

SOME
NOTES ON THE PLANTS OF ROPLEY
AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

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The great characteristic of this district is the abundance and variety of its species. I speak here only of the parishes of Ropley and Bishop's Sutton, which comprise an area of 8429 acres, and a difference of elevation above the sea level ranging from 240 on the west to 694 on the east. There are no hills or open downs, but the ground rises gradually to the very considerable height mentioned, and reaches 700 feet at several points just outside the parish boundary.

The soil varies from alluvial gravel in the bottom of the valleys to deep beds of clay on the heights. There are no springs, except within a space of about a mile and half in length and half a mile in width, in the lowest part of the valley. There the springs are copious and unfailing, and form the source of the Arle, which passing Alresford, joins the Itchen just below, and contributes at least half the waters of the united stream. This conformation of the country gives a great variety of soil, aspect, climate, and situation. Oddly enough the wettest situations are on the summits of the highest ground and in the bottom of the lowest valleys; above 600 feet and below 300. There is no other wet ground, and most of it is remarkably dry. There are extensive woods but very few scattered trees; and the country has been almost denuded of hedgerow timber, which gives it a very bare look, and exposes it without protection to all the extremes of heat and cold, wet and dry. This cutting down of trees and clearing of hedgerows took place between twenty and thirty years ago, and was carried on with great energy under a mistaken notion of improvement. The same cause led to the breaking up of many coverts, and their conversion into arable fields. Owners and occupiers alike are now paying the penalty of these mistakes. The extent of woodland still remaining is 275 acres in Bishop's Sutton and 274 in Ropley, 549 in all, not a large percentage, but enough to give character to the place.

Some parts of this woodland bear every mark of the most remote antiquity. They are treated as coppice-wood, which is cut

about once in twelve years ; so that there are but few large trees. But the copsewood springs up again and again from the same roots. It almost seems as if they were the last remnants of the primeval forest, which has been gradually cleared away until only these small patches remain. Andredsweald extended as far as this, and seems to have ended at about this point, from which it was succeeded by the open chalk downs which stretch across from here as far as Marlborough in one direction, and Dorchester in another.

These woodlands that remain contain specimens of almost every native English tree and shrub, and the old hedgerows that are left in some places have the same variety. The soil under the trees is kept moist and rich, and this favours vegetation. In those woods (and there are some) in which beech predominates, the soil is dryer and the vegetation more scanty.

Before giving a list of the principal trees and shrubs and other woodland plants, I wish to draw attention to one or two kinds.

And first as to the Elms. I am persuaded that the true Wych Elms, such as grows abundantly in rocky and hilly districts, is not found here. But there are several other elms which are perhaps varieties, yet almost rise into species. These seem to be mere degenerate descendants of this and *u. campestris*, crossed again and again, till all marked character is gone. Many of them have pendulous and pliant branches ; and, so far resemble *u. montana* ; many have winged and corky bark. They grow almost like weeds, sending up abundance of suckers, but do not develop into handsome trees as the others do. How shall they be distinguished and arranged ?

Then the mulleins : how many species of them are there here ? Two certainly ; *verbascum thapsus* and *v. nigrum* ; but what others ? are the varieties sometimes met with, mere sports ? The Campanulas again ; are *c. glomerata* and *c. Trachelium*, both of which are common here, the only species of that size and character ? if so, hybrids must be of frequent occurrence.

As to trees, almost every kind of tree flourishes here, but especially the Beech and the Ash. There is a strong popular belief that when the roots of a tree reach the chalk the tree dies. But this is a complete mistake, which a very little observation will disprove. Some of our finest trees are rooted, and as it were anchored, in chalk ; and this, I think, is the reason why trees so seldom blow down here.

There are indeed two trees, but only two, to which this soil, or climate, or both, are evidently injurious ; the soil, I believe, is too calcareous, and the climate too dry to suit them ; and these are trees which it is the fashion to plant more extensively and more frequently than any other, the Larch and the Spruce. All indi-

genous British trees thrive, even the Sycomore, which seems never to grow wild here. But these foreigners do not take kindly to us, nor I to them.

