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CONFIDENCES
OF AN
AMATEUR GARDENER

BY
A. M. DEW-SMITH

AUTHOR OF "A WHITE UMBRELLA"

"And forth withoute wordes mo,
In at the wicket went I tho,
That Ydelnesse hadde opened me
Into that gardin fair to see."

Romaunt of the Rose.

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CONFIDENCES OF AN AMATEUR GARDENER

I

CLEARING THE GROUND

FOUR acres of wilderness. That is what our garden consisted of six months ago. For the place had been untenanted for two years, and the one man who had been living there keeping an eye on it had been powerless to hold the rampant vegetation within prescribed bounds. Consequently the kitchen-garden had broken loose and spread everywhere, dragging in its trail a troupe of inquisitive weeds, who struggled to get in front whenever they had an opportunity. They jumped over the low box

borders and entirely obliterated the paths, and making their way to the hedge that separated the garden from the field, seemed bent on climbing over it and seeing something of the world.

Plants, especially vegetables, that have been accustomed to any kind of restraint, become very loose and untidy in their habits if left entirely to themselves. They seem to lose all sense of decorum and dignity. Gooseberry and currant trees that are wont to stand upright in comely bushes, were sprawling all over the ground, inextricably entangled with weeds of the lowest description. Even the strawberry-plants—models of propriety as a rule—instead of keeping to neat tufts, were trying to climb trees. As for the weeds, they were having it all their own way for once, and were rioting, as it were, in a state of rampant intoxication. Nettles had thronged together and shot up into high hedges that stung one mockingly in the face as one walked along, and creeping weeds had made a network of strings over the ground, and laughed when they tripped one up and landed one on one's nose.

Eight men were turned into the wilderness, and the work of destruction was carried on busily and fiercely for some weeks. All the weeds and ill-

regulated vegetables were wrestled with and cut down, and the sky was lurid with the bonfires that consumed their remains. A hand-to-hand tussle of several days was necessary before the horseradish could be rooted out. For it had employed the two years in strengthening its foundations, with a view as it were to standing a siege, and had sent great powerful roots into the very bowels of the earth. Nothing was spared. Twelve respectable old plum-trees, whose only fault was their barrenness (they had borne but one plum between them the year before), were ruthlessly hewn down and cast into the fire.

The spade and axe triumphed in the end. An acre or so of nice brown upturned soil, a grass plot or two, some neat shrubberies, several dignified old trees—among which a mulberry, a walnut, and a weeping willow are the most conspicuous—the whole intersected with neatly-brushed gravel paths, have emerged from the chaos; all sweet and clean, swept and garnished, and ready for a new population of plants and flowers.

It is what I have always longed for—a piece of clean unoccupied ground, with much rich, upturned soil such as plants delight in, and to be allowed to go about making holes, popping things in, and watching them from their infancy, when they first

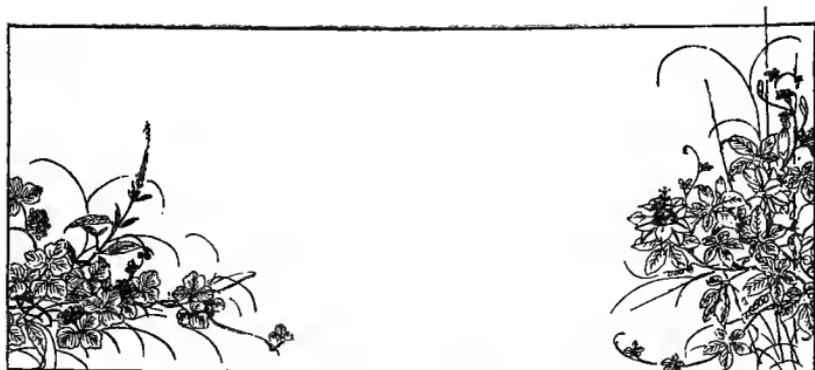
peep out of the earth, till maturity. It is an advantage, too, to be an absolute ignoramus about plants and their ways, so that everything comes in the nature of a surprise; to look on, and play with them, while others attend to their more serious management and culture.

With the exception of about half an acre at the far end, which has been given up to William to grow peas, beans, cabbages, and anything else he likes in the way of vegetables, the whole of what was the kitchen-garden has been turned into flower garden. It is divided into long strips of flower beds, five yards wide, and about fifty yards long, divided by grass paths. There are six of these nice long curved earth-mounds, besides a row of a dozen smaller ones at one end.

Though we have been busy for some time stowing away bulbs and roots under the earth, the beds look delightfully empty—nothing but swelling brown soil. A wire-railing along the top, destined to be covered with climbing plants—roses, clematis, and others, makes a sort of backbone to each bed. But though most of these have already been planted, they are at present only sticks with labels tied round their necks leaning in a forlorn manner against the wire. One of the beds is filled with little rose-bushes—still, also, in the stick-and-label

stage; and another contains nothing but hardy carnations—vigorous little plants, whose leaves have a delicious blue-grey sheen in the sun. With the exception of long borders of wallflowers, these are the only things above ground at present.

But the appearance of emptiness is deceptive. All sorts of things are tucked away beneath the soil, ready to peep out as soon as they think they will be safe from frost. Indeed, as I walked round this morning, and looked at the sticks and labels that mark the various occupants, I wondered if the work of filling up the space were not going on too rapidly. The smaller beds, however, are still empty and ready for seeds; and I have especially petitioned for two strips in the kitchen-garden, where I mean to have tall hedges of sweet-peas. Already I am walking between them in imagination, and feel the air full of their delicious fragrance.



II

THINGS IN POTS

THERE is to my mind something particularly attractive about a new earthenware flower-pot. Six months ago I felt a positive thrill of joy as I contemplated several hundreds of them sitting in rows on the floor of the potting-shed—just arrived from the factory. There were pots of every size, from great big, dignified-looking things, made to hold a tree or a big palm, to tiny little pots, just big enough to hold a very small seedling. I have always had an especial weakness for a very small flower-pot, and find it very difficult when passing a flower-market, where one sees rows of them, each showing off its little plant, to resist buying them and carrying them home in my arms.

Since I first saw the flower-pots, brand-new and almost hot from the factory, great changes have taken

place. They have been filled with mould, taken from the potting-shed, and distributed through the frames and greenhouses, and now each one boasts a plant. A few weeks ago the bulbs which have been hidden in them had hardly begun to show their green tips. The earthy surface for the most part looked undisturbed, and but for a look of consciousness about some of them, I should have thought they contained nothing but mould. But warmth and moisture have been making love to the dry-looking bulbs, and have enticed a plant out of each. Such numbers are there that I feel bewildered as I walk about among them, wanting to look at all, and yet not liking to tear myself away from any. There are bulbs in every stage of development, from those that are only just showing green noses through the earth, to tall plants of jonquil and narcissus that are in flower, and hyacinths and tulips that are already past their prime. Cyclamen and lily of the valley are also blossoming away. So are *Muscari botryoides*. These attractive little plants, which shot up out of twenty of the smallest flower-pots about ten days ago, look better in pots than they do out of doors. They are now about three inches high, and are sitting in a row on one of the shelves, looking quite touching, as Max said, and making a long strip of hazy blue colour which is the first thing one sees on going into the

greenhouse. They are like diminutive hyacinth plants—a tuft of green bulb leaves, from the centre of which shoots a stalk with a pyramid cluster of tiny grey-blue bells with white rims. At first each plant consisted of one stalk only; but now there is a further development. A second stem with its cluster of bells has crept up through the earth close to the other. In some cases these infant blossoms are nearly half-way up the original stalks: in others they are only just beginning to peep through the earth, and there is nothing to be seen but the white tip of the cluster. The elder ones seem to have assumed quite a motherly attitude towards these babes, leaning against them affectionately, as it were with their arms round their necks.

Besides the bulbs, there are a number of plants, all more or less grown up, which arrived in a most interesting parcel from a nurseryman. It was a large bulky-looking pyramid, wrapped round with matting, and suggested an unwieldy piece of furniture. When the matting was peeled off, it disclosed a regular little shrubbery of plants in flower-pots, all looking as fresh and green as could be, apparently none the worse for having spent a day and night huddled together in a stuffy little tent made of matting. They were wonderfully packed—each plant being supported by sticks, to which it was

tied by numerous neat little knots of bast, after the manner of the skilful gardener, and then wrapped round and round with silver paper like a wax doll. It was quite a business unpacking them, and to find room for them on the shelves among the bulbs, a matter of difficulty. I went round picking out the pots full of tulips and hyacinths that had already begun to wither, and putting them away under the shelf, where they were out of sight.

They have had a brief existence. It seems only the other day that I watched them making their first appearance through the earth in the pots. Since then they have bloomed and died—and their little day is over till this time next year. I could not help feeling, as I stowed them away, that it is cruelty to such bulbs to grow them in a greenhouse instead of waiting till it is warmer and letting them grow out of doors in the open air. It is a poor sort of existence sitting on a shelf in a glass case, when one might just as well be outside growing in the earth, with nothing over one but the sky. They miss the pleasantest moment in a plant's life, the awakening in the cool, early morning covered with dew, and hearing all the early morning noises, the other plants stretching themselves in their earthy beds and shaking the dew-drops off, and the early birds beginning to chirp to the early worm. Out

in the garden everything feels fresh and crisp and spry early in the morning. In the greenhouse there is a tired, sleepy feeling in the air, as if the plants had all been up late the night before.

In some newspaper I saw the other day a notice of a plant-grower's observations about the intelligence of plants. He would have one believe that plants are capable of understanding what is said to them, and that they have their likes and dislikes just as we have. It is a pleasant theory, and one which I am quite disposed to believe. Since reading it I have frequently found myself conversing with the plants, and one of them has shown unmistakable signs of understanding me. In the matting bundle were about a dozen pots containing little creeping plants destined to climb up the bare walls and posts of the greenhouses, and cover the staring white paint and whitewash with green. We took pains to put them about wherever there was a post or a bit of wire for them to catch hold of. A long, thin, passion-flower plant, that was engaged in eagerly climbing up a stick of its own, I put near a substantial post in the middle of the house. But the pot being large, and the plant in the exact middle of the pot, I noticed yesterday that it was a good half yard away from the post, and that it had apparently made up its mind that it was useless

to attempt to reach it, for it was shooting up from the stick that supported it, and making a bee-line for the roof. This seemed to me a foolish proceeding, and one to be checked. The pot, I saw, had not been put quite close to the post. I moved it up, and by this means reduced the distance between the post and the plant by a few inches. Then turning the topmost shoot round a little, I pointed out the post to it, and said, "Why don't you try to climb up that post? You will find it impossible to reach the roof if you have nothing to hold on to." It gave no sign of having understood me at the moment, but bounded back to its original position when I let go: and when I left the greenhouse a minute or two later, it was still making for the roof, as upright and straight as an arrow. Three hours later I went into the greenhouse again, and glanced at the passion-flower. The aspiring top shoot had bent down and was leaning right away from the stick to which it was tied, and stretching out two little hands in the shape of tendrils to catch hold of the post. "Well, I *never!*" said William when I called him and drew his attention to its curious behaviour. Of course we encouraged it at once by bending the stick towards the post, and tying it with a piece of bast, and now it seems to have

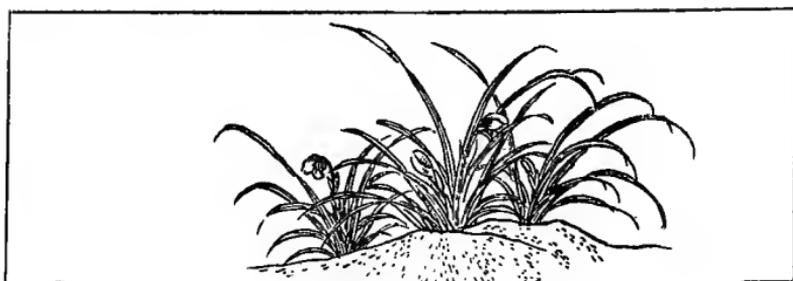
every intention of climbing the post, spiral-fashion, as fast as it can go.

I believe that passion-flower plant likes me. I feel distinctly that it is pleased to see me when I go into the greenhouse in the morning. Most of the plants seem kindly disposed. There is, however, one exception. It is a grey-green, fleshy-leaved thing like a house-leek, with small pinky-green flowers. I do not know its name, and have no wish to know it. I disliked it from the first moment it came out of the bundle, and since it has been sitting on the shelf with the other plants I have grown positively to detest it. And I have not the smallest doubt that it cordially returns the sentiment. It is the most sulky, discontented thing I have ever come across. Though I have put it in a very nice place surrounded by the most charming little trees, it has not made a single friend, but just sits there grumbling. When I pass it by I always feel it is shouting impertinent remarks at me. So much does it disturb the harmony of the greenhouse that I determined to move it from its position and put it on a shelf beside a nasty little prickly cactus to which I have also taken a dislike.

The little trees which I gave it for companions were, a Norfolk Island Pine, a plum-tree and a

myrtle. The Norfolk Island Pine is about a foot high. It has a beautifully upright stem, with very symmetrical branches growing out from it all the way up, which are of the most delicious colour—deep green near the stem, shading off to pale green at the tips. It is such a small, compact, well-finished little tree, that it is difficult to believe that it grows to a huge pine in its native island. The plum-tree is a graceful thing about two feet high, with strong, dark, slender branches covered with fluffy white blossoms. The myrtle is a bushy, compact little plant like a diminutive garden shrub—with foliage of a beautiful deep green.

It seemed to me that when I removed the disagreeable fat-leaved thing from their midst, these three little trees shook their leaves, and gave a sigh of relief.



III

LITTLE BULBS

“No green things in the garden except the wallflowers and carnations.” I made the remark myself. Five minutes after I had made it I took a walk round the shrubberies, and stooping down to look at something in one of the borders, found the ground positively bristling with tips of green; hundreds of snowdrops, crocuses and daffadown-dillies, as stiff and fresh and green as could be—all reproaching me with having overlooked them. “No green things but the carnations and wallflowers! Why, look at us!”

I have felt myself in disgrace ever since, and have avoided the paths where they are thickest, trying to justify my remark by ignoring them. But now the snowdrops, winter aconites and crocuses are coming out as fast as they can, and

the ground beneath the shrubberies is streaked with white and patched with yellow, so that I can no longer overlook them. The mound that supports a venerable mulberry-tree in one corner of the garden, is so covered with snowdrops, that the tree seems to be growing from a huge snowball.

I picked a little bunch of snowdrops, an aconite or two, and a crocus, and then regretted it and wished I had left them where they were. I cannot rid myself of the feeling that it is cruel to pick very small bulbs; for if you pick the flowers you pick the whole thing, especially in the case of an aconite, which consists of a single leaf with a golden cup resting on it. I have no compunctions about picking flowers off larger plants or bushes. I am inclined to think that the plant rather likes it. But little bulbs that grow in families close to the ground I feel sure hate being picked, and I never pick them without an uneasy feeling that I am guilty of cruelty.

The crocuses, indeed, have had much to contend with during the winter, while they lay yet buried beneath the soil, and when I think of what they have gone through, I cannot but admire the pluck they have shown in their struggle for life, and the dauntless front of saffron they are now displaying. For Betty, the tailless sheep-dog, spent all her spare

time during the winter in digging them up—carrying them about in her mouth, and scattering them about the lawn, or depositing them in corners of the house. Whenever we found them of course we planted them again; but numbers were lost, and even those that were replanted, we felt sure would have their growth retarded by being repeatedly dug up and buried again. Chastisement and scoldings had no effect. She apologized humbly, and then went and dug up another. Apparently the fascination of digging a hole and finding a bulb in it, or the pleasant sensation of having a little cold bulb in her mouth was irresistible. She never bit or injured the bulb, and but for the apologetic air with which she approached one, her ears back, and an engaging waggle of her body (which did duty for a wag of the tail), and for the tell-tale crocus roots that could be seen hanging out of the corners of her tightly-closed mouth, she might often have escaped punishment.

She had a winsome, giddy way with her, in spite of being the mother of three puppies, and I gave up punishing her at last, and let her have her own way, merely taking pains to collect the poor little bulbs every morning and plant them again.

It was when Max was away that I began letting the three puppies out of the stable to play on the lawn. I tolerated their rampaging over the flower-beds, and playing hide-and-seeK among the wall-flowers. But when they all went to the crocus border and began digging up the bulbs and playing ball with them, I felt that something must be done. It would never do to have four dogs digging up the bulbs. I must give the puppies away. I set about finding suitable homes for them, and in the meantime determined to bring them from the stable into the house so that I could keep a watch on their outgoings and incomings, and also be able to educate them a little, and not launch them into the world of polite society without giving their stable manners a slight polish. I thought I would have them to sleep in my room by way of a beginning.

They were beautiful puppies—little black, woolly sheep-dogs with white shirt fronts, and large, loose, soft, white paws. Unlike their mother they had long, fluffy tails.

We had christened them after three friends of ours, Tommy, Isabel, and Joan. Tommy was the naughtiest. He used to go about with a staggering, swaggering sort of gait, seeking what he could destroy. He was not the least discomposed by the

summary descent of justice, but when after opening his mouth and extracting a bulb from between his little teeth I boxed his ears, he at once started, smiling, in search of another.

Isabel was the most engaging. She had soft, canoodling ways—would nibble your ear gently with her small white teeth and give you little impromptu licks when you scolded her, or sit with her head on one side and a very solemn expression that was quite irresistible.

And Joan was the cleverest. Besides being the first to dig up a bulb, she had been the first to open her eyes, the first to lap, and the first to bark. Which latter performance caused her mother the greatest astonishment. She sat bolt upright, pricked up her ears, and watched her for ten minutes without moving, as if she had been a rabbit-hole.

I took them up to my room at bed-time and made them a very comfortable nest in my bath. I lined it with the bath-flannel and put in a warm woolly rug rather crumpled up, so that they could snuggle into the folds if they liked. Then I lifted them all in. They took to it at once, curled themselves up into a sort of inextricable puzzle of heads and tails, so that you did not know which head belonged to which puppy, gave three sighs of deep satisfaction, and were sound asleep before the sighs

had died away. I gazed at them with fond admiration, and thought what a blessed thing it would be for mothers if babies could be taught to behave in a like exemplary manner. Then I got into bed and blew out the candle.

