

## Two early (unpublished) Essays

(from the estate of Phyllis 'Filly' Taylor)

The first nature essay is clearly a fair copy, on two typed sheets, with some manuscript additions. It is signed *H.W. Williamson*, with a pencilled note at the end: *One of my first efforts*. It will be remembered that Henry had holidayed in Georgeham in the early summer of 1914, and had spent a leave there in 1916.

### A NORTH DEVON RETREAT.

*The wind shivers the graceful grasses ever so slightly, and they are still again. The wanderer has passed on: in a moment he will be sighing round the delicate green tracery on the larches far away on the hillside, and they will murmur at his gentle caress.*

*Lying here in the strong light of the summer day, with the warm brightness of the sun in my face, everything is utterly content: all life seems to be resting and still. Yet the small insects, tiny almost to the point of invisibility, are crawling in the sweet grass roots, and swarming up their sap-refreshed stems . . . Ah! here is the wind again, playing with cool hand around my face, filling my lungs with its pure, divine freshness, as it sighs it[s] way onward.*

*Mayhap the wind, laden with many faint scents, bears the spirits, or souls, of the creatures who have wandered into the Unknown . . . the butterfly that is wafted by at this moment may be dust the next; it may flutter into a spider's web, and helplessly flicking its dust-painted sails, be the means of sustenance to another of nature's children. And in the brief moment that its life is crushed out, can we say that the spark of vitality that throbbed in its tiny body was extinguished altogether, or was it caught up in the wind's caress and bourne along on its whispering journey?*

*A swift shadow passes above me, and a kestrel hangs, as though suspended by an invisible wire, over the wall-hedge behind. He has not noticed me, for I have kept quite still. His black and chestnut streaked breast has all the graceful lines of speed that man alone can never reproduce. He hangs head to the breeze, which is just strong enough to enable him to hang poised. Now he has lost balance: his wings beat the thin air rapidly: next he sees me, and with a startled scream has shot over the green corn in the next field.*

*The breeze stirs again, the leaves on the maytrees in the hedge rustle, and then are still. A white cabbage butterfly floats over the hedge, followed by another. They settle for a moment on a cornflower that raises its tranquil sweetness among the tall grasses, and then flicker away down wind.*

*Rising from the meadow, I clamber over the stile and stroll slowly – for who can haste in such serenity of sunlight? – along the path through the cornfield, that has been used as a right of way for generations. In the far corner of the field the hawk is hovering; past my head the bees burr and drone their songs of sunshine, laden with the sweetness they have stolen from the fragility of the flowers. High above in the heavens the larks trill and their ecstasy floats in the shivering air.*

*See – the hawk has closed his wings and dropped. Up he shoots again, a small blackness hanging from his talons. Flying slowly away, he bears his poor burden to yonder quarry, where the wails of the young kestrels betray his nest. Another minute flame has been quenched: another soul-speck floats into the ether . . .*

*Hanging pathetically from the thorn studded hedge is the skeleton of a barn-owl, shot long since by a careless sportsman prowling the hedge in the evening for a rabbit or two. The pure white of its breast feathers has turned a dull grey; the action of the sun and rain has given them a forlorn and bedraggled appearance. The space once filled by the large and darkly-luminous eyes is now shallow and empty: the flies and ants doubtless saw to this as soon as it was slung, a limp and broken bundle, in to the hedge. These large fan-like wings, which once beat silently over the mice runs in the dusk, are now shapeless, and the sinews and muscles of the shoulder are withered and rapidly falling into dust. No more will the soft and beautiful ghost fan its way in the gloaming, to call and answer its mate's eerie screech in the distance. The owl pairs for life; in this fact alone there is a sadness when one sees its sun-bleached bones and feathers. Its mate probably has another companion by now, and the two wistful-eyed beauties float together through the twilight, without heed of the still dead one.*

*Everywhere in the field are the buttercups and daisies smiling into the sun's face. The air vibrates with light, and sweetly-cool is the breeze from the sea. A wild elation sweeps over me; I want to open my heart to*

*the sun, to throw my head back and hold my arms up to the sun. Here the inexhaustible life energy is carrying on its eternal work, creating and building. The unknown force that causes all things to reproduce themselves and then back again to rest: back again go their soul flames into Eternity.*

The second nature essay is also a very early one, and is hand-written on two sheets of quarto paper, with a pencilled sketch of a bird in flight. On the second sheet is an address in pencil, heavily crossed out, though it is possible to make out Capt. H.W. Williamson as the first line, while the last line, London, remains.

### THE WIND WHISPERS.

*The swallows have gone. They went in the night, while a little gentle wind was moaning round the house. I was awake, and I heard it. During the darkness I wondered why, but now, in the light of dawn, I know. The spirit of summer was troubled because her joyous children the swallows – the beautiful birds with the blue, blue wings – had left her.*

*For weeks past I had watched them flocking on the telegraph lines, round the church steeples, and the withering rushes that shiver along the sides of the rivers. Restlessly, and suddenly, they would wheel into the air twittering among themselves. They were waiting for the first south wind to wander along, and then with puerile screams they would climb into the dark heavens, higher, higher, towards the stars that poured down their dim mystery, and fly towards the south.*

*And in the daylight, they would be gone. So when I heard a faint whoo-hoo! whoo-hoo!! sobbing through my open window, my heart went out to the spirit of summer, who was wandering about dis-consolate and sad. She was dying, and she knew it. Her breath moaned over the dead leaves that were lying in the street below [and] they fluttered along, with a brittle noise, half sigh, half whisper. Summer knew that they were dead. Round the parent tree she breathed her way, and the rustle, rustle in the night air told her that all the leaves were waving her a farewell.*

*When the swallows flew south in the night, so high that in daylight they would look like a wisp of faintly-moving smoke in the air, summer knew that her race was indeed run, and she moaned around my window. The drip, drip of the mist that had formed on the branches of the tree outside, whose shadowy framework I could see silhouetted against the heavens, were the tears that fell gently from the sunken orbits of her eyes. As her life-throbs grew slower and slower, she yet remembered that I had loved her, and her moan came dimly in through the window . . .*

