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57. 83:15

The Wonderful Sights of the English Clover Field.

by *A. H. Swinton*.

It is the fashion to cultivate clover on the English sea coast, certain of the pea tribe flourish on the margin of the salt sea and botanical rarities are sought for along the sea cliffs in the south, especially at the Lizard where the Reverend C. A. Johns picked the *Trifolium Molinerii*, probably a sport of incarnatum grown for fodder whose crimson blossoms on the railway banks attract the eye, *Bocconi* and *strictum*; whereas *stellatum* has been only noticed growing on the shingle in Shoreham harbour. Whether these like the first cited have claims to have been introduced with clover seed, or ballast, or whether they are the relics of a littoral flora may form the subject of a summer reverie: the red clover, *pratense*, the white clover, *repens*, or the sanfoin, *viciaefolia*, are usually noticed in cultivation during a holiday at the sea side where the bees are busy crossing the white with the red; so that we discover pink varieties of *pratense* or of medium that grows zigzag in the shade and thrives better on dry soil. It is surmised the Romans may have introduced that purple flowered *sativa*, or lucern, on which the Persians are accredited to have pastured their war horses; still in cultivation it now grows wild on the sea coast of the island of Alderney. Three butterflies *Vanessa cardui*, known as the Painted Lady, said to be common everywhere excepting in South America; and *Colias edusa* and *hyale*, known to our schoolboys as the Clouded and Pale Clouded Yellow appear phenomenally every three, four, five, or seven years, and cause warning boards forbidding trespass to be erected in the clover fields. All these have their time and season to increase and diminish regulated by the sun that causes all things to rejoice.

When the shower clears off from June to October and the robin begins to sing a fussy little moth, *Plusia gamma*, with a typical silver Y on its wings may be seen winnowing at the heads of the clover that smell sweetly of honey: but it is so omnipresent that it does not attract much notice except when a cold and rainy summer arrives such as 1829 when Professor James Rennie of King's College, London, remarked that it was almost the only moth which appeared to be plentiful: it again attracted attention in 1837 and 1842. But there is nothing British about the gamma Moth it starts up everywhere in Europe from the hedge and garden plot, it is met with in the north of Africa, in Asia as far south as the Himalayas and in Western North America; which looks as if it did not take its passage in a ship but boldly flew across Berhring's Straits in the stilly radiance of the arctic summernight.

The gamma Moth has an omnivorous green caterpillar laced with pale lines that humps when it walks owing to the absence of two pair of its stumps, or prolegs; whether it never had them or whether it has lost them is a question, the only explanation afforded being that it has been found feeding between leaves spun together where legs would be useless. Although the moth is a common object in the country lanes and plentiful at the sea side the caterpillar is only occasionally a subject of comment in the south of England where it was accused of rendering fields of peas leafless at Chichester in the cold and wet summer of 1879.

The periodical increase of the gamma moth is not confined to the British Islands. The year 1735 was rainy in Europe and the cold that brought the influenza lingered in Paris all May, the latter afflicted Normandy until the end of August; the autumn was stormy and the swallows took their departure from Norfolk at the close of September. to be continued.

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