I slept for about an hour and a half. Then I was awakened by the puppies whimpering. I listened for a few minutes till the whimpering grew louder, and resolved itself into loud complaints. Then I said "Hush!" in a stage whisper. The sound of my voice had the unexpected effect of a puff of wind on a smouldering bonfire. They at once burst into excited yelps, loud enough to wake the household. I lit a candle, sat up in bed, held the candle over my head, looked at them, and said "Diddums Wasums!" It was a foolish thing to say, and I repented it. They took it as encouragement. They all got up and stood with their paws on the edge of the bath looking at me, while their tails wagged backwards and forwards like pendulums; and they made insinuating movements with their heads, implying that they were tired of the bath, and wished to get up, and would I kindly help them out.

I told them that they had made a mistake, that it was not nearly time to get up yet, that the night was only just beginning, and that they would

have to sleep a good seven hours more before there was any sign of morning.

They said they were quite sure it was morning, and that if it was not, it ought to be, and that anyhow no person of sense would think of sleeping a whole night through on end, and they yelped louder and louder.

I got up. I was rather sleepy, and perhaps not quite responsible for my actions, but I yielded to their frantic entreaties, and lifted them out of the bath one by one and put them on the floor. They were very much pleased. They wagged their tails, and then all three made a pounce at my bare toes. I could not allow that. I boxed their ears and reprimanded them severely. Whereupon they seized my nightgown from three different sides and tugged, obliging me to sit down plump and unexpectedly on the floor. This amused them enormously. They rested on their fore-paws and barked impertinently, wagging their tails on high. I sat helplessly on the floor and said "Hush!"

I might just as well have said "Hush" to a Maxim gun. They paid not the slightest attention till the joke palled—which it did quite suddenly, and then with one accord they walked off in different directions to see what they could find.

Tommy found a pair of bedroom slippers, and immediately settled himself comfortably on the floor and began to tear the fur off. Isabel found a rug with a fringe, which she set herself to chew, and Joan found a waste-paper basket, the contents of which she proceeded to tear into little bits and chuck about the room.

Much relieved to see that they had quieted down, I got into bed and blew out the light. But sleep had departed as far as I was concerned. I lay with one ear outside the bed-clothes listening and trying to make out from the sounds where they were and what they were doing.

A series of sharp, jerking growls excited my curiosity. I sat up and lit a match. Tommy and Joan were having a desperate tug-of-war over one of my bedroom slippers. They seized the opportunity afforded by the momentary illumination of the room to drop the slippers and make a dash at Isabel who was chewing the rug, and forthwith all three began a wild game of romps. They rolled over and over; they kicked, they tried to swallow each others' heads, they tore wildly after each other round and round the room, making a noise on the bare boards like galloping ponies. I lay on my back in bed, feeling helpless and hopeless, and more incapable and futile than I had ever felt in my

life. They went on for about half an hour, and then to my joy I detected signs of weariness. It came on rather suddenly. They whimpered a little: they found their way to a fur rug, they flopped down, they sighed, and they slept.

As for me, I wept tears of gratitude and looked at my watch. It was only twelve o'clock. I congratulated myself on having got the orgie over so early, for now we should sleep—perhaps all the better for it—till morning.

Little did I know of the way puppies spend their nights! Punctually at half-past two they woke—got up, and had the whole thing over again, only more thoroughly and uproariously than before. They barked and yelped like fiends. They tore wildly round and round the room. They romped in a sort of frenzy. They carried everything from its proper place and put it somewhere else. They found my boots with trees inside them, in one corner, and carried them one by one, by a button or a boot-lace, bump, bump, bump! along the floor to the furthest opposite corner. They took the contents of the coal-box lump by lump and spread them all over the floor.

If I felt hopeless and helpless before I began now to feel delirious. I could do nothing but behave like a sort of automatic machine that sat up, lit a

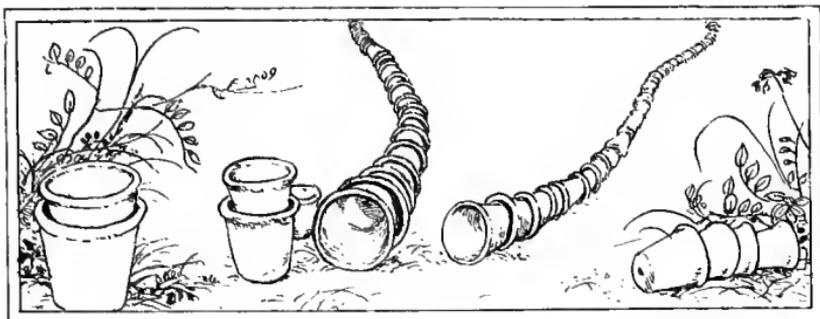
match, gazed, and lay down again, over and over again, till my back positively ached. I did not close my eyes once. For, all through the night, at intervals of an hour and a half, did those awful puppies rise and repeat the programme.

By five o'clock I was a perfect wreck, and detecting signs that the entertainment was drawing to a close again, in a sort of desperation I picked them all up on to my bed and let them go to sleep on the top of me—Isabel on one shoulder, Joan on the other, and Tommy stretched full-length down my side. I dared not move, nor even breathe, for fear I should wake them. I lay stark, staring, wide-awake, in an uncomfortable position, till morning, for I was determined to nip their next entertainment in the bud. Luckily for them they made no attempt to begin again. Perhaps they were exhausted. Their three little limp, warm, dead weights lay stretched motionless on the bed, like small fur rugs. Isabel dreamt she was chasing a rabbit. She gave little yelps with closed teeth, that shook her body, and sounded as if she had another small animal inside her; and her paws twitched, imitating the action of rapid running. This set me pondering on heredity. Isabel could never even have seen a rabbit, much less have chased one, and yet here she was, obviously in hot pursuit. Heredity

sent me to sleep, and I slept till I was wakened by the maid with the hot water. She stood transfixed in the middle of the room, and gazed at the chaos it represented. All the rugs and mats were collected in heaps in the different corners. The floor was strewn with torn-up bits of paper, fur and fringe, and boots and shoes, and coal. All the things that had been in corners were in the middle of the room, and my bedroom slippers, which had been reduced to two bitten soles with remnants of fur and chewed red flannel, were in the fender.

“Take these awful puppies to the stable—to the garden—anywhere. Let them dig up the bulbs—do anything they like—and leave me alone. I don’t want any breakfast—only to be left quiet and undisturbed for the rest of the day.”

“Perhaps it is as well for mothers that babies don’t behave like puppies,” I murmured, as I heard them going bump, bump, bump! down the stairs.



IV

IN THE POTTING-SHED

THE potting-shed is a little place with a tiled roof, furnished with a potting-bench, a seed-cupboard, and some divisions for flower-pots. It is full of flower-pots and little mounds of fine earth and silver sand, and has a pleasant "earthy" smell. Sieves, small garden tools, tails of bast, packets of seeds, and wooden and zinc labels give it a busy air, as though there were always something going on. It is, to my mind, one of the pleasantest places in the garden, and I had visions of myself, equipped with gardening gloves, and a large blue linen pinafore with enormous pockets, spending many pleasant mornings there, busy with flower-pots and mould and bast.

During the winter I had no good excuse for invading it and taking possession, and William had

had it all to himself for potting out his seedlings. But a few days of bright sunshine and a feeling of real spring in the air made me feel that it must be high time to sow some seeds.

I spent an hour rummaging in a box full of packets of seeds that had come from various seed merchants, looking for something to sow. It was January, and most of the familiar things were marked "Sow in March, April, or May in the open border." I put them aside, and picked out one or two packets with strange, unpronounceable names, marked to be sown in January or February in gentle heat. Since discovering that *Mimulus moschatus* is only another name for musk, I am inclined to look on the names printed on the packets with suspicion, as intended to mislead, and have no doubt that many of those with strange names will turn out to be familiar friends in disguise.

I took two of these packets, whose names Eucalyptus and Abutilon were more familiar than the others, and seeing an opportunity of spending an hour or two among the flower-pots and mounds of earth, proceeded with them to the potting-shed.

I found William already in possession. He was engaged in digging cyclamen seedlings out of the square earthenware pan in which they had been

sown, and planting them in little pots—putting each tiny plant, which consisted of a transparent bulb like a mistletoe-berry, with some short roots and one or two dark leaves growing from it, in a pot by itself. He had done about seventy, and the quaint little things were spread all over the potting-bench, so that there seemed very little room for me. He had a mound of soft brown leaf-mould on the bench in front of him, and as I hesitated at the door wondering whether I had better come another time, he plunged his hands into it, and began rubbing it up between his fingers, as a cook does a cake, and filling the little pots with it. This fascinating occupation decided me. I said boldly—

“William, I want to sow these seeds. Can you make room for me?”

He made room with alacrity, carrying some of his little pots away till he had cleared half the bench, and seemed pleased at the prospect of companionship.

He is a kindly person, William, but I have always suspected him of a good-natured contempt for women-folk. He views my attempts at gardening with an air of amiable tolerance as if he thought it a pleasant amusement for me, when I had nothing to do, to play with flower-pots and seeds, but that my interest in them could hardly be serious. He

has the air, when helping me to garden, of one helping a child to play—makes a great show of letting me do it all myself, but in reality reduces my operations to a pretence by rushing to anticipate all my wants in the way of flower-pots, earth, and tools. Even when apparently absorbed in his own work, I can feel that he is keeping an eye on me to see that I am getting on all right, and if I chance to pause and gaze vaguely about me, is quite distressed if he cannot at once guess what I want, and hasten to provide it.

This supervision gives me a feeling of restraint, and to thoroughly enjoy the delights of the potting-shed I feel I should choose a time when he is occupied elsewhere. But being an ignorant person as regards gardening, I thought it best, on this occasion, to submit myself to his guidance. My only experience of seed-sowing so far had been annuals, "in the open border." These I sowed according to the light of nature—scratched a place in the earth, scattered the seed, covered them up with crumbled soil, patted them down and watered them. The method answered very well. They all came up and flowered beautifully. But sowing seeds in pans, to be raised under glass, is a very different thing, and I thought it best to follow the approved fashion.

Next door to the potting-shed is another small

shed containing nothing but flower-pots—great big pots piled up in the corner, and little pots fitted inside each other curling about on the floor like snakes, besides a variety of flat earthenware pans for seeds. I investigated them with great care, and picked out two oblong, rectangular pans, of a particularly nice shape and colour, and brand-new, and put them on my half of the potting-bench.

According to William's directions I scattered bits of flower-pot over the bottom of the pans, and then set about preparing a "light soil." This I made by mixing some silver sand with some of the leaf-mould that he had used for the cyclamens, and working it about with my hands till it made a fine grey-brown soil. With this I filled the pans, and then with a nice little tool, made of a flat piece of wood with a handle sticking up in the middle, patted it down till the surface was quite smooth and apparently hard.

To scatter small seeds evenly over a smooth surface is a difficult operation, and I did it very badly. They ran together in little clumps, leaving some places quite bare. I tried to pick some of them up with my finger and thumb, by way of separating them, but only succeeded in making a pit in the middle of the pan and driving the seeds to the bottom of it. I distributed them, however, to the best of my ability, the *Eucalyptus* in one pan

and the *Abutilon* in another, and then shook a little sieve with some of the sandy mixture over them till they were quite covered. The potting tool then came into use again, and was applied firmly till the surface was quite smooth; then the names were copied from the empty seed-packets on to wooden labels and stuck carefully into the right pans, and the pans carried into the little greenhouse where the seeds are. Here places were scraped for them in the warm cocoa-fibre; they were embedded, watered with a fine rose, and left, in the hope that Nature would do the rest.

Only a few days before I had been commenting on the absence of animal and insect life in the garden. I had not seen so much as a toad or a snail for weeks. But the day after I had sown the seeds I encountered a worm, and moreover had high words with him.

I had left the two pans in which I had sown the seeds looking as smooth and neat as could be. The following morning I went to see how they were getting on, and if they wanted any more water. To my amazement the pan in which I had sown the *Eucalyptus* seed, instead of the smooth surface it had when I left it, presented the appearance of having suffered from a severe shock of earthquake. Hillocks were thrown up in all directions, and right

across the middle was a curved range of mountains, making my beautiful smooth surface look like one of those raised maps, with the mountains and valleys in relief. I gazed at it with consternation. What had happened? Had the seeds all gone mad?

"William," I called, "look at these seeds. What is the matter with them?"

"That's a worm, m'm," said William, looking at them. And taking a pin from his waistcoat, he proceeded to probe into the earth with it.

"Don't do that, William," I said hastily. The worm had behaved very badly, but I had no wish to harpoon him.

Apparently he had been concealed in one of the handfuls of mould I put into the pan, but, thinking something unusual was occurring, had deemed it prudent to lie low till the worst was over, submitting even to the inconvenience of being patted down with the potting tool without a murmur. Then, when all was quiet, at dead of night probably, he had ventured to look around, and with a view, I suppose, to taking his bearings, had gone leaping about in the pan like a sea-serpent, creating dire havoc, and frightening the poor seeds out of their wits.

Max assured me that he would not eat the seeds. He would, he said, however, in all pro-

bability eat some of the silver sand, which would scratch his inside and give him a pain.

Leaving the law of compensation to deal with him in this manner, I contented myself with patting down the earth-works he had thrown up, and did not attempt to evict him, more especially as I felt it highly probable I should have considerable difficulty in catching him.

The sowing of seeds I have since found extremely fascinating. Their behaviour is at times so astonishing, that I find myself walking about among the seed-pans like an animated note of exclamation. Some of them seem to pop up like Jack-in-the-boxes as soon as one has turned one's back—especially anything of a gourd nature—cucumbers, melons, and the like. I put eight cucumber seeds in a pot, in a frame, a week ago. Three days later I went to look at them, and found eight little plants nearly an inch high.

The subject of seeds is one on which I have a tendency to grow morbid. I find myself collecting orange-pips, apple-pips, date-stones, and such-like things that one has been wont to cast contemptuously aside, and planting them in flower-pots to see what sort of trees will come out of them. At Christmas we bought at a fruiterer's a queer-looking fruit called a custard-apple—an unattractive thing

about the size of a large fir-cone, with a thick rough hide. On cutting it open we found it contained an unpleasant-looking mixture, like a bad custard, and some large black seeds. We planted the seeds in a flower-pot, and I quite forgot their existence till some time after I noticed some long pink things in a pot, that somehow reminded me of the flamingoes in *Alice in Wonderland*, and found on investigation that they had issued from the black seeds of the custard-apple. They came up in loops, keeping their heads underground, so that they looked like diminutive croquet-hoops, which may perhaps have suggested the resemblance to the flamingoes. After a day or two they got their heads free and stretched themselves upright, and showed two pale leaves at the top. They remained pale, rather sickly-looking stalks about four inches high for some time, and then tufts of green leaves issued from the top, and they turned into rather nice little trees. I am waiting with some curiosity to see what will be their next development.



V

THE HARE AND THE CARNATIONS

THERE has been a tragedy among the carnations. About a fortnight ago, a burglarious animal, said by William to be a hare, entered the garden and nibbled the hearts out of six of the finest plants. There was quite a feeling of disaster in the garden the morning after it occurred. The carnations that had escaped felt in their roots that their turn would come next. It seemed to me that even the little seedling carnations sitting in rows in one of the open frames had got wind of it, and were trembling with apprehension. William armed himself with a gun, and swore vengeance, if it meant sitting beside the carnations all night. But the hare deemed it prudent to disarm suspicion by keeping away for some nights after his first raid.

Then, when William's patience was exhausted,

and he had given up all hope of catching him, he returned and took to paying them a stealthy visit every night, and browsed to such purpose that in the largest carnation-bed there is hardly a plant that he has not nibbled. One or two plants, of a strong, grassy growth, have escaped. He seems fastidiously to have avoided them as too tough. But those with tender young shoots he has cropped close to the ground, leaving only a miserable patch of stubble.

Carnation buds and shoots are considered a choice delicacy among hares and rabbits. They will come for miles to feed upon them, discovering their whereabouts by that mysterious thing called "instinct." This particular animal has had reason to congratulate himself on his find a fortnight ago. For he must have had quite a pleasant time browsing unmolested every night for the last week, with the whole garden to himself.

Though protections for the poor carnations were thought of and talked about as soon as it was discovered that he had come back, it was a week before they were put into action. The beds were hooped over at intervals down their whole length, and fishing-nets stretched over them and pegged down at the side, making a sort of tent over the carnations through which it was impossible for an animal larger than a mouse to penetrate.

I should like to have seen the hare's face when he arrived, the night after this had been done—eager for a meal. In the dark he would probably bump his nose against the netting and wonder what it was. Then he would move along to avoid it, and finding more of it, mutter, "What the carnation can this be!" Feverishly and anxiously he would begin to grope along the edge of the bed, and when he had nosed his way all round and found no opening that would admit anything larger than a mouse, it would have dawned upon him that he was sold. Then, doubtless, his language would have been wholly unfit for publication.

William hoped he would be fool enough to remove one of the pegs, get under the netting, and then lose his head and forget the way out. In which case he would probably have been jugged by this time. But I am happy to say his greed has not had such dire consequences. A hare is a pretty creature, and I cannot help sympathizing with this one, and admiring his nice, clean, wholesome tastes. There is something suggestive of a poem in the thought of his browsing in solitude in the night, lighted only by the stars (or, it may be, by the moon), and going off home at early dawn, his whiskers and fur all covered with dew, with a nice little bundle of tender, dewy carnation-shoots

under his arm for the breakfast of his wife and family.

I would willingly supply him with a basket of vegetables every night—with a shoot or two of carnation thrown in—to make up for having put a stop to his nightly feast. But I shall probably never have an opportunity of speaking to him, for the poor little cropped carnations, and his tell-tale footprints in the beds, are the only trace he has left.

