLE**

At one corner of the little wood there is a clump of ferns growing on a low mound of rocks, and among the stones there is a cave made of a big stone and some pieces of broken flowerpots. In this cave lives the king of all the little people who share the garden with the birds and the plants. He is an old, and big, and ugly, and loveable toad. His fore legs are bowed almost into a circle, and his back is rough, and knobbly, and brown, and his eyes are like bright beads set in his broad flat head. We found him a long time ago lying in a lane one evening where he would certainly have been killed by the next farm waggon

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that passed that way. The Imp and the Elf picked him up between them and carried him carefully home in the Imp's pocket handkerchief. We built the cave for him next morning, and he took it for his own, and has lived in it ever since. Often in the evenings we meet him on the gravel walks, for the insects he lives on move mostly by night, and also he likes dewy grass better than the dry burnt lawns of the middle of the day. When we find him in the daytime drowsing sleepily at the mouth of his home we bring flies and things within his reach and watch him catch and eat them. He watches the fly without stirring, and then the moment the fly moves he shoots out a long pale tongue and licks it into his mouth. He and his relations do a great deal of good to the gardener, for he eats

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**66 THE THINGS IN OUR GARDEN**

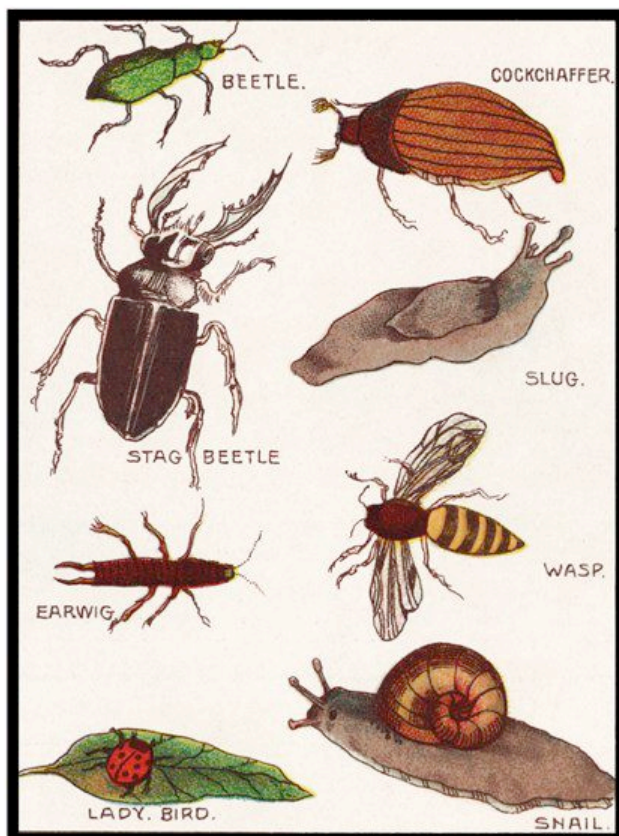
prodigiously, and every evening fills himself with the tiny insects that do harm to the plants. That is one reason why we call him the King of the Little People. But he is so solemn and wise-looking that we could never think of him as anything else. The Imp and the Elf love him well and often pay him a visit or go to see if they can find him when he has gone out from his cave on a busy thoughtful hunt for his supper.

As we walk round the garden early in the morning, after breakfast, before the dew has gone, we find the bushes in the shrubbery glistening with moisture, and often from some way off we see something that looks like a shining, slender wheel hung between the branches. From leaf to leaf and twig to twig, a garden spider has stretched a network of fine silk,

bright with drops of dew, as if a thousand glittering jewels were strung on every thread. Often in the very middle of the network we see the spider, quite still, waiting, waiting for the flies and insects on whom he feeds to settle in his net. For, just like the toad, he eats tiny insects and flies, though he does not hunt them nor catch them with a long, thin tongue. He just waits patiently until some little fly or wee brown moth entangles itself in his web, when he runs nimbly over the network and binds them up tightly so that he can feed conveniently whenever he may will.

