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The Village Pond

This is our village pond, it's on the edge of Slad, down at the bottom of the village. It was where we kids gathered for fun, games and secrecy.

This was our kingdom, the centre of all our juvenile recreations: summer bathing, winter skating and general gathering together to experiment with the first pulsations of sensual enjoyments.

We called it Squire Jones's pond. The squire glorified in having this ancestral, almost feudal possession of this place but he never checked on us, and we could do whatever we wished. Since then it's had some posts and fencing put up to keep people out but we don't take any notice of them. These fences were put in by quite a nice man but the previous owner put up the sort of wire that went round it like the Berlin Wall and the villagers used to come down in the night

Down in the Valley

with big wire cutters. So that didn't endure for very long. It's still a free gathering place. It's inhabited by coots and moorhens and dabchicks.

I don't remember ever coming down and looking at a dabchick. But the coots were very close, bosom chums of mine. We used to spend many a happy hour together. These are the sort of things I remember and we still come down here. In the summer there are great flotations of pink lilies. They are a month behind this year. Aren't we all! But they'll be out by the end of June and they're just like great stars of pink candle wax, floating on the water.

It was at the village pond where almost everything happened in terms of games, village gossip, childish errors. It was a teeming little paradise of wildlife and very few people except we kids came here and I think we were tolerated by the wildlife because they, and the horses in the field, it was the only life they knew. They got used to us. In summer we'd swim, and in winter skate and fall through the ice, chase each other, steal the moorhens' eggs, get attacked by the swans. And they are pretty difficult to cope with when you are a kid, because they have these huge wings and they would come like Concorde taking off. They'd come across us and bash into us and we used to scream and jump into the hedges.