But though I sympathize with the hare, I sympathize even more with the carnations. Nothing can be more unpleasant than to have to sit still and endure to have your leaves and tender shoots nibbled off as soon as they emerge from the earth. Mr. Brown, who knows about hares and carnations, says the plants are not spoilt, but that they will throw out new shoots, become more bushy, and probably be all the better for their cruel pruning. It is a comfort to think they are not utterly cowed, or entirely annihilated by the treatment they have received, but only roused into growing with redoubled energy.

In fact the treatment the carnations received at the teeth of the hare was only what many plants receive at the hands of a gardener, with a view to their future good. By putting a stop to the growth

of a plant in one direction, you force it to try another way—throw out a shoot somewhere else. The opposition seems even to rouse its determination, so that it throws out new shoots with greater vigour. By judicious rebuffs of this kind you can, it seems, turn a lanky tree into a bush, and also make a dozen new trees from the bits you cut off. A little oleander-tree in the greenhouse had a tendency to gawkiness. It was stretching three lanky stems upwards, as if intent on reaching the roof, while down below the trunk was naked and bare of foliage. At William's suggestion I cut the three lanky shoots right off and left nothing but the bare trunk. The shoots were divided into six cuttings, put into a flower-pot—as near the edge of the pot as possible—and watered abundantly. In about a week I pulled one of them up to see how it was getting on, and found that it was putting out a number of tiny white roots. And on looking at the oleander trunk I found that it was covered with tiny green buds. These have since grown into branches, converting the gawky tree into a neat shrub. The cuttings, too, have grown into respectable trees, and each one has been given a pot to itself.



VI

BILLIKINS

THE birds had been busy about their nests for some weeks. Such a fussing and chattering and hopping about there had been at first. Such excitement when one of them happened to find a particularly nice bit of fluff wherewith to line a nest. When the nests were ready the fuss subsided. There was a sort of lull. For the hen birds were all busy laying and hatching eggs—a business that requires repose. Their mates sat and sang to them—sentimental songs and lullabys for the most part, and had whispered conversations with each other as to how their wives were getting on, and how many eggs they had laid.

Then we began to find little bits of broken egg-shell beneath the trees, and shrill chirpings came from the nests, where a short time ago the mothers

sat silently brooding. And the birds, instead of fussing over bits of fluff and straw, swept backwards and forwards with worms and insects in their beaks.

At the foot of an old tree-trunk, covered with ivy, we picked up a nest of young birds. The nest had fallen out of a tree and lay battered on the ground, and the mother-bird, scared by the catastrophe, had deserted them. They lay huddled up among the ruins of the nest, chirping frantically with terror and hunger. So we took them home, and put them, nest and all, into a basket lined with hay and cotton-wool on a little table in the corner of the drawing-room.

They were an extraordinary little quartette. Perfectly naked bodies with superfluous-looking appendages of legs and wings, and enormous mouths that opened like wash-leather purses with yellow rims, and closed automatically when you popped anything in.

Max pronounced them sparrows, but absolved me from slaughtering caterpillars for them by saying that sparrows would eat anything. So I tried bread-and-milk and hard-boiled egg, which I popped into their gaping mouths with a quill pen, and, judging by the eagerness with which they gulped it down, I gathered that they approved of



the diet. In fact, at this stage greed was their chief characteristic. Whenever any one came within a yard of them the four mouths would open spontaneously, and they would clamour loudly till we had stuffed them quite full, when the beaks would shut with a satisfied snap, and huddled together they would drop off to sleep, while some mysterious mechanism inside them dealt with the bread-and-milk and egg, and made it into bones and muscles, and especially into grey fluff, which began to crop out all over them.

Then one morning, a few days after we had found them, one of the little bodies lay limp and dead in the bottom of the nest. And the next morning we found another, and the next morning another. And the next morning we quite expected to find the last one limp and dead. Instead of which he was alive and as vigorous as could be—looking as if he fully meant to illustrate the law of the survival of the fittest in his own small person. He was rampantly eager to be filled, and opened his mouth wide and screamed loudly whenever the quill pen hove in sight, refusing to be satisfied till we had stuffed him so full that he must frequently have had a pain in his little inside.

The fluff grew apace, and soon the little naked body was quite decently covered. And then a

change came over him. From having been nothing but a mouth with a digestive apparatus, he became a person—a very small person, it is true, but undoubtedly a person. He himself was the first to make this discovery. He looked down at his legs and his breast, took stock of his size, gave a peck at his fluff to see what it was, then looked up at us and said, “Chirp! You’re another!”

It was obvious that he must have a name at once. Some one suggested “Billikins.” We tried it. “That’s me!” he said; “Billikins, at your service.” And he hopped out of the nest on to the edge of the basket.

From that day his development was rapid. Feathers grew among the fluff, till he was a grey feathery ball; the beak grew small and shapely, the eyes bright and intelligent. Very soon he could hop about on the table, and flutter from one chair-back to another, or from the table to a convenient finger or shoulder. He developed, too, a heart chock-full and overflowing with affection, all of which he lavished upon us giants, not one whit rebuffed by our size. He seemed to look upon us as large and most adorable birds, and his aim and object was to be always with us. He would perch on one’s shoulder or arm, or on the top of one’s head, every now and then hopping forward, and

with a chirp giving one a soft little peck on the cheek just to remind one that he was there. For he seemed to realize that he was so small that he might easily be overlooked if he did not occasionally assert himself in this way. Or he would snuggle down inside the frill at one's neck, fluffing out his feathers as if he were having a dust-bath, and then carry on a chirping conversation, interspersed with gentle pecks. He particularly disliked being left in a room by himself, and would try to follow one unobserved by hopping along on the floor at one's heels. The little tap, tap! would betray him, and bring upon him a rebuke; for it was considered a dangerous habit.

Unlike the Scotsman, Billikins considered that cold water was meant to drink—not to wash in—and he steadily refused to use it for the latter purpose. We tried to entice him to take a plunge in a bowl of water, by splashing up little showers of spray; but though he was much interested in the proceeding, and chirped with excitement as he watched, nothing would induce him to venture so much as a toe in the bowl. It was a case of *le premier pas qui coûte*, we thought; so I took upon myself to initiate him into the delights of bathing, one day, by picking him up and plunging him straight in. The result was as great a shock to me as it was to Billikins.

He went in a fluffy, perky little bird ; he came out a miserable, draggled little atom, with all his fluff plastered down so that his little naked body showed through. All his bright perkiness had gone suddenly out, and he lay in my hand, a poor little prostrate heap, with his eye wandering in a vague, frightened way—crushed and bewildered by the sudden immersion. As for me, I was as stunned and bewildered as he was. “You have killed Billikins!” kept ringing in my ears as I carried him rapidly into the house to the kitchen fire.

I had on a gown with a small black-and-white check. I made a soft nest of it, and pillowed him gently on it, and sat where the warmth of the fire could reach him, and gently rubbed his little body and stroked his head. The news of the disaster had spread, and an anxious group knelt round the small invalid, watching the little panting body and the wandering eye, and overwhelming him with tender epithets, to which, contrary to his usual habit, he vouchsafed no reply. At last he stirred a little and his eye grew a trifle brighter, and then, in answer to his name gently whispered, he gave a faint chirp. It was the crisis. Rapid recovery ensued. He began a rather feeble chirping conversation with us, and said he was really all right. The feathers began to dry and fluff out again, until he was

completely covered. Then his legs regained their strength. He stood up, pecked at his feathers a little, and hopped on to my finger, which I held towards him as a perch.

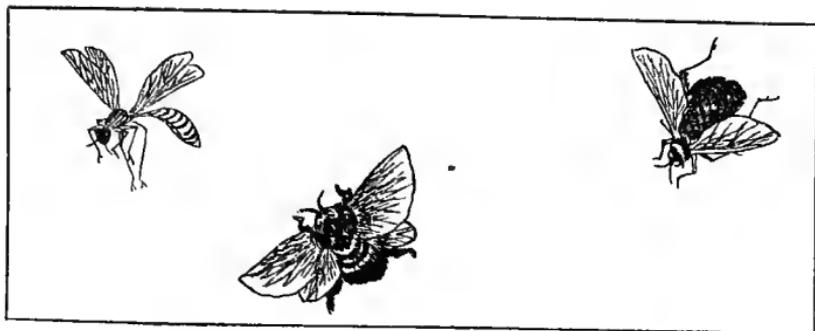
After this terrible experience Billikins's popularity reached a sort of zenith. He became more engaging in his ways than ever. Considering his size, it was marvellous the important position he occupied in the household, and even among our circle of acquaintances—all of whom substituted Billikins for the weather as a topic for conversation, "How's Billikins?" doing duty for "What a beautiful day!"

After the bath episode, too—doubtless to show that he bore me no ill-will—his tenderness and pretty little attentions to me were marked with a delicate and subtle emphasis. He showed an especial affection for the black-and-white checked gown, and would fly straight to me when I came into the room wearing it, and hardly leave my shoulder all day.

One day, about a month after the bath, he was helping me to write some letters. He was in one of his high-spirited, cheeky moods, and amused himself hopping after the pen, and trying to pick up the words as they dropped from it, and making dirty smudges on the paper with his inky toes.

When I remonstrated with him he would hop on to my shoulder and peck my ear or my nose if I happened to turn my head, chirping all sorts of nonsensical terms of endearment in my ear. Soon he tired of the game, and went and perched on a bronze pig, that he was rather fond of. It was a stupid-looking pig, with wide-staring, expressionless eyes, but Billikins was never tired of trying to get a response out of it, peering round into its face from his position on its back, and chirping questions at it in his most insinuating and piquant manner. After writing for some minutes it struck me that he had been very quiet for a long time, and I turned round to see where he was. He had fallen off the pig and was lying motionless on the table beside it. I dropped my pen and picked him up hurriedly. He was quite warm, but his head hung back limply over my hand. I felt under his wing for his heart. It had stopped. Billikins was dead.

The tears that were shed over him would have surprised most people. But then those who did not know Billikins could have no idea how utterly adorable he was.



VII

FREESIAS

THERE is something particularly attractive about a freesia. In its youth it is apt to straggle rather awkwardly—to lie prone and hang over the flower-pot, as if it had not a sufficient hold upon the soil. But when it is full grown, and a long slender stem, with a cluster of creamy-yellow or white, trumpet-shaped bells, leans forward from a surrounding of delicate green grass, to greet one, one realizes that instead of being awkward it is an extremely graceful thing. It has a scent of a delicate piquancy, which is most refreshing; and as it is of those flowers which “do best perfume the air,” it is one of the most delightful plants to have in a greenhouse.

It was on one of the hot, sunny days that come upon us sometimes unexpectedly in early

spring that a party of bees paid the freesias a flying visit. The sun was beating through the glass on to the flowers and drawing their fragrance from them, so that the warm air was almost heavy with it, and it required only the slightest stretch of imagination to believe that it was the middle of summer.

The ventilators at the top of the greenhouse were wide open, and it must have been a whiff of the freesias through these that attracted the bees as they were passing, for when I went to look at the plants in the morning they were already in possession, fussing about among the flowers and filling the air with loud humming. The hurry and bustle they were in betokened that they were on their way somewhere else, and had merely stopped for a minute or two because, having happened by accident upon a perfect garden of sweetness, they could not bear to let it go to waste. "We really must stop and gather this," they seemed to say; "but we have no time to lose, so let us be as quick as possible."

Though they made occasional sweeps among the other plants to see if there were anything of interest, they confined their attention mainly to the freesias, which were nodding and dipping their slender stemmed blossoms as the bees burrowed

first into one and then into another, taking care not to overlook any of them. Occasionally in their eagerness they disappeared right inside the blossom, nothing but a brown hind-leg betraying the thief. Even the blossoms that had begun to wither and curl up were considered worth investigation. I watched a noisy, busy fellow who seemed to consider that these half-withered blossoms contained the best spoils. He went from one to the other, kicking the folds aside with an impatient petulance that was very funny to see, making his way inside the blossom, and coming out again with a hum of satisfaction.

Besides those that were busy among the freesias, numbers of bees seemed to have collected as much honey as they could carry—or, perhaps only as much as they had time for—and were anxious to get out and go on. They were banging themselves furiously against the panes of glass in the roof, and humming angrily at finding their way barred by something they did not understand. They had obviously come in through one of the ventilators at the top, which were all wide open, but every one of them seemed to have forgotten the fact, and to imagine that they could break a hole in the glass if they only banged hard enough. I tried to dust them off the glass in the direction

of the ventilators, with a freesia blossom ; but they refused to be dictated to, and showed signs of losing their temper at my interference. So I let them alone with a sigh at their obstinacy, wondering that creatures that had such a reputation for intelligence could be so stupid.

I went to see how my seeds were getting on, and spent some time watering them, pulling up weeds, and generally attending to their wants. But I was oppressed the whole time with the thought that the poor bees would all die of exhaustion if they continued to bang themselves with such fury. I went back to see how they were getting on, intending to open all the windows, and regardless of their feelings, brush them out with a feather broom. The windows were still shut, but the bees had all disappeared. I had fully expected to find dozens of little brown bodies dead upon the shelves, so I looked about carefully ; but there was not so much as a ghost of a bee to be seen, and though I listened carefully, not a hum betrayed a loiterer left behind. They had gone as mysteriously as they had come, leaving not a trace of their visit.

Since that hot sunny day we have had several hard frosts, and I have wondered whether the bees found a snug, warm corner to shelter them from the cold.



VIII

A RAINY DAY

THERE is nothing to my mind so delightful as rain. Even a rainy day in London has its charms. The wet flagstones, the shining streaks and puddles in the streets, the umbrellas jostling along on the pavements, the lumbering omnibuses swaying heavily with more umbrellas growing on their tops like mushrooms, the hansoms flying through the streets with rain pouring off the oilskin capes of the cabmen in bucketfuls, have an exhilarating effect on one's spirits.

Such a sentiment, I feel, lays me open to the charge of being a demented enthusiast. For to the majority of rightly organized persons a rainy day in London is, I believe, one of the most depressing things in life.

But in the country that man or woman must

have, I think, a disposition towards melancholy to whom the rain means nothing but gloom, and be a churlish, unsympathetic fellow who can sulk and sigh while the rest of nature is smiling and singing. One may have, it is true, too much even of a good thing; and rain that pelts on and on without ceasing from a sulky sky, till the earth begins to turn mouldy and the vegetation looks sodden, is apt to pall; just as sun that beats down upon us for weeks, and dries the moisture out of the plants and grass, so that everything is brown and parched and covered with dust, wearies us at last. But a fine, persistent, cool rain, such as we had a day or two ago, coming after a week of dryness, is, I think, one of the most refreshing and inspiring things on earth.

On rainy days I envy men the fashion of their clothes, and begin to think seriously of discarding petticoats for a neat suit of oilskins, such as sailors wear; a pair of loose trousers ending in boots, a short pilot-jacket and a small cap, the latter more by way of decoration than for purposes of use; for there is nothing pleasanter than to feel a gentle rain beating on one's face and head. But fear of public opinion prevents my adopting this attire, so I must needs make the best of an ordinary mackintosh and a pair of snow-boots. The latter

are very comfortable, drawn over one's indoor shoes; but they must not be so big that one's feet walk about independently, and come down on the ground each time with a heavy double "plump." With my petticoats well tucked up, and completely covered with a mackintosh, nothing on my head and snow-boots on my feet—a pyramid-shaped bundle with feet—I am rain-proof, and can enjoy even a thorough downpour without the disturbing knowledge that I am getting wet through, and shall have to change all my clothes when I go in, or run the risk of rheumatic fever.

The smell of a garden after rain is most delicious, even when there is nothing in it but earth and green leaves. In hot weather the "earthy" smell is quite pungent. But even in the cool days of early spring it is very noticeable. There is a particularly cheerful air about the wet and dripping shrubberies. They look freshened up and "spry." All their leaves have been washed, and are still wet from their bath; each one has a raindrop hanging from its point, so that they glisten all over, and there is such a chirping and chattering going on in them that one wonders what it is all about. Birds delight in a shower. It seems to go to their heads and make them quite hilarious.

They have large convivial parties at which they all talk at once, for the pleasure of hearing their own voices, or because they cannot help it, rather than that they have anything to say. They go hopping and pecking about as if they were full of new plans and resolutions, and had so much to do and felt so industrious that they must begin at once.

But the most delightful things to look at after rain at this time of year are the small things that are just coming up and beginning to flower, such as violets and primroses. They positively love it. They drink it in through their roots and pores, and their leaves grow stiff and strong with new vigour and life. New violets appear under the leaves where one could see none the day before, looking dark and moist, and tightly rolled up yellow buds show themselves among the primrose tufts. The wild primrose plants that are dotted about in the shrubberies look so happy that I cannot help stopping to smile at them. Only yesterday I had noticed that they were looking tired, and, as it were, bored and listless. But now, after the rain, the leaves are dewy and moist, and each one stands out stiff and fresh and green, alive and awake in every fibre.

The primrose is one of the best-loved of wild

flowers. It is loved, I think, for its pretty sweet-smelling leaf, and the pleasant places it chooses to grow in, even more than for the flower itself. Whether it is clustering along the banks of a picturesque lane, nestling beneath a hedge, or helping the pale mauve dog-violet to carpet a copse, it suits its surroundings so well that it seems perverse and foolish to take it from those of its own choosing and plant it in stiff rows in a garden bed, where, moreover, it loses its character and becomes a polyanthus.

It was one of the friends of our childhood, too, and this has done much to make it beloved. Delicious April afternoons spent gathering primroses in sunny copses when we were children have surrounded it with a far-away misty poetry, which the smell and sight recall.