Many of our upland plants are mere survivals from the time when the downs were still uncultivated and the woods and copses flourishing. They linger by roadsides, and in chalk dells, long since disused. Such are the Gentians; and the Lady's Fingers (*Anthyllis vulneraria*); and the few bits of Broom and Gorse which are still left to us. The grubbing of copses and hedges and the formation of large half-cultivated fields was thought at the time to be an improvement, but it has certainly impoverished the district by diminishing the fertility of the soil. Abundance of common weeds have taken possession of wide tracts of stony, shallow arable land, which was once covered, sheltered, and enriched by trees and turf. The following are some of the trees and plants still found in our woodlands and hedgerows :—

Clematis Vitalba ... Very abundant and beautiful	Erica vulgaris ...
Anemone nemorosa ...	Lysimachia nummularia
Helleborus viridis ... Not plentiful	" nemorum ...
Helleborus foetidus ... Not plentiful	Ilex Aquifolium ...
Aquilegia vulgaris ... Very abundant in one or two localities	Fraxinus excelsior ...
	Ligustrum vulgare ... Common and truly wild
Hypericum,	Erythraea centaureum v. pulchella
Androsæmum	Solanum Dulcamara...
" perforatum ...	Atropa Belladonna ...
" dubium ...	Orobanchè major ...
" hirsutum ...	Sarothamnus scoparius Not very common
" quadrangulum	Vicia hirsuta ...
" humifusum ...	" Sepium ...
" pulcrum ...	" lathyroides ...
Oxalis Acetosella ... Very common	Lathyrus Aphaca ...
Malva moschata ...	" pratensis ...
Euonymus Europæus Very abundant	Prunus communis ...
Tilia Europæa ... Probably not wild	" Cerasus ...
Acer campestre ... Common and very fine	" insititia ... In old hedgerows
Rhamnus catharticus Not unfrequent	Geum rivale ... In Old Down wood
frangula ... Not unfrequent	Rubus Idæus ... by no means uncommon
Epilobium tetragonum	" Cæsius ... by no means uncommon
Circœa Lutetiana ... Abundant in one locality	(Blackberries innumerable of all sorts and sizes)
Bryonia dioica ...	Potentilla reptans ...
Sanicula Europæa ... Common in dry woods	" Tormentilla
Angelica sylvestris	Poterium sanguisorba
Bunium flexuosum ...	Rosa arvensis ... Frequent
Cornus sanguinea ... Very abundant and beautiful	Pyrus communis ... Truly wild
	" Aria ... Frequent and very ornamental
Adoxa moschatellina...	" tortinialis ... A little doubtful, for I cannot find it now
Viburnum Lantana ... Abundant	Epilobium
Viburnum Opulus ... Abundant	angustifolium Very abundant and beautiful
Asperula odorata ...	Epilobium parviflorum
Valeriana dioica ...	
Eupatorium cannabinum	
Serratula tinctoria ...	
Campanula Trachelium	

Epilobium montanum	Populus nigra	 Probably planted
" roseum	Pinus sylvestris	 Always planted
Scrophularia nodosa	Taxus baccata	 Truly wild
Digitalis purpurea	Epipactis latifolia	....
Melampyrum pratense	Cephalanthera grandiflora	....
Origanum vulgare	Listera ovata	....
Stachys Betonica	Orchis mascula	....
" sylvatica	" maculata	....
Lamium Galeobdolon	Habenaria bifolia	....
Teucrium Scorodonia	Ophrys apifera	....
Ajuga reptans	Iris foetidissima	....
Daphne Mezereum	Galanthus nivalis	....
" Laureola	Tamus communis	....
Euphorbia platyphyllos	Paris quadrifolia	 Abundant in several places
" Peplus	Polygonatum multiflorum	Abundant
" amygdaloides	Scilla nutans	....
Humulus Lupulus	Allium ursinum	 Very abundant in one place
Ulmus campestris	Equisetum sylvaticum	....
Betula alba	Polypodium vulgare	....
Carpinus Betulus	Aspidium aculeatum	....
Corylus Avellana	" Filix-mas	....
Fagus sylvatica	Pteris aquilina	....
Quercus Robur		
Salix fragilis		
" purpurea		
" Caprea		
" aurita		