At this time, too, while the breakfast things are being cleared away and we walk round in the cool before the sun is hot, we see the lawns covered with little heaps of earth like tiny coils of twisted

earthen rope. "The worms have been busy," says the Elf when she sees them, and the old gardener is angry with the worms for making such a mess of his lawns. For the little piles are made of the earth which the earthworms bring up from underneath the ground. During the daytime the worms burrow and delve deep under the earth, but when the evening falls they bring up the earth with which they have filled themselves and empty it into these little mounds. It is because the worms come up out of the ground at night or before the sun is high that the country people tell you "The early bird catches the worm." You will notice for yourself that there are far more worms to be seen early in the morning than in the afternoon. Do you know that although the gardener is so angry with



the worms they do very much the same work that he does himself sometimes? You remember what the gardener does when he is making a bed ready for seeds or planting; how he digs and turns over the old earth, bringing fresh soil to the top? Well, that is just what the worm does, only a worm does not use a spade but burrows down and brings up the new earth inside himself. So that really worms are rather useful things, for they keep the soil always changing, bringing up new earth and dropping it on top of the old for ever, and for ever, and for ever. Only, you see, they do it just the same on a fine, smooth lawn as well as in a bed, and it is that that makes the gardener cross.

The garden is full of snails and slugs. I never found a garden yet without them,

but our garden seems very much too full of what the Imp calls the One-foot-people. If we walk about on a moist day we find, all over the place, silvery, slimy tracks, with at one end of each a big, fat, glistening slug with its horns out and twisting this way and that as it slips along on its one sticky foot. And near by we shall probably find a snail, also one-footed but carrying a coloured house upon its back. The old gardener likes slugs and snails even less than he likes worms. The Imp and the Elf asked him about them. "Nasty, dirty, greedy things," he said, "look here and see what they have done." He showed them leaf after leaf of his cabbages and lettuces eaten away, with nothing to show of the culprits but some shiny tracks that disappeared in the earth. It is hard work for a soft, one-footed thing

like a slug to move over a hard, dry surface; so the slugs wait till the dew falls and then creep out of the earth and over the damp ground and up the moist leaves, making paths for themselves out of their sliminess, and then, after feeding comfortably and ruining the leaves, creep back again into the earth before the sun has had time to grow hot and dry the ground and make their travelling difficult.

The snails are just as much nuisance as the slugs, and have a more easy time, because they can hide so neatly in their hard shells, so that birds that can eat a slug without bother have to break the shell before they can get at the juicy flesh of a snail. But though they do so much harm both these one-footed people are very interesting, and the Imp tells the most delightful story of how he once dreamt

that he was a snail, carrying his house shell on his back, all purple and brown and gold. "And I ate all your very best lettuces," he tells the old gardener.

But neither snails nor slugs are as lively and exciting as beetles, whom the children like best of all the smaller things, because they are so beautiful. Often when we walk round the garden in the summer, and bend our heads to go through under the trees in the wood, the Elf finds that a tiny golden green beetle has got entangled in her hair, and the Imp, pulling it free, holds it out for my admiration, in his small fat hand. It is an active little thing, with its six hurrying legs, running about over his fingers, like an emerald drop of mercury. And when it opens its wing-cases, and puts out its wings and flies away like a ladybird, who

is a beetle too, and a cousin of its, the Elf, claps her hands because it looks so pretty. Then there are tiny brown beetles, and shiny blue fat ones, and black slim ones, and sometimes huge ones, with great jaws like the claws of a crab. These are the monster stag beetles, the biggest beetles that belong to England. Sometimes three or four come flying together into the garden and drop on the lawn, when the grey cat chases them, and leaps at them as they buzz in the air, just as if they were a kind of strange mouse. Once we heard her squealing by the shrubbery, and when we ran out to see what was the matter, we found that three of the big black things had fastened tightly in her fur.