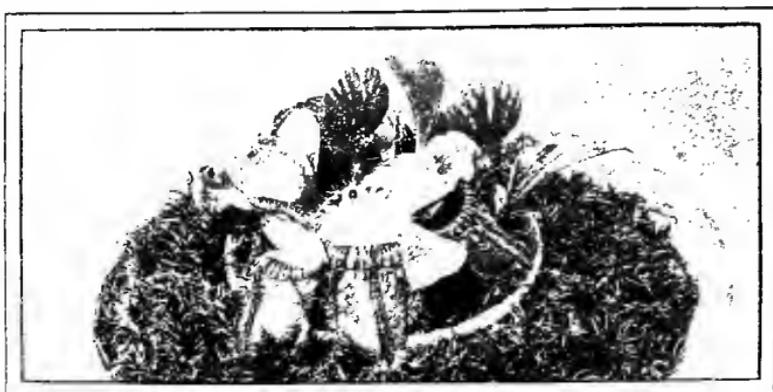
In my own case I can account for my feelings about most flowers by early association. Those that grew in the strip of ground bordered by large smooth stones in which I dug and planted, and sowed, and watered before I was ten years old are enwrapped in a sort of glamour of indescribably delightful sensations, hard to recall and impossible to keep with one for more than a flash, but which never entirely leaves them. Some of these are plants which I cannot help feeling, had I met them

for the first time in later life, I should have disliked. Among these are pelargoniums and balsams. For both of these I have that sort of affection one has for a thing or person one does not admire. A week ago I discovered in a back row in the greenhouse, a small pelargonium, almost the exact counterpart of the compact, sturdy little plant that was the central ornament and pride of the garden of my childhood. It had two little blossoms on one stalk, cheek by cheek, of the precise deep magenta of my old friend. The sight brought a sudden rush of the air that played about that little pebble-marked plot years ago—a medley of the colour, smell, and texture of plants and earthiness, merged into one soul-possessing sense of beauty, that made one realize that a garden in those days meant more for one than it can ever mean again.

A sudden jump into the world of one's childhood never fails to make one realize how much more intense and pervading were one's impressions, especially those received through the senses of sight and smell. On very rare occasions I can recall for a brief moment—perhaps half-a-second—my feelings on first seeing a ripe red strawberry beneath its leaves. The richness of the red, contrasting with the deep green of the leaf; the

luscious smell of the fruit; and something about the way the little seeds were embedded over it went to make a feeling so deep and overpowering for the beauty of the thing, that it has never completely died away. Every now and then a flash of light seems to shine suddenly on the picture of the strawberry and its leaf, and I realize again for a moment what a beautiful thing a strawberry really is, if one only knew it.

I have had the same experience on coming unexpectedly upon a coloured picture-book that I had not seen for more than twenty-five years. When I was little more than an infant I had pored over the details, absorbed the colours, and followed the reading of the story into a delightful enchanted fairyland. The sudden sight of it again, recalled the entrancing wonder a coloured picture-book had been in those days, and made one sigh to think that the years have dulled one's sensibilities, and deadened one's soul, so that such passionate delight in things is no longer possible.



IX

THE PITCHER-PLANT

ONE of the smallest pots in the greenhouse contains a diminutive pitcher-plant, labelled after the manner of botanists, who always seem to give the longest names to the smallest plants, *Cephalotes follicularis*. It is of the kind that has independent pitchers on stalks, not hanging from the end of its leaves, like orchid-house pitchers, and it eats insects. At least, it would if it could get them.

Each little pitcher is especially designed to entice silly inquisitive ants or flies to take a look inside. It has a rather interesting, curious appearance, calculated to attract attention, and a little honey scattered about outside, where it can be seen and smelt, suggests that there is plenty more inside. The ascent of the outside of the pitcher is made

easy by a little path, furnished on each side with a fringe, by which the insect can pull himself up if he feels inclined.

When he reaches the top, he finds that the opening is lined with curved grooves, set close together, and leading over the edge, right into the inside of the pitcher, and which are, moreover, so smooth and delightful to walk upon that, before he knows where he is, he has run up one side, slipped over the top, and slithered heedlessly and gaily down the other. From the inside of the pitcher there is no return. What happens to the silly insect after the fatal slither I do not precisely know, and indeed would prefer not to know. But from stories I have heard of roads that are as slippery as ice, leading to spikes that turn inwards and stab him, sticky hairs that stretch out and catch hold of him, and horrible poisonous stuffs that squirt at him from the walls, I gather that the inside of that bag is like the worst possible kind of nightmare.

In Nature one's sympathies are continually being divided. One is sorry for the hungry spider, who must go without his dinner for want of a fly, and extremely sorry for the fly whose lot it is to provide the much-wished-for meal.

And lately when I have passed by the pitcher-plant every morning, and glanced at it to see how

it was getting on, I have been worried by the thought that since it took up its abode with us three months ago the poor little thing has, as far as I can see, not had a single insect to eat. So much pity did I feel for it that I went so far the other day as to capture an ant that was tearing about on a rose-tree—looking for aphides, I suppose—and with murderous intent put him in the flower-pot containing the pitcher-plant. He scurried aimlessly about for a second or two, as if he did not quite understand his sudden change of surroundings, and then he stumbled across the opening of one of the paths running up the side of the pitcher, and without a moment's pause or consideration began tearing up. Contempt for his idiocy, and a sudden horror at the fate which awaited him, brought about a revulsion of feeling. With the stick with which I had captured him I gave him a flick, that landed him on his back on the floor some three feet below. Apparently he was none the worse; for he picked himself up in a twinkling and scurried on, reminding me somehow of the clown at a circus, who, in the course of his aimless running about, will turn an utterly irrelevant and, as it were, involuntary somersault, and continue his course as if nothing had occurred to interrupt it.

Then, for I felt that my treatment of the pitcher-plant had been shabby, I proceeded to investigate each of the little bags to see if there might not be some trace, in the way of bones and skulls, of its having had a meal more recently than I supposed. A part of its equipment, which I had not noticed before, was a lid overhanging the opening of the bag, to prevent, I suppose, untidy insects looking upon it as a convenient hole to shoot rubbish. I had some difficulty in seeing in. I contrived, however, by tilting and turning and twisting the flower-pot, to make a fairly thorough investigation of each bag. I found at the bottom of each a little collection of rubbish, consisting chiefly of bits of leaf and stick and mud, mixed with water, but nothing of a more interesting or nourishing description.

I derived a certain amount of comfort, however, from the discovery. For as long as the little pitchers contained something, it seemed to me the plant was not so much to be pitied as if they had been perfectly empty. It was, I thought, a kindly attention on the part of Nature, who, unable to provide an insect, but not liking to pass the little gaping mouths without putting something in, had mixed a little pudding of leaf and mud, and popped it in, on the chance that the plant might take it for a fly.

When I went to look at it the day after my discovery, I did so for the first time for many weeks, without any feeling of uneasiness as to its welfare. Something unusual about its appearance, however, caused me to look a little closer, when to my amazement I saw that the little pitchers were all perfectly empty! It flashed through my mind that the poor little thing, unable to withstand the pangs of hunger, had, in a fit of desperation, ravenously devoured the mud and rubbish.

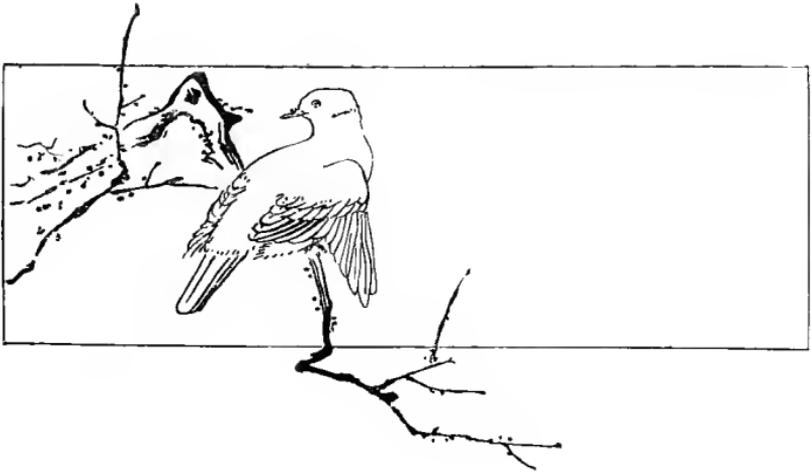
I called excitedly to Max, who was outside. "Just look at this extraordinary pitcher-plant! It has actually eaten up all the dust and rubbish at the bottom of its bags!"

"Eaten it!" said Max. "Why, I've just washed them all out!"

Max has a morbid horror of dust and dirt. And, whereas the little rubbish-heap at the bottom of each pitcher had been a source of gratification to me, he had thought of it only with disgust, and had been oppressed by the thought of the discomfort the plant must have endured from its want of cleanliness. In fact, as he explained to me, it had been a source of such perpetual annoyance to him, that at last, unable to bear it any longer, he had washed it. He had filled each little pitcher with water, stirred up the rubbish at the bottom with a

camel-hair brush, and then, turning the little plant upside down, had shaken it all out. He had repeated the operation several times, and was perfectly satisfied with the result.

As for me, I felt bewildered at the different aspects which one and the same thing may present when looked at from opposite points of view.



X

DREAMS

It is still early for sowing seeds out of doors. So I have to content myself with poring over seed catalogues, making lists of what I want, and dispatching them with postal orders to the seed merchants, and then walking about and choosing spots and strips to sow them in, and indulging in imaginative dreams as to what the garden will look like when they are all up. My knowledge of gardening being very elementary, the dreams are sometimes vague. But one main idea I cling to, and that is to have *plenty* of the flowers I like best, and to grow them for the most part all together in masses or long rows, not dotted about as isolated plants. In my dreams I see the ground

about the shrubberies thickly dotted with all sorts of primroses, the seedlings of which will be ready for planting out soon, and also a narrow sloping bank with a hedge of little plum-trees as a background, and a grass border in front, thickly covered with the commoner sorts. Two rectangular beds, about nine feet by six, and a border sixty feet long, I have marked with my eye to be sown with mignonette; and there are several unoccupied places about the shrubberies where I can see columbines of every sort and colour nodding and fluttering in the sun.

The arrival of a packet of seeds always gives me a feeling of wholesome industry. There is such a pleasant suggestion of fresh air and sunshine, earthiness, and sweet smells, and, above all, of cleanliness about them, that they act as a sort of moral tonic and rouse one to plot and plan and work. Consequently, when I find a fat envelope in my breakfast plate full of neatly-done-up paper parcels with seeds rattling about inside, the day at once assumes a new face—that of a pleasant sort of busy day, such as one likes to meet at one's breakfast table.

As I open the envelope and pour the little packets into my lap, my mind runs forward, and I have visions of sunny hours spent digging, sowing, watering, and watching, and still further on of

beds and borders gay with the colours and sweet with the fragrance of the flowers. My purchases consist for the most part of seeds of common things, such as nignonette, sweet-peas, stocks, asters, phlox, poppies, and nasturtiums. But I have indulged in a few packets of annuals with strange names, and also in one packet of sweet-scented tobacco and another of evening primrose seed.

The two latter set me dreaming and recalling pictures from the past rather than painting them for the future. Somewhere, in the far-away regions of my memory, there was an old-fashioned garden where along a terrace near the house ran a thick border of sweet-scented tobacco that used to breathe its sweetness into the warm night air, and find its way into the house through the open windows. I have shadowy dreams of walking along the terrace on summer nights, when the air was laden with the perfume of the flower, and the darkness flecked with the silent white blossoms gently moving on their slender stems.

I mean to try to produce a whiff of that garden of the past, for summer nights to come, by planting the tobacco thickly in the beds beneath the sitting-room windows. But Nature has not blessed me with much patience, and I sigh to think that I must wait many months for the white blossoms.

The evening primrose seed recalls pictures from a book. In Mr. W. H. Hudson's *Idle Days in Patagonia* there is a chapter on the "Perfume of the Evening Primrose," which carries you away to the airy, grassy plains of Patagonia, where you can lie on your back with nothing but great stretches of sky overhead, and nothing around you but great stretches of plain, covered with grass, and dotted with the faint, floppy yellow blossoms of the evening primrose—"a plant of somewhat melancholy aspect," he calls it, "suggesting to a fanciful mind the image of a maiden originally intended by Nature to be her most perfect type of grace and ethereal loveliness, but who soon outgrew her strength with all beauty of form, and who now wanders abroad careless of appearances in a faded flimsy garment, her fair yellow hair dishevelled, her mournful eyes fixed ever on the earth where she will shortly be." I have a vague and foolish notion that by scattering the seed on a waste piece of ground at the back of the garden I may be able to reproduce a little whiff of the atmosphere of Patagonia, and realize with greater truth what those endless grassy plains are like.

But so far these are nothing but dreams. Time must pass before they are realized. And meantime

I must possess my soul in patience and be content with seed lists, and the moral support derived from a rather elaborate gardening outfit. This consists of a blue linen apron that covers me all over, and has two enormously capacious pockets in front; a pair of dark-coloured tan gardening gloves with gauntlets—the kind that are smooth inside and slip on easily—and a hat almost as big as an umbrella. A series of common chip baskets of various sizes, one of which I carry on my arm; a trowel, a fork, a tail of bast, a pair of scissors, and a particularly nice watering-can, complete the equipment. Like the White Knight, I think “it is always well to be provided for *everything*.” In spite of feeling that I bear a very strong resemblance to that gentleman when thus equipped, I feel that my appearance is appreciated by the plants. It seems to put us on a pleasant footing of sympathy with each other. They recognize me as a friend, and though my attentions may consist merely of pulling up an occasional weed, cutting off a dead leaf, or giving a friendly touch or support to a straggling branch, I feel that they are more pleased to see me when I am obviously on gardening intent than when in ordinary attire.



XI

SOWING SEEDS

A BRIGHT sunny morning, after several days' rain, made me feel that I must be up and doing. I resolved to sow sweet-peas and mignonette everywhere—all along the borders in the kitchen-garden, in hedges, and in large clumps wherever I could find a vacant spot. I donned my blue apron, put the seed-packets into a basket, took my fork and my garden gloves, and went towards the kitchen-garden where, a day or two before, I had mentally appropriated a long strip for a hedge of sweet-peas.

There was a sunny breeze, and little light clouds were sailing in a leisurely way across the sky. As I walked, the seeds in the basket ran about inside their packets, rattling cheerfully. A lark accompanied me overhead, with a distant carolling; and the two sounds combined gave me a feeling of

cheerful industry. I was in good humour with myself, the seeds, the lark, the fine day, and the world in general.

The flow of my good spirits received a slight check when I found two silly old men planting potatoes in the very patch that I had designed to hedge with sweet-peas. They were within a yard of the box border, and were about to make another row just where I intended to put the sweet-peas, when I arrived on the scene. I felt annoyed with them for being there at all. They seemed to be filling the garden with their baskets and tools and lines and fuss, and they shambled about in their baggy trousers and muddy boots as if they thought the business of planting potatoes the most important in the world. I told them that they must on no account come any further with their potatoes. They looked a little puzzled and scratched their heads, and for a moment I thought they were going to argue with me. However, they had apparently no such intention; for after filling up the holes that already had potatoes in them, they collected their traps and shambled off out of sight, so that I had the whole garden to myself, which was just what I wanted.

It seemed to me that the ground wanted digging before I sowed the seed. So I proceeded to turn

up the soil with my fork, travelling along the gravel path on my knees and working with such a will that I had to pause about every yard to rest and pant. The soil was moist and dark-coloured, and I turned up a great many fine fat worms, which I took special care to throw among the potatoes. A starling sat in a tree in the privet hedge that separates the garden from the field, watching this operation with the greatest interest. He kept chirping remarks over his shoulder to his companions who were pecking about in the field behind, which I suppose had reference to the size and quality of the worms I was unearthing. On one occasion his interest rose to excitement. I made a bad shot with one of the worms, and instead of throwing him on to the potato-patch, threw him sideways, where he landed tightly wound round a twig of an espalier apple-tree. He was apparently a little stunned, for he stayed there, not making the slightest effort to unwind himself. I could see that the starling had the greatest difficulty in refraining from hopping off his tree and going to his assistance, and that he was longing for my back to be turned when he would hasten to untie him. Indeed his chattering about it began to get on my nerves, and in order to put a stop to it, I was obliged to go and untie the silly thing myself.

It took me about an hour to dig the whole

border, for besides turning up the soil with the fork, I crumbled it in my hand till it was fine and powdery. When I had finished I surveyed my work with satisfaction. The whole length of the border, a little way from the box edging, ran a smooth strip about a foot wide of fine, dark new soil, a rich soft bed for the seeds.

I felt that I must stretch my limbs before beginning the work of scraping aside the soil and sowing the peas. So I went to the potting-shed to write some labels, for I intended keeping the different colours separate in the hedge, and labelling them, so that I might settle when they bloomed which were the best to sow again next year.

The bright day had roused every one to industry. I passed Max and William, busy unpacking and sorting some fruit-trees that a retreating nurseryman's cart had just deposited, and stopped a moment to chat and look at the trees—nice little dark-stemmed espalier apples and plums. I wrote my labels with great care: Princess Beatrice, Blanche Burpee, Adonis, Princess May, Mrs. Gladstone, Dorothy Tennant, and the Countess of Radnor, and then went to the house to write a note, which my eagerness to garden had made me forget.

I was away from the scene of my work about half-an-hour. As I went towards the kitchen-

garden again, I saw Max and William moving away, carrying little trees, and the two shambling ones following them with spades. I wondered if they had seen and admired my work, and looked myself to see if I could observe the difference between my newly-dug-up strip and the potato-patch.

There was something I could not make out lying on the ground at intervals along the strip. I strained my eyes as I approached, to make out what it was, and saw with a feeling of annoyance that they had carelessly deposited fruit-trees just on the part I had dug so carefully. I hastened up to throw them off on to the path out of my way. But when I reached the spot I stood and gazed instead. The whole length of my strip, at intervals of about two yards, down the very middle, were great holes, at the side of each of which lay an apple-tree, apparently just waiting to be put in.

My indignation rose. "Max!" I called, trying to be calm and polite, "I am going to sow sweet-peas here. You can't plant your fruit-trees in the same place. There won't be room."

