The Plants And Trees Of England.

English flowers and trees are perhaps the most renowned in the whole world. They are certainly among the loveliest, and that is why I would like to see them. Early in the spring, before any of the flowers except a few stray snowdrops are open, the trees, which have stood silent and seemingly dead during the Winter, begin to stir and push out their tiny green shoots. As the year advances, all the trees are covered with a delicate mist of green.

Growing on the banks of tiny streams, narrow rivers and wide and rushing torrents, are willows and alders, their roots spreading along the banks, sheltering clusters of flowers.

In very early spring the alders are covered with tiny purple buds and empty brown cones from the previous year, and must be a lovely sight. Gradually green catkins are formed, and changing colours, hang like scarlet tassels, colouring the waters with flame when they fall. Later in the year, the purple buds are changed to green or black cones, which open when they are dry and spread their seeds far and wide. The willows droop over the water in such a way that they are often called Weeping Willows. Their leaves are long and pointed, and are a very pale green with silvery-white downy undersides, and the flowers when they open are either like golden-tipped brushes (ge) or pointed green capsules. These capsules when ripe,
burst open, covering the tree with a mass of fluff like cotton wool.

Away from the river banks, in the meadows, oaks, beeches, ashes, elms and many others stand sentinel, providing shade on hot summer days for weary travellers. In every hedgerow trees tower from the lower bushes below them, country roads are fringed on both sides with trees, every garden has at least one tree in it, in fact all of England is studded with a profusion of trees, all of them giving beauty and grandeur to the countryside.

I should also like to see the oak, “King” of all the trees, which rules the English countryside, lovely, as are all the trees, in every season of the year. In spring it has tiny strings of bell-shaped yellow flowers, and the female flowers are tiny green berries in scaly cups. In the autumn the acorns change to auburn, and the leaves, which were a reddish colour in the spring and a yellow-green in the summer, change to a red-brown.

The grey trunks of the beech trees make them easily recognized, and in the spring their pale green leaves covered in silky down must be a familiar sight to English people. Their flowers are golden and green tufts, and turn eventually to three-cornered seeds in hard, prickly cases, and are often fed to pigs. The towering, spreading branches of the beech make a cool shelter even in the hottest days of the summer, and the reddish-brown and orange leaves of the tree make a mantle of colour on the ground in the autumn.

So the list of trees goes on, many of them not true natives of England, but thoroughly naturalized now. Elms, ashes, oaks with their beautiful clusters of white flowers and then
saskat berries, elders, birches, chestnuts with their spires of pink and white flowers, limes, sycamores, poplars, planes and all the coniferous trees—lovely trees dominating the whole country. The flowers and seeds of these trees are always a delight to children. The glorious spires of chestnut flowers, which turn to shine brown conkers crying out to be searched for among the Autumn leaves; the white elder flowers and the purple elderberries which tempt everyone, young or old; the sycamore keys floating down to earth; fir cones that forecast the weather—all these go to make up the attractiveness of the trees.

The smaller trees must be lovely also, hazels with their “lambs’ tails” catkins and tiny bright red tufts of threadlike flowers in the spring, and their white nuts wrapped in pale green cases in the Autumn must be loved by everyone. Pussy willows, perhaps the favourite trees of the children, have velvety silver-grey flowers that are covered with golden pollen in Spring, and blackthorns tint the lanes with white early in the year.

On the banks of Highland lochs, tall pines and fir trees stand guard over the quiet waters, their needles carpeting the ground, and their cones providing food for the squirrels that live in their boughs. These trees make the Christmas trees each year, and often pines are cut down to make telegraph poles or masts for ships. Beddars are often grown on the lawns of country houses and must stand magnificent, their branches spreading in lofty curves. The yew tree, because of its gloomy look, is most commonly grown in churchyards and the holly, also an evergreen, is in fruit at Christmas, and its bright red berries against a background of prickly dark green leaves are used for decorations and even for Christmas trees.
I would like to visit the cottage gardens where the fruit trees begin to flower early in
the year, and to see the plum, pear, apple, cherry, almond and walnut trees covered with pink and
white blossoms, making fairy rings under every
tree. To smell the scent of the mauve and
white lilacs, and the golden flowers of the
laburnums hanging in showers from their trees
is one of my dreams. Then, in early May, to see
the first flowers begin to open on the hawthorns
in the hedgerows, and soon to see every hedge
a mass of sweet-scented whiteness, and in the
gardens the red may making a carpet of pink
underfoot, showing that Spring had really come.

Though the English trees are lovely,
English flowers must be still lovelier. Even in
January the gorse lights a few golden lamps on
the moors and the hazel catkins begin to appear,
but the real flowers do not appear until
February. Then, sometimes while the snow is still on
the ground, tiny spears push through the earth, and
brave snowdrops hang their fragile white heads
in the wind. Many of the snowdrop flowers are
tinted with green, and the three large petals
surround their inner cup like a ballet dancer's
skirt. On the open banks the coltsfoot flowers
star the earth with gold, the flowers opening
long before any leaves appear, and on sheltered
river banks the golden stars of the
celandines peep out from behind their large, shiny
leaves.