The cockchafer is another big beetle who is a friend of ours. When we sit on the seat in the twilight, while the bat is

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flitting to and fro, we often hear a deep booming buzz in the air, and a big dark thing comes flying sometimes right into us in his labouring flight. Only about a week ago one flew against me and fell on the path at our feet. We picked it up and held it while we looked at its ruddy brown wing covers, ribbed from end to end, and its body striped across in dark and white, and the two beautiful fan-shaped feelers it bore on its head. It was quite hard to hold, for its legs were nearly as strong as the Elf's fingers. When we were tired of it, we found that it was very like some acquaintances, easier to get than to lose; for it clung so tightly, with its strong legs and clawed feet, that we could only loosen it with a hard tug. Then we threw it into the air, and it boomed away as merrily as before.

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But the most interesting and useful of the little people are the bees who live in the hives. All day long they hum in the garden, busy about their work, helping the flowers by going from blossom to blossom, and helping themselves and us, by gathering the honey. From the pantry of each flower they suck the honey, and carry it back to the hives to store it for the winter. The Imp and the Elf often go and stand at a safe distance from the hives, near enough to see, but not so near as to worry the bees. Though the bees never hurt anyone who leaves them alone, they easily grow nervous, and then perhaps they might sting even the children, who do not wish them anything but good. The children sometimes take campstools, and set them on the garden path, and sit there and watch the bees fly

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lightly away from the hive doors, the little holes in the front of the hives, and then fly heavily back, laden with the sweet honey. Once the old gardener showed them the way in which the bees store their honey. He let them see how the bees had built hundreds of little six-sided cells of yellow-tinted wax, and filled each cell with honey. The bees live all together, like the people in a castle. They have a queen to rule over them, and they work very hard indeed, so that all may live comfortably during the winter. But Imps and Elves and grown-up people are fond of honey too, and the gardener takes the honey out of the hives for them, and gives the bees syrup instead, so that they do not mind. And then at nursery tea we have bread and butter, and honey all juicy in the comb, trickling out of the waxen cells all

**THE LITTLE PEOPLE 77**

over the plate. And there is nothing nicer for tea than that.

The wasps, who are cousins of the bees, are not so useful, though they wear far more gorgeous clothes. They give us no honey, but are ready even to steal the jam from the sandwiches as we put them into our mouths at a picnic. They are rather bad-tempered people, too, and sting us if we make them angry. But they are just as clever as the bees. They have a queen, too, and they build fine houses, where they live, hundreds together, sometimes in a hole in a bank, and sometimes in a tree. There is a wasps' nest in a fir tree not very far from the house. It hangs from a bough like a big ball of grey paper. All day long the wasps buzz round it, and we do not like to go too near. But you shall

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hear all about that in the "Book of the Woods."

There, now. I think I have told you about all the little people who really matter. All except the earwigs. The Imp and the Elf hate earwigs, and told me to put them last of everything. For they are always finding them in the horn at the back of the nasturtiums, so often that they do not care to make nasturtium buttonholes. And that is a pity, for nasturtiums are jolly flowers. The earwigs like them because those horns give them nice dark cool hiding places. At night they come out and enjoy themselves, and spoil the enjoyment of other people by eating the petals of flowers. So that really we are quite right not to like them, But no one need be afraid of them, because they can do no other harm,

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"Have you told them that earwigs are pigs?" asks the Elf. I have not said that, but I have said that they make things ugly, and that is quite as bad. And now the Imp and the Elf are bothering me to write about their own gardens. So come along to the next chapter, and I will see what I can do.

**V**

**THEIR OWN GARDENS**

Close by the wood at the bottom of the garden there are two oblong flower beds, as I told you in the first chapter. A white rose stands in one and a red in the other. The Imp grows the red roses, the Elf the white, and these are their own gardens that they tend themselves. Often while sitting at work I look out of the study window, and see far down the garden the two small people, the blue sun-bonnet and the broad straw hat, busily nodding and talking about their work. For all the year round in even a tiny garden there is plenty of work to do. Whatever is done by the old gardener in the big

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garden must also be done by the Imp and the Elf in their little garden plots.