He was busy, some little way off, superintending the digging of more holes. "The espaliers must go there," he shouted; "there is no other place. Can't you sow your sweet-peas somewhere else?" And hardly waiting for my answer, he proceeded

with his directions to the shambling ones to dig another hole.

Sow my sweet-peas somewhere else! I felt too indignant to speak, and could do nothing but gaze angrily and helplessly at their four backs stooping over the little trees. They were so much absorbed in what they were doing that it did not even seem to occur to any of them that I had a grievance.

I picked up my basket with the sweet-peas and mignonette and my fork and turned away with tears of rage in my eyes. The starling looked on, and I could hear quite plainly that he was telling the other starlings all about it.

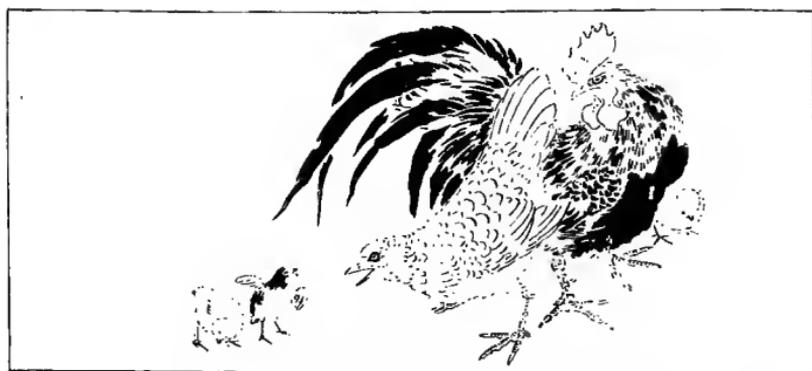
A greyness came over the sun, and a sympathetic little shower began to fall. I thought to myself, If I get wet through and catch a cold and die, perhaps they will be sorry, and I resolved not to go in.

I walked from the kitchen-garden into the flower-garden, and came upon a new flower-bed that had just been made—a long narrow strip the whole length of the hedge, with a grass border in front. It was obviously designed for something—had probably been made on purpose. As I passed it I had an idea, and paused looking at it. I would fill it with sweet-peas and mignonette, and have my revenge!

I set to work at once, anxious to complete it before they had finished putting in their fruit-trees.

The ground had been newly prepared, and was soft and crumbly and delightful to work on. The strip was too long for a hedge the whole way, so I sowed the sweet-peas in clumps, first pale mauve, then pink, then white, then salmon colour, at intervals of a yard the whole way down. I drew a circle on the soil for each clump, and then distributed the seed in a sort of geometrical pattern inside it. Thirty clumps took me to the end of the bed. I looked round when I came to the end to see if they had finished their tree-planting, and could see the tops of their heads over the hedge, going off in the opposite direction. So I felt safe for a little longer. With the side of my fork I scraped a strip about half-a-foot wide, the whole length of the bed in front of the sweet-peas. Then walking along in the attitude of the traditional sower I showered it thickly with mignonette seed, and going over the ground again covered it up. The shower had sprinkled on while I sowed, but I had worked so quickly, and been so absorbed that I had not noticed it.

As I stood up to contemplate my work the rain stopped; the grey veil was drawn aside, the sun shone out again, and a lark shot up quite close. I felt better. "After all, life has its compensations," I said, as I walked towards the house crumpling the empty seed-packets in my hand.



XII

HENS AND CHICKENS

“If you go and live in the country,” my friends said, “you must have something to do besides gardening—look after hens, or something of that sort.” They all said it, so that at last I began to think there must be something in it, and that I should find life in the country insupportable if I did nothing but garden. The general opinion seemed in favour of hens. So I chose hens.

I enclosed a little bit of ground in an out-of-the-way part of the garden with wire-netting, and built a most attractive little house in one corner, with a perch for them to go to bed on (a most uncomfortable bed I should have thought, but my gardener told me they preferred it), and six little boxes full of clean straw in a row for them to lay their eggs in. Then I bought six hens and a cock and put them into it.

I had never taken any interest in cocks and hens before. I knew that hens existed for the purpose of laying eggs for breakfast, and that cocks were nuisances that made unearthly, meaningless noises in the middle of the night; but that was about all. Consequently, when I had put them into the run, I watched them with some curiosity to see how they would take to it, and how they would behave.

I never saw any one with such a self-satisfied proprietary air as the cock. One would have thought he had chosen the site, enclosed the run, and built the hen-house himself and put the straw into the nests with his own hands. He walked the hens round, drawing their attention to the various points and advantages. "I think you will find the nests most comfortable," he said, with the air of a landlady showing off her well-aired beds—"clean and well strawed. I am sure there are many hens who would envy you such extremely well-made and convenient boxes for laying eggs in. And one each, as I'm alive! so that there need be no quarrelling." While he delivered this lecture the hens all peered into the hen-house over each other's shoulders. He then drew their attention to the soil, scratched up a little of it, and said, "Very fine soil indeed; plenty of slugs and other interesting objects to be found, with here and there a tuft

of grass to whet the beak upon, and stones and grits to aid digestion. Look at it for yourselves, I beg." And he stood aside and watched them with an air of proud proprietorship, as they followed his directions and investigated the soil for themselves. He then proceeded to take stock of the dimensions, the view, and the site generally. But this he did, as it were, on his own account, as if he thought such weighty matters were beyond the comprehension of hens.

The hens were not so ready to approve everything as the cock. They seemed at first somewhat inclined to resent my looking at them. They eyed me with an expression of indignant surprise, but when they saw that I had no intention of moving, paid me no further attention. They were not, however, going to give their unqualified admiration to anything before thoroughly testing it. They walked about with a coldly critical look in their eyes, seeming to say, "It is not bad, as far as one can judge, but it is far too early to pronounce an opinion."

The morning after their instalment I went out eagerly to see if they had laid any eggs. Two of the hens and the cock were busy scratching holes in a corner of the yard. The other four were presumably in the hen-house, to which I directed

my steps. I found they were very much there. As I opened the door there was a wild hysterical shriek, and they all four flew straight in my face and out of the door, banging me on the head with their wings and legs as they passed. I was so startled and terrified that I fled inside the hen-house, shutting the door after me, and it was some time before I dared venture out again. My behaviour had created a frightful commotion. They were all talking and shouting at once, when I timidly emerged. The cock seemed the most indignant of all. He remonstrated loudly with me as I passed by: "Really, I never heard of such behaviour. How can you expect them to lay any eggs if you go invading their privacy like that without even knocking at the door? When I have taken so much trouble to make them feel at home it is too bad. You should remember that hens have nerves." I felt reprovèd, and from that day never ventured to look for eggs till I had counted the hens and found they were all safe outside. And as long as I respected their convenience in this particular they did not seem to resent my appropriation of the eggs they had laid. The cock, who was nothing if not philosophical, had, I think, pointed out to them that if I took their eggs I made up for it by feeding them very well, and that

after all you could not have everything in this world.

One morning I found that one of the hens had taken to her bed, and that nothing would induce her to get up. She even refused to stir when I went into the hen-house—merely blinked at me and sat tight. When she had stayed there for two days on end I began to think she must be ill. I consulted all my poultry-books, but could find no mention of her disease. Then I consulted my cook. “Why, she’s broody, m’m,” she said. “She wants to sit. You must give her some eggs and she’ll hatch you out some chickens.” “But I have no eggs to give her,” I objected. “Why doesn’t she lay her own?” “Well, m’m, she’s been a-laying of them for some time past, but we’ve eaten them all. I dare say Mr. Hodge would let you have a dozen.” “Ordinary eggs such as we have for breakfast?” I asked. “Yes, m’m, that’s the kind, and the newer the better.”

Now, it is not to be supposed that I am so grossly ignorant as not to know that hens hatch chickens out of eggs; but I assure you it had never struck me before what a remarkable process it is. I put thirteen perfectly ordinary eggs under that hen. They contained nothing but yolk and white; (I am sure of this, because I tested them by eating

one for breakfast;) and at the end of twenty-one days, during which time the hen did absolutely nothing but sit on them, ten chickens walked out of them, all covered with fluffy feathers, with beaks, eyes, wings, and strong legs, with toe-nails, and all as spry and 'cute as could be. Where they got their fluff and feathers from was what puzzled me. Certainly nothing can be less like fluff and feathers than the yolk and white of an egg. And yet that there was nothing else to make them of inside the egg I felt as morally certain as one can be about anything. Anyhow, there they were, and there was not the least doubt about them. At least, there was no doubt about them the first time I visited them. When, an hour or two later, I went to look at them again I received a dreadful shock. Every single chicken had disappeared, and the hen was crouching with what seemed to me a most guilty expression on her countenance. Stories of animals that devour their young flashed through my mind. She had eaten them all! "What have you done with your chickens, you wicked, inhuman mother?" I shouted at her. Immediately ten small heads with bright eyes peeped out at different points from beneath her feathers, making her look like a sort of porcupine with heads instead of quills. They were all underneath, though how she managed to stow

them so that not so much as a toe of any one of them was to be seen was a mystery.

The remarkable intelligence which those chickens displayed on the very day of their birth filled me with amazement. Compared with the intelligence of the average new-born baby it was little short of astounding. When he was only a day old, I saw one of them performing his toilet, with as much ease as if he had been at it for years—pulling his ridiculous little wings out, and tidying the bits of down one by one with his beak. A new-born baby can do absolutely nothing for itself. It cannot sit up, much less stand or walk. It cannot see; it cannot hear. It can hardly keep its own head on, and its expression, compared with that of a chicken, is absolutely idiotic. It cannot even feed itself, and as for taking its own tub, and putting on its own clothes, why the notion is ridiculous. A chicken stands, walks, runs, sees, hears, feeds itself, takes an intelligent interest in the universe, and performs its own toilet the very day it is born. And such extraordinary intelligence does it display in everything that it does, that I am convinced that if it were the custom for chickens to wear clothes it would put on its own socks and shoes, tie its sun-bonnet under its chin, and go for a walk five minutes after it was born.

That such extraordinary atoms of intelligence as chickens should develop into nothing better than cocks and hens shows that there must be something very seriously wrong with their education. With a view to forming some theory as to the cause of their degeneration, I observed very carefully the way the mother educated them, and came to the conclusion that she educated them horribly.

She taught them three things, better left untaught: greed, destruction, and the use of bad language. Her lessons in greed I watched with amusement, and some admiration of her methods. I would bring out a saucer of chopped-up egg, oatmeal, and things chickens like. She would pounce upon it, seize great lumps of the food, and apparently gobble it up in a great hurry, talking all the time at a great rate. "Come along! Eat it all up! Stuff it down! Get as much as you can! Don't leave a scrap!" But, as a matter of fact, her devouring of the food was a pretence. She merely chucked it up and down, and flung it about, managing to give an appearance of rapid consumption, and awful greed. It took the chickens in. They pounced too, and gobbled as hard as they could.

Her lessons in destruction I viewed with less equanimity. In one of the numerous poultry-books I purchased, I read that it was a mistake to imagine

that chickens did harm in a garden. The small amount of mischief they did—so said the book—was more than compensated for by the benefit they conferred by devouring slugs and insects. So when they were about a week old I turned them all into a little yard, on to which my sitting-room window looked, and which contained a little grass-plot, some gravel-paths, and a flower-bed or two along the wall. Into one of the flower-beds I had just transplanted some nasturtiums, and, feeling a little apprehensive lest they should walk over them and break them down, I established myself at my writing-table in the window, where I could glance at them occasionally while doing my accounts.

The hen conducted them round the yard in a most orderly fashion, poking into all the corners, pecking about on the ground, and apparently giving them a little lecture on the best places for finding slugs. The chickens followed her closely, listening with great attention, like a group of eager, docile scholars thirsting for knowledge, and nothing could have been more decorous than the behaviour of the whole party. They passed the nasturtium-bed once or twice without even glancing at it, though I had noticed that they paid some attention to the other flower-beds, nipping off an insect or two from the plants. So I congratulated myself

with the thought that it probably contained nothing in their line, and felt I might safely withdraw my surveillance.

I went to order the dinner. I was absent not more than ten minutes, and when I came back looked out of the window to see how they were getting on. If I had not seen it with my own eyes I could hardly have believed that one hen could have done so much in so short a time. The nasturtium-bed was scattered all over the yard. Earth and nasturtium plants were strewn all about—flung out with such strength and fury that they covered the ground for several yards around the scene of action. Where the bed had been was nothing but a deep pit, in which the hen, with her back to me, was still digging in a sort of frenzy, flinging great handfuls of earth out behind, and talking in an excited way to her chickens, who were all peering down into the hole, and occasionally imitating their mother by giving a little backward scratch and flinging their small contribution of earth into the yard. “Come on,” she seemed to say, “be quick! she’ll be back in a minute! Don’t leave a single plant! Dig them all up, like this! Scratch, scratch! Fling, fling!”

I could hardly contain my rage. I rushed out at her with a stick, and she fled from the pit with

a shriek. "Here she is! I told you so!" I was so angry that I drove her into her coop that I had taken the precaution to bring out, and shut her up. If it had been ignorance I could have forgiven it. But she had so evidently planned the whole thing beforehand. And her duplicity had been so shocking. She had walked past the bed with such an innocent air, just to give me the impression that it was the last thing she would think of touching, and then as soon as my back was turned—for, judging by what she had accomplished, she could not have lost a second—had torn to it and begun her work of destruction.

The whole party was somewhat cowed by my sudden appearance and summary treatment. The chickens crowded up to the coop, and looked at me rather awe-struck, while the mother kept up a muttering under her breath which sounded rather rude, but I did not understand what she was saying. I left her for a few minutes, which time she apparently spent in brooding over my treatment, and making up her mind what to say, for as soon as I entered the garden again, she put her head through the bars and hurled such a storm of abuse at me that I really felt thankful that I did not understand what she was saying—stretching her neck, and making frantic efforts to get out of the

coop. After she had vented her wrath and set a shocking example to her chickens by using the most horrible language, her tone became expostulatory and her remarks more intelligible. "Look at my chickens!" she said, "all over the place! and I not able to get at them, shut up in this box and feeling like a fool. How do you expect me to educate them? How can they have any respect for their mother when they see your monstrous treatment of her? It is really too bad. I must beg you to let me out at once. I cannot and will not stand it!"

I looked round for the chickens. They were indeed all over the place. One had made his way through a fence of wire-netting that enclosed a flower-bed in one corner, and appeared to be busily employed over something—killing a worm, I gathered from his gestures. I went up quietly behind him to see what he was doing. I had sown a row of my favourite flowers—sweet-peas—in this sheltered corner, where I thought they would be safe from sparrows. They were just about an inch above the ground and beginning to unfurl their leaves. The chicken was engaged in pulling them up, shaking them as if they were worms, and casting them aside. The ground was soft, and they came up easily, roots and all. This apparently

surprised and pleased him, for he had done five, and was going on steadily as if he meant to do the whole row, when I arrived on the scene and stopped his little game. I felt very much inclined to smack him. "But what can one expect," I thought, as I proceeded to put the sweet-peas back into their holes, "with such a mother as an example!"

I came to the conclusion, however, that a chicken's capacity for doing good in a garden by no means equalled his capacity for destruction, and I thought it advisable to turn them all out into a field where there were no flower-beds and no seeds—nothing, in fact, but grass for them to destroy. They probably did not find it as amusing as the garden; but then they had to learn, like every one else, that life is not all amusement.

From the day they were turned into the field they began to degenerate. Instead of the intelligent balls of fluff they were the day they were born, they grew rapidly into gawky, scraggy, hobble-de-hoy cocks and hens. Their eyes lost their inquisitive sparkle, and became sour and suspicious-looking. I never saw so striking an example of the deteriorating effect of a poor education. I made up my mind that I would educate the next batch myself. But circumstances occurred which prevented there ever being another batch. William came to me

and said, "Hadn't I better fatten up some of those chickens?" "Fatten them up!" I cried; "why, surely they are quite fat enough." "Not fat enough for the table, m'm." "For the table!" I exclaimed. "You don't suppose I am going to eat them, do you?" "Well, m'm," he said, "you can't keep them all. There are six cocks and only four hens, and the cocks 'll kill each other as soon as they get a bit bigger." I considered the question and made up my mind. "You may fatten those little cocks," I said, "and when they are fat enough you may kill them and send them to market. But don't let me hear any more about them, or even see them again. And you may break up all the new coops for firewood. I shall hatch no more chickens to be fattened for the table. I consider it a barbarous pursuit."



XIII

GREEN-FLY

IF I were to arrange the insects I have met, in order of merit, judging them solely by the feelings they inspire in me, down at the bottom of the list, in company with the household-fly (when mouldy) and the wood-louse, would come those nasty little sticky green things called by the learned "aphides" and by the vulgar "green-fly." They have fat, transparent green bodies with a tight thin skin, and long sticky legs that they move with great difficulty, as if the joints wanted oiling. They live chiefly round the necks of rosebuds, crowded so closely together that it makes you quite uncomfortable to look at them. If there is not standing-room for them on the rosebud, they sit in layers one on top of the other, looking very hot. If you give them a poke with a bit of stick

they fall off in clumps of two or three in an intoxicated sort of way, and lie on their backs with their sticky legs in the air. When they do this you go in-doors and take a bath.

There is only one other insect that inspires me with the same feelings of disgust, and that, I have always considered (and shall continue to consider till I hear to the contrary) first-cousin to the green-fly. It is, if anything, more repulsive than its first-cousin. It sits on a twig of grass, or lavender, in early summer and *spits* till it has enveloped itself in a little blob of froth, which looks particularly revolting. A larch-wood with which I am well acquainted is at one time of the year made quite loathsome by these nasty little blobs hanging to nearly every blade of grass. Once, in my youth, I ventured to investigate one of them. I had been told that it had an inhabitant, and was loth to believe, from mere hearsay, that any creature could be so degraded as to inhabit such a medium. Overcoming my sensations of disgust, I took a little blade of grass and scraped some of the froth aside, and disclosed a nauseous-looking green thing that moved uneasily about on being disturbed. On which I quickly covered him up again, and tried to think of other things.