Gradually more flowers appear. In grassy
patches the pink tips of white daisies make a
splash of colour, and children begin to make
daisy chains for their younger sisters.

With the coming of the fierce March winds
the wildflowers or wood anemones open in the wood
and spring is said to have really begun. These
flowers are a creamy white colour, and have
fragile stems and feathery, deep green leaves.

Sky, sweetly scented violets peep out from fairy
farms on banks, and in the woods, and clusters of
five-petalled primroses star whole valleys with
pale yellow. Glades of bluebells open, the glades
being completely carpeted with a hundred thousand
bells of blue. Many bells grow on each stem and are
guarded by tall, straight spear-shaped leaves. Among
the bluebells the cups of the wood sorrel make
splashes of white in the blue, and golden daffodils
or heat hilles dance joyously in the wind.

The meadows are filled with flowers by
May and must look lovely. Golden dandelions
with their tooth-shaped leaves mingle colourfully
with white starwort, mauve lady's-smock and the
red and white balls of the threefold leaved
clover. Blue speedwells, the blue of the sky, creep
along pathways, and their cousins, the scarlet
pimpernels, tell the weather to every passer-by.

The hedgerows are full of flowers also.
Jack-in-the-Pulpit's brown spikes sheathed with
green, grow close to red and white campions, whose
five divided petals look like ten, white
shepherd's purse, and red and white dead nettles,
which, unlike their cousins, the stinging nettles, do not
sting. In the ploughed fields surrounded by
white may, the tiny purple and yellow faces of the
heartsease must make a pleasant picture, and
many other flowers must be found after careful
searching.

The gorse and broom make a flame of
gold on the moor, and below them heather hangs
its purple bells and wild thyme its mauve flowers.

while, on the open Downs, a traveller might suddenly come across a blaze of gold from a glade of cowslips. The country people say “Mark the five small spots of red, in the golden chalice shed,” in order to distinguish the cowslip from the primrose, but it is very different even without that.

So the year advances, each month heralded with flowers that are found nowhere else in the world. By June, the meadows are filled with golden buttercups, used by children to discover whether a friend likes butter or not, the answer being given by a gleam from the flower held under the chin. On old walls, and by streams and ditches, the red flowers of the hestibrot make a vivid splash of colour. These flowers have long spikes on their seeds, and these give the plant an untidy look. Another name for it is the wild geranium because of its reddish-green leaves.

Also growing in the meadows are the pink and white clusters of the yarrow, sometimes called milfoil because of all its tiny leaves, the lemon-coloured spikes of the toadflax or wild antirrhinum, the untidy yellow heads of ragwort, the purple knapweed looking rather like a thistle, but with no spikes, the thistle itself, with sharp swords protecting its purple crown, the mauve cushions of the salvia, very like fairy pin cushions with golden stamens for pins— all blending together in the harmonious beauty of the countryside which I long to see. The coral banners of the sorrel rise near the gold and white of the ox-eye daisies, the sorrel a trusty knight for his lady, and the hedges of every field are covered in twining pink convolvulus.
The ripening wheat is full of gorgeous scarlet poppies, the silky flowers contrasting vividly with the yellow wheat, and the orange-yellow bird's-foot trefoil flowers play hide-and-seek on the grassy verges.

As June becomes July, and July August, the hedges are a riot of colour and sweet scent, and that is perhaps, the time I would most like to visit England. Wild roses, the "Queens" of the country flowers as bluebells are the "Kings", dominate every place they grow in. Their pale pink flowers and deep pink buds stand for England, and even when their flowers are dead, the roses still brighten the hedges with scarlet hips. Honeysuckle clammers through the hedges, ever aspiring to reach the sky, and its creamy gold trumpets are filled with delicious honey for the bees.

But one of the loveliest of the hedges is the traveller's joy, with its white festoon of sweet scented flowers which turn to a mass of silky fluff in the Autumn. This flower must chace many a weary traveller on the dusty roads, and help him to set off on his travels again feeling very refreshed.

So the year ends with a final blaze of colour in the hedges, and the seeds are buried in the earth ready to grow into the flowers of the next year. But although the flowers may seem dead, English people know that they are only resting and will come again to cheer the countryside, and people outside England hear about the flowers and long to see them.
Books Used

"The Countryside Companion" edited by T. Stephenson

"The Children's Encyclopaedias" by Arthur Mee

"Wild Flowers" by Mrs. Lancastre.

"Birds, Flowers and Trees" illustrated, Odhams press.

"Flower Fairies of the Spring" by E. M. Barker.

"Flower Fairies of the Summer" by E. M. Barker.

"Flower Fairies of the Trees" by E. M. Barker.