Even in the winter they are busy; for then there are bulbs to be planted—crocuses and snowdrops and hyacinths. They get great fun out of bulbs—such solid, comfortable sort of plants as they are seen in boxes in the seedsman's window, great boxes full of them like round, brown balls. Sometimes at one end of the ball a yellow or pale greenish spike has poked its way out through the russet coverings, and it is clear that somewhere hidden in the brown ball is life, and that green leaves and a gay flower are only waiting to force themselves into the light. The Imp and the Elf plant their crocuses and snowdrops in little clumps, a few inches below the ground, some time before Christmas, and then the snow comes and covers the earth,

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and is swept away by the sun, and falls again, and at last clears away, leaving the ground dark and moist, when the green shoots appear and, even in the cold weather, the little white snowdrops nod and sway above the ground, and are often covered once again by the snow, even in their blossoming. Then the crocuses, purple and orange tubes of colour, shoot up among their spiky leaves and open as they die. And later, the daffodils bloom in the children's gardens, and hyacinths, purple and pink and white and blue spires of gorgeous colour. Then the long, narrow leaves droop to the ground and wither, and the bulbs are pulled carefully and laid away and kept in a dry place, to be planted next year and given another chance of flowering.

With the early spring comes seed-time.



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The Imp and the Elf summon me from the study and we tramp off together to the seedsman in the village, who has a big, flat card, and on it, tied in bundles, small paper packets of seeds. Every packet has on it a brilliant coloured picture of the flowers that it is to produce, a gorgeous promise of decoration for the garden plots. Each packet costs one penny, but is an earnest of many pennyworths of happiness. Always the choosing takes a long time—there are so many packets to choose from—and ever the choice is the same in the end. Every year the seedsman smiles, and bends over the counter, and advises gravely and with much serious thought over the wisdom in choosing each separate flower. Every year he puts into two large envelopes the same selection of seeds. Packets of cornflowers “because

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they are blue and jolly,” nasturtiums “to climb the walls,” sweet peas “to climb the sticks,” dwarf nasturtiums “because they look so jolly on the ground,” Virginian Stock “to make a border,” and poppies “for a blaze.” We walk home full of eagerness for the sowing, and all talking at once of the glories that the two little gardens will show when the cuckoo brings the summer.

Then, after lunch, the two children walk down the path to the gardens with trowels in their hands and a bundle of split sticks begged from the gardener. They dig a trench for the nasturtium seeds close under the wall, and sow the pale, brown, husky things, an inch or two between each. They make round trenches for the dwarf nasturtiums, and sow them in the same way, and the poppies and corn-