Both greenhouses having been newly painted

and glazed, and containing new pots, new soil, and new plants, they have a particularly fresh, bright appearance, and there had been no sign of blight or decay on anything. Indeed, with the exception of a worm that made havoc in one of the seed-pans, and a party of bees that paid us a flying visit one sunny morning, I have seen no insects at all. Consequently I was not prepared for the unpleasant discovery I made the other morning.

A dozen little rose-trees that stood at the back behind other plants in the small greenhouse attracted my attention. They had begun to show buds, and some of them seemed to be already coming out. As I wished to examine them a little more closely and see what sort of roses they were, I reached in among the other plants and took two of the pots out and put them on a shelf in front, and proceeded to look at the buds. To my disgust I saw that they were simply covered with green-fly! I took a little twig and began brushing them off. But, as I particularly object to squashing them, I succeeded merely in scattering them on to the floor, and even on to some of the other plants. So I threw down the twig, shook my hands, brushed and shook my skirt, and went out into the garden to air myself and get rid of the unpleasant sensations the operation had caused.

Round at the back of the greenhouse I came upon Max and William. William was busy over an iron bucket with holes in it, in which he had some red-hot cinders, and Max was looking on and directing him. "What are you doing?" I asked. "We are going to smoke the green-fly," they said. They had taken from the greenhouse all the tender seedlings and delicate plants that might be supposed to object to smoke, and had collected and put in their places all those that were being tormented by green-fly. They purposed then shutting up the windows and doors, and filling the place with tobacco smoke. The green-fly, they said, would object to this so strongly that they would turn brown and fall off dead.

Some rope that had been unravelled and soaked in tobacco-juice was put moist into the cinder-bucket, where it began at once to smoulder and send up volumes of thick white smoke. It was then carried into the greenhouse by William, who emerged coughing, and the door shut upon it. In a few minutes, from the cloudy appearance on the glass, we could see that the place was full of smoke, and soon it began to pour out from the cracks, chinks, and little orifices in the roof and round the door. In order to be effectual the soaked rope must smoulder, but not blaze. The

cinders in the pail proved, however, a little too powerful, for it suddenly burst into flames. William, who was peering through the window to see how it was getting on, was obliged to open the door, penetrate into the midst of the smoke, and put it out. He came out staggering, and looking a sickly green, and had to be brought to with brandy, which, he being a water-drinker, had a surprisingly rapid effect. The effect of the smoke on William made me tremble for the fate of the plants. It seemed to me they were a little overdoing it. It was surely hardly necessary, I thought, to subject a fragile, transparent creature, the size of a pin's head, to several hours of treatment, a few seconds of which would nearly "do for" a man. However, it was satisfactory to think they would be so thoroughly annihilated, and I thought what a pleasing sight the corpses would be on the morrow.

It was too late to see them that night, but I hastened to gloat over them immediately after breakfast the following day. A nasty stale smell greeted me as I opened the door. The plants and seedlings had a faded, depressed, chastened look, as if they were all recovering from a serious illness. Some were drooping despondently, and others showed symptoms of turning yellow. Never mind, I

thought, they will soon recover when they see the corpses strewing the ground, and realize that they are free from their little tormentors; and I glanced eagerly about on the shelf and floor for signs of the massacre. There were none. The smoke had apparently done its work so thoroughly that there were not even any charred remains to be seen. Then I looked at the rose-bushes, started, looked a little nearer, and rubbed my eyes, while vague recollections passed through my mind of having somewhere read of an optical disease which begins with insects and ends with a pink hippopotamus in your bath. Sitting in crowds on the rose-buds were, it seemed to me, even more green-fly than there had been the day before—looking, if anything, fatter, greener, more transparent than ever.

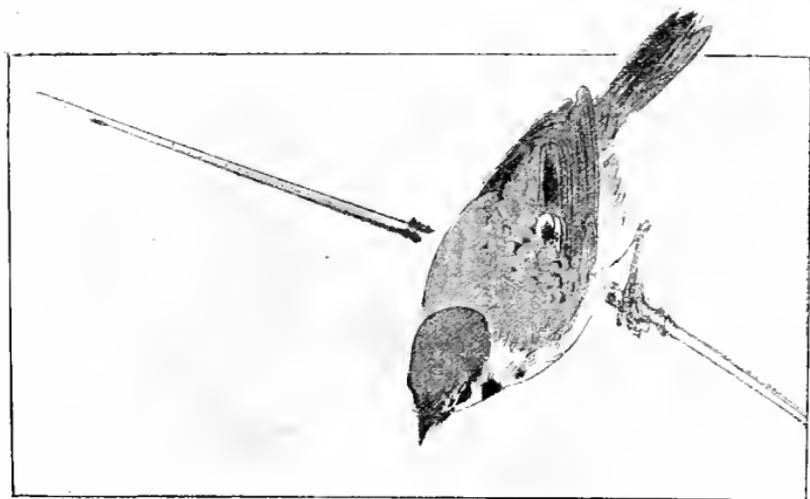
William, who is of a sanguine disposition, assured me that some of them had begun to turn yellow, and that another dose would certainly do for them. But I confess I felt sceptical, and was not at all surprised when fumes of brown paper soaked in the strongest tobacco juice yielded only a stray corpse or two. Then the plants were all syringed with an infusion of quassia chips—bitter stuff that is said to be particularly distasteful to them. Anyhow, as William remarked, they don't *like* it. "How do you know that, William?" I

asked, when he made the remark to me. "Well," he said, "I took one of them off the plant, and dropped a little of it on him, and he turned brown."

Finally, after trying a variety of remedies, none of which made any appreciable difference in their numbers, we were recommended by a friend to try "Mac Dougall's Insecticide," which he said he had found a "certain kill." William went in pursuit of the article at once, and came back with a packet containing half-a-dozen sheets about a foot square of thick, dark-brown cardboard. According to the directions, one sheet, which costs ninepence, is enough to fumigate 1,000 cubic feet. By doing a mysterious little sum it was ascertained that one-half of the greenhouse that could be shut off from the rest contained 3,500 cubic feet, and that consequently four sheets of paper would suffice. Before starting we collected all the plants that wanted treatment (chiefly roses, lilies, and calceolarias), and put them in front. One little azalea was suffering from a thing called "thrip"—a little, long-bodied black insect of most objectionable appearance—and was looking very ill and shabby. We gave it a special seat in the front row. We suspended the sheets of cardboard banner-wise from the ends of sticks, and supported the sticks in flower-pots, which we put upside down on the

ground. Then, after seeing that the windows and ventilators were tightly shut, a match was put to the bottom edge of each sheet, and they were left to smoulder. We watched through the window till the place was full of thick white smoke, and then we left it for the night.

Max called me out before breakfast the next morning to see the result. The floors and flower-pots were simply strewed with corpses, so that William had to get a broom to sweep them up. So complete was the massacre that we have since searched the plants in vain for a living aphid or thrip. The experiment left no smell after the first day, and the plants have not been in the least injured by the smoke. In fact, they look better and fresher than before. The calceolarias have shot up rapidly and are growing into strong plants, and "Ethel Brownlow," a tea-rose of most exquisite "old-rose" colour, that was suffering very much from the plague, is covered with roses.



XIV

BY PARCEL-POST

OUTSIDE, things seem to be taking a long time to wake up. Though the perennials planted in the autumn have as much green leaf up as enables me to recognize among them delphiniums, peonies, lupins, and phloxes, and the rose-trees and climbing plants are covered with buds, and the carnations and wallflowers make streaks of green, the general aspect of the garden is brown and earthy. A cursory glance at the kitchen-garden beyond the hedge might lead one to suppose that it is still in the same state as a month or two ago, just after having been converted from wilderness to brown soil—a series of empty beds, neatly bordered with box and

intersected with gravel paths. But a walk through it yesterday brought me to the conclusion that there is more going on there than anywhere else. It is true there is not much in the way of vegetables above ground at present. But there are two long raised beds containing asparagus, some mounds containing seakale and rhubarb, several long rows of little green things like cabbages, and dotted about in many of the beds are labels showing where seeds have been sown. There are rows of dark-stemmed espalier trees standing with outstretched arms down either side of the main paths, and about one-third of the garden is filled with little naked bushes, hardly visible against the dark soil, but for the labels that flap in the wind—gooseberries, currants, and raspberries, which I noticed, on looking closely at them, are putting out buds at a great rate. One bed, containing rows of small green things, flat on the ground and rather beset with weeds, I found on investigation to be a strawberry-bed.

It was when sighing over the slowness of things the other day that my eye was caught by an advertisement of “strong young plants, warranted to bloom this year,” among which were twelve *Nicotiana Affinis* for a shilling, and many other tempting things for incredibly small sums. I made out a list at once

of the things that attracted me most, and sent an order for twenty-four tobacco-plants, twenty-four Iceland poppies, twelve *Salvia Patens*, and twelve *Verbascum Olympticum*. The latter is a magnificent weed commonly known as mullein. It grows a huge spike, six feet high, covered with small golden-yellow blossoms from a tuft of large grey-green plush leaves. The *Salvia Patens* I saw a year or two ago growing in great abundance in a garden in Surrey. The colour seemed to me one of the most beautiful things I had ever seen—a pure blue like that of the tiny Alpine gentian, but differing from the gentian in being of a velvety instead of a smooth texture.

The promptness, efficiency, and quietness of the post always amazes me. You drop a letter into a box, probably on your own hall-table, just as you drop a penny in the slot, and like the penny it sets the whole post-machine working. The letter performs a series of evolutions, is handed on from one place to another, and before you know where you are, a chocolate box is shot out on to your breakfast-plate. I found it on my plate with my letters when I came down to breakfast two days after I had dropped the letter in the post—a wooden box with the nurseryman's label on the outside, and edges of green moss sticking out beneath the lid. I had

expected at the very least a hamper as a result of my order, if not a nurseryman's cart, and I hastened to undo the box before I had my breakfast, to see what it could possibly contain. Inside were five little newspaper bundles, containing what at first seemed nothing but a little mud, some of which was scattered about on the bottom of the box. But on taking off the newspaper I found five little clumps of tiny seedlings with their roots wrapped round with damp earth and moss. I took off the moss and some of the earth, and saw that each clump consisted of a dozen or so of wee plants, with roots and leaves of their own complete, and unmistakably answering to their names by their foliage, but so small and young that they were quite touching. In spite of their journey through the post they looked quite fresh and green, and as healthy as could be.

Max laughed at their size. He said I had been "done," and assured me that he had a patch of Iceland poppies six times the size of my whole twenty-four put together, for which he had paid a neighbouring nurseryman only threepence, my twenty-four having cost me one and sixpence. As a matter of fact, their youth and smallness was what appealed to me most about them, and I could not help feeling that I had far rather have

these babes, and watch them grow up, than the aged clump he had bought from his nurseryman for threepence. In fact, I was more than content with my bargain, especially as, when I came to investigate the bundles and separate the muddy little things, I found that I had been dealt with liberally in the matter of number, and had been given in two cases fourteen for twelve and twenty-eight Iceland poppies instead of twenty-four. There was, besides, an extra bundle marked "gratis," and containing six very nice little carnation plants.

It was pouring with rain when they arrived. But I could not bear the thought of their staying any longer wrapped in bits of newspaper in a chocolate box, after a tiresome journey through the post. So I wrapped myself in a mackintosh, put on my thick boots, took a fork, and went forth and planted them. As I dug holes for them and tucked them in up to their necks, with the moist earth pressed firmly round their roots, I felt that they were distinctly grateful to me, and rejoiced to find themselves once more in a comfortable bed.

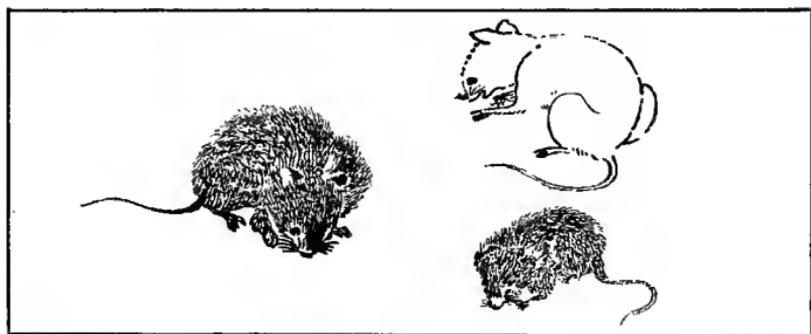
I planted the tobacco in a bed beneath my sitting-room windows. The windows are low, and if the plants grow they will soon be able to look into the rooms. The tiny salvias and the still tinier verbascums I planted alternately in the long

strip where last week I put the clumps of sweet-peas and the border of mignonette. The gorgeous blue of the salvia and the golden yellow of the mullein will have, I think, a fine effect. But it is difficult to imagine that such wee things will ever develop to the plants I have in my mind's eye; especially as now that they are bedded up to their necks in earth, there is nothing to be seen but a green leaf or two, in the case of the mullein only one little soft grey thing. The Iceland poppies I planted in groups of seven in the corners of a square bed that is now gay with a border of daffodils in full bloom.

I felt as much solicitude for these young seedlings as if they had been so many infants or young birds, and as soon as the rain was over went out to see how they were getting on. All seemed to have revived after their journey and were looking fresh and vigorous. But there had been a tragedy among the Iceland poppies. One of them had been pulled up, and lay limp and dying on the ground, an inch or two from where he had been planted. I looked round, puzzled to know who could have been guilty of such wanton cruelty, and my eye fell upon the starling, who was occupying his favourite position in the tree in the hedge, and chatting volubly in a somewhat

apologetic fashion. Something in his manner betrayed the culprit. So I listened to what he had to say, and gathered from his somewhat incoherent remarks that as soon as my back was turned after planting the poppies, a huge worm had peeped out of the earth quite close to the poor little seedling. Knowing my dislike to worms he had immediately hopped down to remove it, but in pulling it up, perhaps a trifle roughly, he had pulled up the poppy too, and found himself totally unable to plant it again, for which he was very sorry.

I dug a hole, put the poor little poppy in, tucked him up comfortably and gave him some water, and in an hour or two he had quite revived, and looked as happy as the others.



XV

THE MOUSE AND THE PEAS

IT was my own fault, I admit. But then, as I told myself afterwards, I did not know what sort of mouse it was going to be. I thought, of course, that it was the sort of mouse that sits in the grate in the middle of the night scratching the paper, and, when you throw something at it, goes mad and tears up the window-curtains and then over your bed.

The sweet-peas had been in the ground about ten days, and were just beginning to think about coming up—in fact, a series of cracks in the earth, through which, if you looked close, you could see something white, encouraged one to hope that in a day or two they would be above ground—when William came up to me in the garden, where I was

picking daffodils, and told me that the mice had been eating my sweet-peas.

“Mice!” I said, incredulously. “Not mice, William?” for I thought he must mean sparrows. He assured me he meant mice. I followed him, still unbelieving, into the kitchen-garden. There he pointed out to me a series of little holes, scraped in the ground, as it were, with a very small hand, and scattered round them, on the ground, bits of the hard outer shell of the pea, which the mouse had discarded as indigestible.

Now I had imagined that the only enemies I had to fear for my sweet-peas were sparrows. And I had taken elaborate measures to circumvent these little wretches by covering the ground where they were sown with a net-work of black cotton—a labour which had taken me the better part of a day. I had, moreover, spent a small fortune on the seed, choosing all the choicest varieties from the seed-merchant’s lists, and I was looking forward to a glorious hedge in a few months’ time. So, to feel that all this was to end in a meal for a greedy mouse was to feel extremely foolish and not a little aggravated.

I looked blankly at William. “What are we to do, William?” I asked. I had heard of soaking peas in paraffin to make them distasteful to animals

who might otherwise be disposed to eat them, but it was too late to do that now.

“I’d best lay a few mouse-traps,” said William.

I detest mouse-traps—indeed, traps of any kind. But the prospect of having all my sweet-peas devoured was one I could not face. I told William to get some mouse-traps and put them along the border at once.

An hour or two later I went out and found six little traps placed on the ground at intervals, the whole length of my sowing. Inside each was a little bit of yellow cheese hanging from a hook in the ceiling, and the door of each being wide open gave them a sort of “Will you walk into my parlour?” air. I took one up and examined it. It was a wooden affair, with wire bars. The cheese was put at the farthest end from the door, so that the mouse had to go right inside to get at it. It was so arranged that as soon as he touched it, it bounced up to the ceiling, at the same time shutting down the door by which he had entered like a port-cullis, and there he was a prisoner. What happened to him then? I asked myself. What would William do with him? Kill the poor little thing ruthlessly, I was afraid. Or, worse still, give him to the cat. I resolved not to think about it.

During the rest of the day, however, I found

my footsteps continually turning towards the kitchen-garden, to see if there were any mice in the traps. And each time I had a feeling of relief when I found they were still empty.

I awoke early the next morning, and as I awoke a conviction came into my head with a sort of unpleasant bang that there was a mouse in one of the traps. I felt so sure of it that I could almost see him. I fell to wondering again what William would do with him, and then tried to dismiss him from my thoughts, and go to sleep again. But I could not get him out of my head. He seemed to be sending me telepathic messages through the cold morning air, begging me to get up and come and let him out. In fact, so persistently worrying was the thought of him that at last, half-asleep, and hardly knowing what I was doing, I got up, performed a hasty toilet, and before I quite knew where I was, found myself walking towards the kitchen-garden. The keen morning air woke me up thoroughly. I gazed ahead as I came near the mouse-traps, and felt quite sick when I saw that one of the cheese-holders was standing on end, showing that the door was down and a prisoner inside. So distressed was I at the discovery, that I had to summon all my resolution to go straight up to it and look inside. Sure enough, there was a mouse. Not,

however, a grey, large-eared mouse such as I had expected, but a little brown, furry fellow, with small ears and bright eyes.

