

# **MY NATURE NOTEBOOK**

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My nature notebook by E. Kay Robinson

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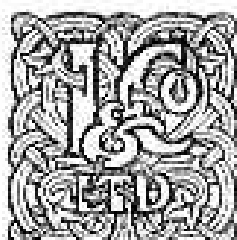
# MY NATURE NOTEBOOK

BY

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## PREFACE.

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A YEAR contains only fifty-two weeks, but in every week all kinds of things happen in nature. This little book is a cursory record of one year, week by week, and its republication in this shape is due to encouraging requests by readers of the *Daily Graphic* and the kind permission of its proprietors.

The blank pages are supplied for readers to record their own notes of the passing seasons, with the intervening chapters as a guide for comparison with the year that is past.

E. KAY ROBINSON.

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midst of frost and snow; and the year's lambs were ushered, bleating, into a world of blizzards and icicles. So, with better luck—of which the first days of the new year gave generous promise—it seemed that 1902 might reach the Ides of March, as fateful in our springs as in Cæsar's fortunes, well ahead of the record of 1901.

#### EXHAUSTED SUPPLIES.

Those who decorate churches for Christmas in the country have the best means of judging what kind of a winter it has been so far, for the holly berries are the emergency rations of the birds. They will plunder the rowan tree of its flat bunches of scarlet-orange fruit in summery autumn, gobbling them so wastefully, too, that three berries are scattered on the ground for every one that is eaten. The berries of the elder are scarcely allowed to show purple before they are incontinently swallowed by the gabbling starlings and jarring missel-thrushes that scramble and tumble all day long among the elder's yielding twigs. But the holly is held in reserve, not by mutual consent, for there is no mutuality in bird-dom, where each thrives upon its neighbour's misfortunes, but because the berries have little attraction, in spite of the urgent invitation of their colour. So in a mild season the holly may carry its berries till the next summer; but in this winter the birds' hard times had reached the holly-eating stage just two days before Christmas.

## THE HOLLY AND THE BIRDS.

The result was rather curious in different parishes. In some the emissaries and helpers of the parsons had taken the field betimes and collected stores of berried holly for the church two days beforehand. In others, where reliance was placed upon supplies contributed by parishioners, the birds were beforehand with the holly gatherers, and many a tree which had flamed with scarlet on the previous day had been stripped of the last glint of a berry between dawn and breakfast-time. And, after all, the holly fulfils its function better in feeding the birds than in decorating even sacred masonry ; for, like almost all thorny or prickly trees, it proclaims its dependence upon the birds by the very arrangement of its defences. So high as cattle can reach, its twisted spiky leaves present their bayonets at every angle against all comers ; but at a higher level, where most of the berries cluster and the birds are welcome, the leaves grow straight and spikeless. The hawthorn exhibits the same choice of guests in a great measure ; but you see this best, perhaps, in other lands, as in India, where the babool tree is thornless in the upper branches, on which the weaver-birds hang their swinging bottle-nests, but below, as high as camels can reach, it carries a formidable armature of two-inch thorns.

## FEATHERED ALIENS.

Since the birds had eaten up their reserve of food before the New Year—for there was hardly a berry left even upon the hawthorns—one did not like to contemplate their fate, if really hard weather should come later. Luckily, there were very few redwings with us. Just when the autumn migration was in full progress, the wind unaccountably swung round to the north-west, and remained there for several bitterly cold days, during which the stream of bird migration to our eastern coasts was diverted to Central Europe. Let us hope that there were plenty of berries for the redwings there. There would have been none to spare for them here in any case; for the fieldfares, which arrived in great strength just before the change of wind, were more than numerous enough to eat all that the quarrelsome missel-thrushes would let them have, and the redwings, being the weakest, would have gone hungry. It is probably from this cause more than any weakness of constitution that the redwings die first in hard times.

## SPRING'S FIRST FALSE START.

But the closing year, at any rate, brought no hardships for the birds. I do not recollect such an amazing change of climate in winter, even in England, as that which came to us with the morning of December 30, 1901. At 9 a.m. the windows became dimmed with moisture outside, not inside, the glass, showing that the temperature outside had risen