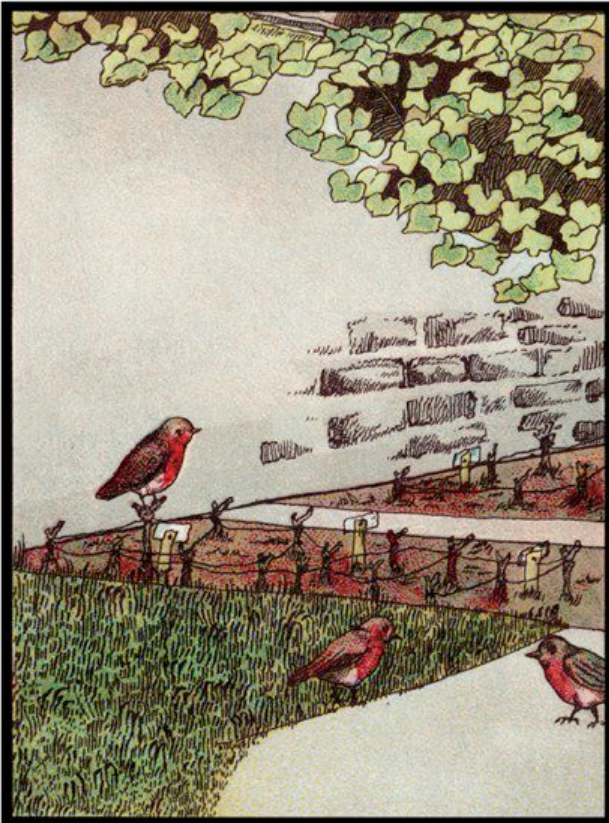
**THEIR OWN GARDENS 85**

flowers, too, only their seeds are so small that it is impossible to sow them separately, and they have to manage them less carefully by shaking the seeds, like fine powder, out of holes torn in the corners of the packets. Then the sweet peas, like little hard, black bullets, in round trenches in each bed. Then a long, narrow trench, not very deep, all round each garden, is sown thickly with Virginian Stock. Every trench is filled lightly in when the seeds are sown, and the earth smoothed over the top of it with small, fat hands. And then, greatest fun of all, a cleft stick is stuck in the earth above each lot of seeds and in its split end is fixed the empty paper packet, with its gaudy picture, to remind the gardeners of what they are to expect from the earth beneath.

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Then after some solemn walkings round and round the gardens and the whispering of mysterious words that none but the Imp and the Elf understand, they come back to the house, with the air of people who have done their share of the work, and have only to wait to reap their rich reward.

But really there is a great deal more to do. And the children do it, though they always feel that the best part of the labour is done when the seeds have been safely nested in the ground. As soon as the little green seedlings begin to show, twigs have to be pegged into the earth all about them, and black cotton and white stretched from twig to twig, a warning network to keep the greedy feathered people from stealing the seeds. Then the poppies and cornflowers sprout up in thick green



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patches, and have to be thinned. This is a joyous and messy business. The Imp and the Elf kneel on the paths that run round their gardens, and pull out the weaker smaller seedlings one by one, till only the finest are left with a little space of earth about each one, so that they may have free room in which to grow. And then a week later the thinning has to be done again, and only the very biggest and very best seedlings are left to grow higher and higher, and at last blossom into colour.

Then the nasturtiums and sweet peas begin to loll and straggle feebly over the beds, and another and even more delightful piece of gardening work must be done. The nasturtiums must be trained up against the wall, and fastened to it with little bands of cloth or string and a couple

of tacks, just as the old gardener trains his plums and greengages. In this piece of business the gardener lends the children his age and superior strength, for, as he says, "one blow on the tack is worth a dozen on the thumb," and it is sadly true that the Imp beat his thumbnail nearly black when he tried to do it himself.

From the wood-shed behind the house they gather a bundle of tall sticks with the twigs left on them. These are planted in the ground in the middle of the circles of young sweet peas. The pea seedlings are deftly twined round the twigs. They do not need fastening like the nasturtiums, for they will climb easily for themselves, clasping the twigs with their delicate tendrils, and twisting round and up the sticks. Only, as they grow taller, we tie a length of cotton all round to keep the whole

bundle of sticks and climbing peas firm and tight together.

Besides sowing seeds, we make sure of having our gardens gay by buying a lot of plants, that are not easy to raise from seed, ready grown from the nursery gardener. We are lucky to have a good nursery gardener just outside the village. We go round to his garden, or, as the Elf calls it, "his nursery for little baby plants." We go round there, with big baskets on our arms, and walk up and down his beds with him, and see a gorgeous sight, broad seas of pansies of the loveliest colours, geraniums (scarlet and pink), and golden calceolarias, and begonias the bright colour of blood. It is a fine thing to know that you have a little money to spend, saved up since Christmas, and that you can buy the finest pansy in the world for

twopence, and a geranium for a penny more. We choose once and then change our minds and choose something else, and all the while the nurseryman smiles. He is a very patient man. At last we decide, and he uproots a clump of marguerite daisies here, a pansy there, and puts into each basket begonias, geraniums, and calceolarias in neat little red pots, and, when we have paid, throws in a tiny blue verbena into each basket as a special present from himself. "For I'm a gardener and you're a gardener," he says to the Imp, "and we want to help each other." And the Imp feels very proud, and offers him a white bachelor's button for a buttonhole. For the Imp has the white daisies because he has the red rose, and the Elf has red daisies because her rose is white.