I picked up the trap and looked in at him. He seemed terrified, and looked wildly about for escape. Then I noticed that his tail was caught tight underneath the door, and that he could hardly move. I released it by raising the door the least little bit, and this enabled him to whisk about in rather an alarming fashion. I put him down on the ground again, and wondered what on earth had induced me to come out and look at him. What could I do now I had come? I had an almost uncontrollable impulse to open the door and let him out, and I stooped down with that object. Then I suddenly thought of William. What a goose he would think me! To tell him to put mouse-traps to catch the mice, and then to go and let them out! But I did not know what kind of mouse he was going to be, I argued with myself. I did not know he would be so brown and furry, nor have such bright eyes, nor such long whiskers, nor such funny little hands, nor look so very small and frightened; and I again stooped and put my hand to the portcullis. Then I thought of my beautiful hedge of sweet-peas, and of the long morning I had spent in sowing them. I had put each pea in separately,

making a sort of pattern in the drill. It had taken me hours to go the whole length of the border, and my back had positively ached with stooping when I came to the end. I pulled myself together. No. If the mouse was foolish and greedy enough to go into the trap, he must abide the consequences. I would leave him to William, and think no more about him.

I turned away resolutely and began walking towards the house. When I got a few yards down the gravel path, however, I looked back. There is something fatal about looking back, especially if you are a woman. It is, I suppose, the heritage of Lot's wife. I had left the mouse-trap turned so that I could see the bars. When I looked back and saw that little brown field-mouse, with his little nose pressed against the bars, and gazing with wistful misery at my retreating figure, I did not turn to salt, but I turned to something equally apt to melt, and I melted; I became a melting mass of remorse and pity.

I went back and picked up the mouse-trap, murmuring all sorts of fond and foolish things, and stroking its wooden sides in a silly, caressing manner. I walked off to the far-end of the garden, where the privet-hedge was just beginning to show its green shoots. I looked round cautiously to

see if William was anywhere in sight, and being satisfied that he was not, I stooped down and made a hole through the hedge and looked through to see what it was like on the other side. I could see a dry ditch with grass and weeds growing in it, and a few primroses on the bank—just the place a field-mouse might be supposed to like. I put the trap through the hole, with the portcullis end first, pressed down the wooden bar that held the cheese till the door was open, said “Shoo!” at the mouse, and out it shot.

It ran down into the ditch, and then sat there, as if it were too bewildered by what had taken place to move, till I was obliged to say “Shoo!” at it again. Then it ran off and disappeared beneath a dock-leaf. I watched for a few minutes to see if it would reappear; but it did not. So I got up, and putting the mouse-trap in my pocket, walked towards the house, trying to look as unconcerned as possible. As I passed the sweet-peas I ducked quickly, and deposited the trap on the spot from whence I had taken it, and went on.

In the course of the day I asked William if he had caught any mice, and affected surprise when he replied in the negative. I repeated the inquiry every day for a fortnight, and always received the same answer. By dint of early rising I myself

caught six, and sent them on their way rejoicing through the hole in the hedge, taking the precaution to box their ears with a stick as they whisked out of the trap. By the end of a fortnight they had apparently made up their minds that the sweet-peas were not worth such treatment, for the mouse-traps remained empty for a week on end. The sweet-peas were, moreover, well above ground, and big enough to take care of themselves.



XVI

GARDENS OLD AND NEW

A GARDEN begins to be really enjoyable when there are things to pick. In this new-old garden, where all the flower-beds have been dug up and planted anew, there has so far been nothing to pick. It is true there have been hundreds of yellow, purple, and white crocuses, blue squills, and hepaticas. But such small bulbs do not invite one to gather them; they seem rather to beg to be let alone. During the last fortnight, however, thousands of violets have appeared under the trees in the shrubberies. So thickly have they blossomed this year that from a little distance they look like a purple carpet beneath the trees. There is something irresistible about a sweet-scented violet, something that entices one to pick it at once. And during the last fortnight I have picked and picked

till I have been weary, wondering often the while whether the small fragrant bunches of dark purple that I have dotted about the house were worth half the trouble the tiresome little things gave one—the stooping, the burrowing down among the leaves to get the stalk as long as possible, and the tying up in bunches. In these particular violets, which have been let alone year after year to grow as they will, the stalks are most aggravatingly short; and when I have picked my basket full and settled down to arrange them in bunches, I generally find that I have at the end, to make a little bunch of heads with about half-an-inch of stalk only, which, in order that each may reach the water, have to be put in a saucer. A little encouragement and attention, however, in the way of digging about the roots, manuring, and separating, will, I am told, induce violets to grow as long stalks as one can wish. And I am determined that as soon as these troublesome little things have done flowering they shall have all their creature comforts attended to and be given as comfortable beds as possible, in order that they may be more conveniently picked next year.

Clumps of yellow daffodils have also appeared dotted about in the shrubberies, and these are so ornamental arranged in Japanese pots and vases in

the house (especially when a liberal supply of the long green spikes is put with them) that I have gathered great bunches ruthlessly. While violets and daffodils have been making purple and yellow patches underfoot, overhead flowering shrubs have been budding and bursting into colour. The most beautiful of these has been an old almond-tree, whose branches have been a mass of pink blossoms against the sky. William has made several expeditions up a ladder into the tree to cut off the particular branch I marked from below to grace an old Chinese blue-and-white jar that occupies a corner of my sitting-room.

There is the same contrast between an old garden such as this, and a new garden, such as I watched being cleared in the midst of pine-trees on the top of a heather-clad hill in Surrey the other day, as there is between the old village, with its thatched-roofed cottages, that you come upon in a hollow in our English counties, where it has slumbered for centuries, surrounded by cultivated fields, and a brand-new settlement cropping up on a bare uncultivated spot in one of the colonies. The one is full of associations of the generations of people it has watched run their lives: the trees, shrubs, hedges, grass, and the soil itself are full of traditions they have been absorbing for centuries; the very

air seems heavy with human history. The other has no associations but those of Nature. Earth, air, and water are pure and uncontaminated by humanity.

As I looked at the bare patch of sandy soil that was being converted into a kitchen-garden with hoe and axe, I thought that with a slight stretch of imagination I might fancy myself in a new colony watching a settler making his plot of ground habitable. All around were pines, heather, and gorse. Not far off, the new house could be seen appearing above the tops of the trees, and in the air was that strange feeling of lightness and freedom that there is about a place that has not been lived in, that has no sign of ever having been lived in: no tombs of ancient Britons, even; no human bones; no trace of anything human having passed that way.

I was, however, only in Surrey, within forty miles of London, where a large tract of heathery, piney country seems to have been overlooked by man since the beginning of time—despised as poor, unprofitable land, not worth cultivation. Not many years ago some one happened to come across it, noticed that the air had a purity and freshness almost unknown in other parts of England, drew attention to the fact, built himself a house, and settled down on the top of the hill. Since then people have been

flocking to it steadily year by year, and houses cropping up, as it were, like mushrooms in a night. But the air still keeps its strange purity and freshness, and will do so, we may hope, for a generation or two more. There is still about the place that delightful feeling of freedom to do as you please that there is in a new country before that tyrant conventionality has begun to stiffen everybody, as it were with starch, and make them unable to move this way or that for fear of spoiling their irreproachable bearing.

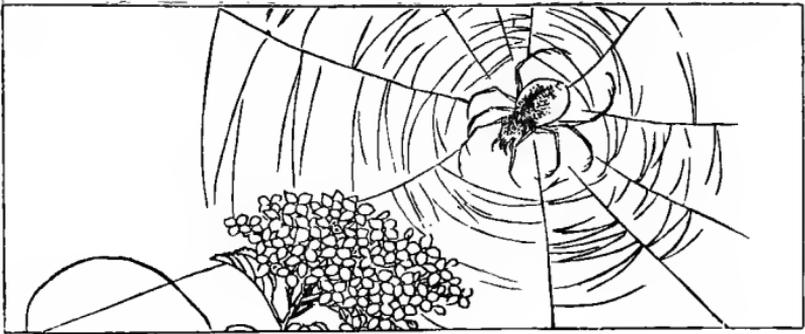
The soil of the new kitchen-garden looked to me sandy, yellow, and poor, very different from the rich brown earth of the garden I am most familiar with. But so far nothing had been done but to clear the space, dig out the roots of gorse, bracken, heather, and mark the paths and beds with a border of box. Though the poor-looking, sandy soil of this part of Surrey is the despair of gardeners when they first attack it, so that they feel hopeless about inducing anything to grow there, a few years' experience has proved in many cases that though they may not care much about the soil, many plants delight in the invigorating air, and grow luxuriantly. Some of these hill-gardens boasted last year the most gorgeous borders of herbaceous plants. One of these could, I think, have held its

own in a beauty show against any border in the country. Cactus-dahlias, dark-blue and pale-blue delphiniums, tall white phloxes, and red-hot pokers had grown to an enormous height, and jostled each other in the background, while the foreground was ablaze with smaller plants and annuals.

Flowers sometimes show a preference for a particular spot, and will grow there in profusion, while refusing to flourish in another place only a few yards off. Something in the air, the soil, or the surroundings, it may be merely the view, pleases them, and they settle down, send out roots and branches, and take possession of the ground in a determined way that shows they mean to stay there.

A queer, long-shaped cottage, built bungalow-fashion, all on one floor, of logs with the bark on, in one of these clearings, is so much loved by flowers, that in summer it nestles in a perfect bower of green leaves and blossoms. Creepers—clematis, honeysuckle, roses, and ivy—race up the walls as soon as they are stuck in, and seem so bent on covering them up entirely, that last year nothing could be seen of the cottage but its windows and chimneys and bits of the roof peeping out here and there from a tangle of green. It seems as if they found the rough bark of the logs a

sympathetic thing to climb on—reminding them, perhaps, of the trunks of trees in their native haunts—and climbed with a will. Not content with covering the walls and hanging in festoons from the porch, they had in several places forced their way through the roof to see what it was like inside, and had sent straggling sprays along the rafters in the ceilings. A narrow bed ran round the outside of the house, and this was so filled with plants that it looked as if all the flowers in the garden had crowded up to the cottage and were trying to look in at the windows. In early spring this bed had been gay with bulbs: crocuses, snowdrops, daffodils, narcissi, hyacinths, and tulips. But later on it was filled with scented verberna, heliotrope, and the sweet-smelling, crinkly-leaved geranium. These were so content with their surroundings, and grew at such a pace, that a few weeks after they had been put in they were flourishing bushes reaching half-way up the walls. In fact, so profusely did they branch and flower, trail and straggle, that they required severe pruning to keep them in order and prevent their getting in at the windows and filling the house. One carried away great bunches of the sweet-smelling things, and left no trace of the theft.



XVII

THE GREEN-FLY SCORES

A STORY is told, somewhere, of the South Sea Islanders, that some traders wishing to ingratiate themselves, made them presents of various objects of English manufacture, among other things of some common door-nails. The islanders were very much puzzled as to what these could be, and for what use they were intended. After much consulting they came to the conclusion that they must be the buds from some plant. So thinking life might not be quite extinct they planted them in rows and watered them with care.

When one sees the wonderful things in the way of plants and flowers that develop from extraordinary-looking things in the way of roots and seeds, one is not surprised at the South Sea Islanders' excessive faith, but rather inclined to

wonder that their hopes in this particular instance were doomed to disappointment. We plant some little bits of rubbish that look like dead spiders—and in which we might reasonably suppose life to be quite as extinct as in the South Sea Islanders' door-nails—and they develop into a mass of gorgeous scarlet anemones. We scatter a little brown dust, that looks very much like powdered tobacco, and quite as dead, on a rockery, and some months later we find it has developed into hundreds of the bluest of blue Alpine gentians. These experiments I confess I have not yet made myself, but I saw the results in great perfection in Surrey last week, and was also shown samples of the insignificant objects and stuff from which they sprang. Even in my own experience I am continually being startled by the extraordinary things that come out of insignificant-looking seeds.

One of the most amusing results we have had from a packet of seeds is a pan full of young sensitive-plants. There are about fifty of them in a pan a foot square. At present they are not more than half-an-inch high. Each one consists of the two original flat leaves that come up first to make a sort of platform for the real thing, and, springing from the centre of these, one, or sometimes two, tiny acacia leaves. They looked so like spread-out

hands, that, not realizing that they were sensitive, I instinctively gave one of them a pat with a twig I was holding. Instantly the little hand shut up tight, and the arm went down like a railway signal. I was so surprised and amused that I could not resist patting the whole fifty, one after the other; and then when I had finished I began again and patted them all a second time. In fact, there is something so fascinating to me in their behaviour that since I discovered them a week ago, I have not been able to resist patting them every time I go into the greenhouse. Max pretends they hate it, and begs me not to tease them. I myself have noticed a tendency on their part to grow bored, and refuse, after several pats, to play any more. They realize, I suppose, that I am only making fun of them.

Some time ago, in a box of green sphagnum moss that had come from a nurseryman, and is used for putting round some of the things in pots, I believe to keep them warm, Max found some tiny sundew seedlings—so tiny that the little fringed hand was scarcely bigger than a pin's head. He picked them out carefully and planted them again in a flower-pot full of wet moss and peat, hoping that they would grow and catch flies for his amusement. They took to their new surroundings

and grew apace, and the other day I found him feeding one of them with a very small spider, not quite so big as a pin's head, and a very fat green-fly off a rose-tree. Now, though a large spider inspires me with horror, terror, and loathing, there is something attractive and endearing about a very small spider. It is so much more of a "person" than other small insects, and a "person" of that size is quite touching. Consequently when I saw the poor little thing lifting its legs one by one from the sundew in its endeavour to get free, and drawing out each time a long hair of the sticky stuff that was glueing it to the trap, all my sympathies went out to it, and I begged Max to let it go. He paid no attention to my request, but merely gave the spider a little push on to the middle of the leaf, where the sundew's tendrils began to fold round it, and proceeded to put the aphis, which he had on the end of a twig, in the middle of another leaf. I told him I thought it was perfectly odious of him to torture two poor little insects that had never done him the least harm. He said that, on the contrary, the aphis had done him a great deal of harm by eating the rose-trees and distributing its objectionable offspring all over the place.

"Well, but the spider!" I pleaded. For I felt myself there was not much to be said for sparing

the aphid. He pretended to be absorbed in the aphid and made no reply, and after watching him for a few minutes I gave it up, and left him, with a storm of indignation at his cruelty and pity for the spider and even for the aphid raging in my breast. The aphid however, as it turned out, was quite able to take care of itself. It even showed itself possessed of a sense of humour, for it scored off Max in a way that amused me very much, and which he had apparently not foreseen.

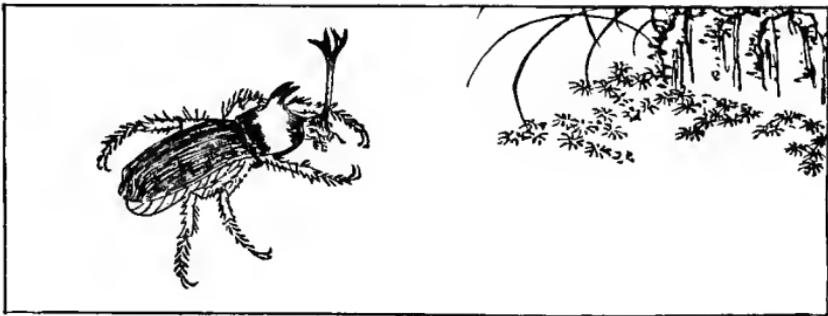
I was so annoyed with Max and so disgusted with the sundew that I avoided going near the odious little plant for the next few days, and forbore to ask any questions as to the fate of the spider or the aphid. He, however, volunteered the information the following day that the spider had succumbed, but that the aphid had escaped and entirely disappeared. He added that he was unable to account for its disappearance, as he had taken the precaution to cover the flower-pot with a bell-glass.

A day or two later I was in the greenhouse snipping the seed-pods off an azalea. This is an occupation I find extremely soothing and conducive to meditation. The greenhouse was hot, and the snipping of the scissors and the buzzing of a bumble-bee who was fussing about were beginning to make me feel quite drowsy, when I was aroused

by an exclamation from Max, whom I had not heard enter. I turned round and saw that he was examining the sundew. He had lifted the bell-glass, and was contemplating the plant with an expression of the greatest disgust. Though I had vowed not to look at the sundew again, my curiosity got the better of me, and I could not resist going up to see what was the matter. The escaped aphid had not been idle. It had revenged itself by simply covering the sundew with its loathsome offspring. With the greatest care it had avoided depositing any of them on the top of the leaf, where they might be caught by the sticky tendrils; but up each stalk, and underneath the leaf, as high as they dared go, the horrid little things were sitting in crowds. I laughed so much at the sight and at Max's discomfiture that I felt quite ill. I told him his sundew was quite spoiled, and that he had much better throw it away. But he scorned my advice on the subject, and I left him fiercely puffing smoke at them from his tobacco-pipe—treatment by which he succeeded in exterminating them.

Last night I came across a book which contained a most amusing account of the habits of the creature, and in which the observations of M. Charles Bonnet, the naturalist, are quoted, and

which somewhat explained its curious behaviour. M. Charles Bonnet caught an aphid and shut it up quite by itself in a glass-case, taking the greatest precautions to prevent any of its friends having access to it. He then proceeded to watch it every day from four o'clock in the morning till nine o'clock at night almost continuously. He observed that it changed its dress—its skin, I mean—four times: once in the early morning (on getting up, I suppose), once at two o'clock in the day (for lunch?), and twice at seven in the evening (obviously for dinner). “On the 1st of June,” he says, “at about seven o'clock in the evening, I saw, with great satisfaction, that it had given birth to another; from that time I thought I ought to look upon it as a female. From that day up to the 20th inclusive, she produced ninety-five little ones, all alive and doing well, the greatest number of which were born under my own eyes!”



XVIII

CATS

ON the whole my feelings towards cats are those of indifference. I believe I could dispense with them altogether and feel none the worse. But I have met with three cats in the course of my life whose demeanour and behaviour aroused a certain amount of interest and evoked feelings that could not be characterized as those of indifference.