What a chattering there is at the dinner

table after the buying of plants! The Elf talks and the Imp talks, and they talk hard both at once, and promise us all flowers to wear as soon as the plants have been properly planted. And then, when dinner is over, they go off to the gardens with trowels, and plant the roots deep in the moist earth, digging the holes neat and round, keeping the earth on one side, and then scooping it in again all round the plant, and patting it down with the trowel to keep all steady. The Elf loves taking the geraniums and potted things out of their red shells. If you simply take hold of the plant and the pot and pull you will probably break the stalk. Besides, if you are wise, you will want to plant it in the earth it has grown in, to keep its roots unhurt. So you hold the pot nearly upside down, and tap carefully,

gently, with the iron trowel all round the pot. Suddenly you feel the earth loosen inside, and then you poke your finger through the hole at the bottom, and the plant in its earth comes cleanly out of the pot like a chocolate mould out of a pudding dish. Then you plant it like the other roots, patting the earth neatly down all round it so that it mixes with the earth that has come out of the pot.

Then watering, and that is a jolly business, too, though it is hard work. The Imp and the Elf have two little watering-cans of their own, one green and the other blue, but they are very little and do not hold much water. So that once upon a time they used to be always running up and down the garden path, passing each other like two busy little bees, carrying water from the tap in the ivy at the

side of the house down to their gardens, emptying the cans, and running back again for more. They used to envy the old gardener, with his huge cans that carried enough water for a whole bed, and were too heavy to be carried by either the Imp or the Elf. But one evening, when they were hot and tired, I saw them come up to the house together, leaving their cans by their garden plots. They were talking so hard, and their heads were nodding so eagerly, that I wondered what new idea they had happened upon. They went round behind the house to the wood-shed and came back with one of the gardener's big cans. They filled it with difficulty at the tap and staggered off together down the path, holding it between them. When they reached their gardens the Imp sat on it, very

red and panting, while the Elf sat on the edge of the grass. Then, when they had rested, they got up, dipped their cans into it and filled them, watered the plants, and filled the cans again and again in the most comfortable manner. They always do it that way now.

They are very wise in their watering, taught by the old gardener. They wait till the sun has left the flower beds, for it does no good to water a plant in the sunlight. They water all round the roots of the plants, so that each has a ring of moist earth about it. "I love watering flowers," said the Elf one night, coming in. "They always look so grateful." And indeed they do. There is no sweeter garden time than when the sun has gone, and the ground smells sweet after the watering, as after gentle rain. Often we sit in the

garden in the dusk watching the dimming colours of the flowers, and the pale evening primroses opening their blossoms to the night moths. It is then we think that evening in a garden is the jolliest time of all. But then when morning comes, and they bolt out after breakfast, and the old nurse calls after them not to run on the grass that is wet with dew, and glistening in the sunlight, why then that seems the jollier time. And again later, when they lie on the grass and watch the bees busy about their gardens, and listen to the low calm humming of them, why then that time seems jollier still. And again when they walk round looking at the flowers and picking buttonholes, they think there can be no time so sweet as that. So that really all times are so happy that they think each the best while it lasts. But I,

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who am an Ogre and older than they, love the evenings, when we look at the rosetrees and count the buds that will open in the mornings, and watch the dying petals fall slowly to the ground, and see the bat flitting about, and the pale moths fluttering. Then, as we think about the flowers and make stories about them and their lives and the fairies who live in them, I think that evenings and gardens belong to each other, and that we are lucky in that they belong to us also, and that the Imp and the Elf are very lucky people to be young and to have gardens of their own to tend. And the Imp and the Elf seem to think so, too.

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