For "Pumps," a little black cat that lived in a house at which I occasionally visited, I had something akin to horror. Nothing could account for the way that little cat used to behave but the supposition that it was possessed by a fiend. It delighted in playing practical jokes upon inoffensive visitors—such as jumping on their backs and pulling their hair down when they least

expected it; climbing up their legs while they sat at meals, and pouncing at them in the dark from behind doors and beneath sofas. But its most odious habit was that of accompanying one to one's room at night, for no other object apparently than that of annoying an inoffensive visitor.

Its method was to creep stealthily beside one along the passages and up the stairs, and every now and then, as if yielding to an uncontrollable frenzied impulse, to make a mad dash and scoot wildly up the stairs, and crouch in an obscure corner till one caught it up, when it would start again. It then contrived to slip unobserved into one's room, where it would hide in a dark corner till a fitting opportunity occurred, when it would dash suddenly from the corner, and pounce upon one as if one were a mouse, causing the unsuspecting visitor to scream loudly, which was apparently what it wanted.

After this had occurred on one or two evenings, one made it a habit to search the corners till one came upon two shining coals and a vague outline in a crouching attitude, which one promptly chased out with the hearth-broom.

Its exit always excited my admiration. It would gallop out like a spirited charger, with its tail erect—giving a sort of importance and dignity to an

incident that might otherwise have suggested nothing but humiliation.

I was never on anything but "distant" terms with the yellow cat, and do not even know what her name was; but there were things about her—her cold reserve, her decorous behaviour under all circumstances, and the astounding independence with which she lived her own life, and thought her own thoughts, that excited my admiration—and I always think of her with respect.

Before I made her acquaintance she used to live in the stable, and was, I believe, the property of the stable-boy. She must have had some sort of fellow-feeling for him, for when he left she, as it were, packed up and moved into the kitchen, and a sort of bond of union grew up between her and the cook. Its basis seemed to be an understanding that they should let each other alone. They never spoke to each other, as far as I could hear. They just lived together in the kitchen, and respected each other's independence. But one felt that they thoroughly understood each other. It would have been intolerable to that cat to have been asked questions as to where she had been, or where she was going, or what she was thinking about. The cook felt this instinctively and acted accordingly. And it would have been irritating to the cook if

the cat had walked about and got in her way, and tripped her up when she was at her work. The cat knew this, and avoided it. When I went into the kitchen to order the dinner, I generally found her rolled up asleep in a small wicker chair with a cushion on it, that she had entirely appropriated to her own use. Very occasionally, and only when there was no cooking going on, I found her sitting bolt upright on the hearth, gazing pensively at the embers, and looking as if her mind was far away in the regions of abstract thought and only her outward form decorated the hearth. But whatever her attitude, it was always one of dignified repose.

The peaceful current of her life was undisturbed for two years. At the end of that time the cook married and went away. On the day on which she walked away in her wedding garment a new cook walked in and took her place. The cat sat up and gazed steadfastly at the new arrival for about a minute, and then, having apparently satisfied herself that she was not the sort of person she could stand, got up and walked deliberately and firmly out of the room. As far as I know she never set foot in the kitchen again. The new cook informed me that the day after she arrived she had met her in the garden. "She walked alongside of me quite friendly-like," she said, "till I stooped down to

stroke her, when she suddenly went for me, and clawed hold of my legs so vicious-like that she almost fetched blood, and then bolted away into the bushes with her tail up, and I never see her again."

After that she disappeared entirely for three weeks. Then one morning when we were sitting at breakfast she appeared at the dining-room window, and made a face that looked like a "meeow." We let her in at once. She looked wretchedly thin and miserable, and had scratches on her face as if she had been in the wars, and also she had completely lost her voice, for though every time we caught her eye she looked as if she wanted to say something, all she did was to open her mouth and make a noiseless face at us.

We provided her with a saucer of milk and some fish at once. She devoured them eagerly, and then walked round the table shooting her head and back up at any hand that showed a tendency to pat her, purring hoarsely, and every now and then gazing at us and making the same noiseless remark she had made at first, and showing signs of gratitude and feeling that I had not deemed her capable of. I gathered that what she was trying to say was something to this effect:—"I have had a horrible time, and can stand it no longer. You must let me stay here." So I told her she might as long

as she behaved herself. She gave a responsive purr when I said this, and jumped lightly up on to a corner of the sofa, where, after sitting lost in deep thought and gazing at vacancy for a few minutes, she curled herself up and went to sleep.

The next six months of her existence were passed principally on the corner of the sofa, where she was unmolested, and where I had ample opportunity of observing her ways. Her daily routine never varied. She fed—she performed her toilet—she slept.

The performance of her toilet had a fascination for me. She did it with such scrupulousness, attending to every part of her person in turn. First, sitting up, she would wash her head and face all over with her hand. Then stretching herself full length on the sofa she would lick herself from her neck down, back and front, ending up with her legs. Not a square inch was neglected, but it always seemed to me she bestowed an undue share of attention on her right leg, which she would hoist over her shoulder and groom with an energy that appeared to me a little overdone—but perhaps my observations were at fault.

As I said, she spent a peaceful six months on the sofa, and seemed quite happy. Then the even tenor of her life was again disturbed. It is my almost invariable habit to go into the kitchen

every morning when I order the dinner. But, being more than usually busy on one occasion, I sent for the cook to attend on me in the dining-room. As she stood before me discussing joints and vegetables, I noticed that the cat had awakened, and was sitting bolt upright, gazing at her with an expression of mingled horror and surprise. "Good Lord!" she seemed to say, "that woman again! I hoped she was dead." So marked was it, that the cook noticed it; for after returning the gaze for a minute she said, "I can't abide that cat, m'm. Nasty vicious thing! She'd go for me again, if I gave her the chance." The animal gave a start, as if she understood the purport of the words, bristled slightly, and then, as if to say, "No; I really can't stand this!" jumped off the sofa, walked stiffly out of the window on to the lawn, and disappeared round the corner of the house.

From that day to this she has not shown her face. I have given orders that when she next calls she shall be encouraged with milk and fish, and treated kindly; but it is months now since she went off, and I begin to think she has gone for good.

She wanted but little here below, that cat—one chair or the corner of a sofa, and to be

let alone and not have the companionship of those she loathed forced upon her. It seems hard that that little was denied her. But such is life!

I believe I was really fond of "Tabitha"—the cat who came to us a few months after the yellow cat had disappeared, and who, from the interest she took in the garden, I always allude to as "the gardening cat." She was a very ordinary-looking cat of a grey-brown colour, with white chest and paws, and a thin, insignificant tail. Before she came to us her world had consisted of a kitchen, and the roofs, chimney-pots, brick walls, and paved yards of a dull London street. She had spent most of her time dozing over the kitchen fire. Occasionally she roused herself to catch a mouse, but I am told gave no sign of possessing a soul.

The moment that she stepped out of the cat-basket in which she had travelled from London, on to the lawn, was an epoch in her career. She gazed about her bewildered and blinking for a few minutes, looked at the trees, then up at the sky, and seemed to experience a sort of thrill at the sound of the birds singing. Then she took a step forward and smelt the grass rather cautiously to see what it could be—gave another look all round,

and sat herself down with, as it were, a sigh of ineffable content.

After sitting for some moments, with her head slightly raised, drinking in draughts of entrancing sights, smells, and sounds, she got up and looked about her again. Not far from the place where she had emerged on to the lawn was a fir-tree, beneath which was a patch of violets in full bloom. She walked off towards this and proceeded to smell the violets. After a sniff or two she paused and appeared to consider the scent, as an old gentleman considers the flavour of port wine. She seemed to find it good, for after inhaling a little more she sat herself slowly down among the leaves, and contemplated them for some moments as if lost in wonder as to what they could possibly be. Then she roused herself, looked round again, and caught sight of a bed full of wallflowers, tulips, and hyacinths. She ran across to it, and began to investigate them. There seemed to be something particularly intoxicating about the scent of a plant of deep red wallflower, for after smelling it she arched her back, and attempted to rub herself against the plant, and then lay down on the ground and rolled as if slightly intoxicated. Then she sat up, and, as if trying to pull herself together, began to clean her face with her paw very energetic-

ally. She paused, however, with her paw half-way to her face, and looked out at the lawn again. Then her feelings got the better of her sense of decorum (there had been an obvious struggle going on between them), and with tail erect she galloped out on to the lawn, scooted wildly round the grass, and finally dashed up the fir-tree, where she had a sudden reaction, and, seating herself down on a branch in a dignified and decorous manner, became once more a cat of irreproachable bearing.

She sat there for some time and reflected, and then came down again, looking rather subdued, and stepping very cautiously along the trunk of the tree. She then proceeded on a voyage of discovery round the garden. I did not follow her, but I saw her when she came back, and she seemed to me a different cat. There was a light in her eye and a buoyancy in her step as if she had been drinking champagne.

From that day forth she behaved in every way like a cat consumed with a passion for Nature. She spent all her time in the garden, and was always to be found sitting among the flowers, perched on a rockery, up a tree, or walking about the paths or on the lawn. The songs of birds seemed to give her a strange pleasure.



She would sit for hours listening to them, gazing up at the trees and blinking, and as far as I could see she made no attempt to catch them.

I frequently observed her smelling the daisies on the lawn. When she had satisfied her nostrils, she invariably sat herself down in orthodox cat-fashion, her two front paws planted close together, and gazed at them. "What extraordinary things daisies are, if you come to think of it!" her attitude seemed to express. On one occasion I came across her sitting in this upright attitude on one of the paths, gazing intently at something on the ground. After gazing for a minute or two she put out a paw and gave the "something" a pat, and then gazed again. I went up to see what it was, and found she was observing the ways of a large garden beetle. She got up when she saw me and walked backwards and forwards with her tail up, purring loudly, evidently wishing me to take notice of her interesting discovery. When I walked on, she seated herself again in her neat, formal attitude, and continued her observations. A quarter of an hour later I passed the place again. She had gone, and the beetle was walking off in a rather ungainly manner towards one of the flower-beds, where he disappeared beneath a large leaf. I was

glad to see that Tabitha's thirst for knowledge had not led her to vivisect him.

She took the greatest interest in my gardening operations, and always accompanied me when I went to sow seeds. She would run to meet me, "mewing," as soon as I appeared with my basket, and follow me round the garden, sitting on the path beside me as I sowed the seeds, watching my every movement, and looking as if she was longing to do it herself.

As Tabitha's soul enlarged and her love of nature increased, her bodily frame seemed to diminish. She grew thinner and more ethereal-looking every day. One felt tempted to believe that, like the famous *Eva Fliegen* who lived on the scent of flowers for seventeen years, she imagined she could subsist on the odour of a wallflower or a violet. She became extremely fastidious about her food, refused milk altogether, and would drink nothing but pure water from an enamelled bowl, and she showed at times a strange repugnance to meat. She even tried to overcome her carnal appetite for fish. While we were having our meals she usually sat on a corner of the sideboard. For soup she had the greatest contempt, and showed no sign of even being alive when it was in the room. But when the fish came in, she always awoke, and jumping lightly down

from her perch, would seat herself on the ground and gaze upwards at the table. If one took no notice of her she would stretch up a paw, and touch one gently on the arm. When a piece of fish was offered to her she would first smell it all over, and then turn her head away with a face of disgust as much as to say, "No, I really cannot." Then she would be irresistibly compelled to turn towards it again. When she got as far as this, she was usually a lost cat, and would take the morsel and devour it. And having once yielded to her impulse she would greedily clamour for more. But I have known her resist her appetite from the first, and after investigating the proffered morsel, with a face that implied it was as much as she could do to look at it, turn and walk away, and jumping up on to her accustomed place, gaze at us with eyes that said plainly, ".How can you be so gross?"

I came to look upon Tabitha as a saint among cats, and had she died at a certain period of her career, should doubtless have thought of her ever after as surrounded with a sort of halo of glory.

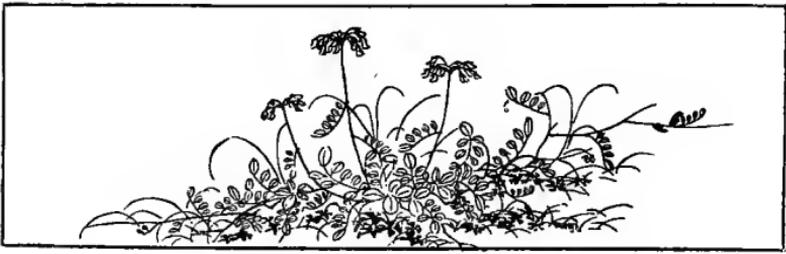
The birds were beginning to build when she first came to us, and I often thought how nice it was to have a cat who took an intelligent interest in them, and who had no ferocious instincts which might lead her to slaughter them.

A thrush had built in a tree not far from my window, from which I could see it sitting and hatching its eggs. I used often to watch it, and think how pretty and soft and quiet it looked. One day I was startled by a sudden shrieking and commotion among the birds. All the sparrows that were building in the ivy seemed to be circling round something, and chirping with rage and excitement. Instinctively I looked out of the window at the thrush's nest. It had gone! I looked down at the ground and caught sight of a cat with something in her mouth. I flew down the stairs, with my heart in my throat, and out into the garden, and found myself face to face with Tabitha. She had the thrush in her mouth; her eyes blazed, and she looked like the fiend incarnate. I made a dash at her, but she evaded me, and disappeared like lightning into the shrubbery.

I wept tears of rage and sorrow for the thrush, and of disappointment in Tabitha. From that day I witnessed the gradual triumphing of her lower nature and the dwindling of her soul. Instead of spending her time admiring the flowers, and helping me to garden, I was continually coming upon her crouching behind bushes, with an unholy gleam in her eye, watching the birds at play. At the end of a week I could bear it no longer. I

put her in the cat-basket, and sent her back to London.

I sometimes wonder whether she looks back upon her sojourn in the garden as an entrancing dream. I also wonder whether her apparent love of nature may not have been an elaborate piece of acting, specially designed to put me off the scent.



XIX

WEEDING

THE daffodils are over. Nothing is to be seen, where a short time ago there were streaks and patches of gold, but the leaves; and these, instead of standing upright and stiff, lie limp on the ground in untidy clumps. Here and there a late narcissus is to be seen, and is to be congratulated on being behind its time; for those that were earlier were torn to pieces and beaten to the ground by the gales that swept over the garden a fortnight ago. The wallflowers, too, which have been more brilliant than usual this year, are beginning to fade, and it is difficult to find any without withered blossoms clinging to their stems. Even the tulips and hyacinths are past their first beauty, and show a tendency to lean heavily against their supports, or lie prone altogether if they have no support to

lean against. In fact, the spring flowers' season is coming to an end, and there seems to be a sort of pause in the garden—a dead season with nothing particular going on, while we are waiting for the summer flowers to appear.

For the first time it seems to me that things grow slowly. Perennials are a little late with us, and as I walk about the flower-beds, measuring their height with my eye, and looking for buds, I feel that a gap in the sequence of gay colour is inevitable, when the flowers that are lingering with us now have disappeared, and those that blossom in summer have not yet arrived. Delphiniums, phloxes, peonies, and columbines are already sturdy little bushes, and numbers of other things that I am less familiar with form green tufts about the beds. But they look as if months must elapse before they can develop into tall flowering plants.

Some weeks ago the roses were all pruned ruthlessly to the ground. It was said by an authority on the subject that the most important shoots were still underground, and that this treatment would encourage them to emerge. It seemed to me, at the time, a barbarous thing to do, for they were fairly well-grown little trees; and I felt inclined to be indignant when I went to look at them the day after the pruning, and saw nothing

but the poor little clipped stalks peeping out of the earth. The means, however, appear to be justified by the end, for the shoots beneath the earth have been pushing up rapidly, and already the bushes are nearly a foot high. As for my seeds: some of them—such as sweet-peas, nasturtiums, and mignonette—are above ground. But they are still so small that it is difficult to distinguish them from the weeds that are hurrying up around them.

In fact, the only things that grow apace at this time of year are the weeds, and they are certainly making the most of their opportunities. This pause between spring and summer in the garden may almost be considered the weeds' season. Every year about this time they make a desperate effort to regain possession of the soil from which they have been evicted—an effort which ends every year in their ruthless massacre and destruction.

One cannot help feeling sorry for them; for, before we took to making gardens and filling them with foreign plants, the weeds were in possession, and had it all their own way. And one cannot help wondering at the persistent way in which they appear again year after year, only to be mown down and cast into the fire. Not a square inch in the garden at this present moment but has its seedling weed, which, if you look aside for a while and give

it a chance, will grow in an incredibly short time to a plant trailing hundreds of dependent seedlings in its wake. If we did not wage war against them with might and main, our flowers would have a very poor chance. In fact, let them alone at this time of year, and in a couple of months they will have converted the neatest of gardens into a chaotic wilderness.

During the past week I have spent many hours weeding, and though I have cast basketfuls of weeds on to the gravel path I have made no perceptible difference in their numbers. There seem to be innumerable little weeds ready to pop up and take the place of the older ones as soon as they are rooted out.

On days when the sun is bright but not too hot, and the air is fresh but not windy, I find weeding a pleasant occupation, and can spend hours over it without finding it irksome. There is a curious fascination about picking things. If the sky is fair, I wish for no pleasanter occupation than to pick flowers or fruit. And weeding partakes of the nature of picking, in that it can be done mechanically, leaving one's mind free to wander where it will—to plot, plan, cogitate, and reflect. The chief drawback to it, and what prevents its being an ideal occupation, is that the weeds grow on the ground.

This necessitates stooping, and stooping is uncomfortable. In fact, as with reading in bed, so with weeding, it is almost impossible to find a position that is comfortable for more than ten minutes at a time. I find kneeling the least fatiguing attitude. One can lean over the flower-bed, and, resting on one hand, pull up the weeds with the other. One can vary the position by kneeling first on one knee, then on the other, and then on both together.

All one needs in the way of equipment is a pair of gloves—not the ordinary leather gardening gloves, but an old pair of kid gloves which are thin enough to enable one to feel what one is about and manipulate the tiny weeds—and a fork to dig up refractory things that have long roots, and will not yield to gentle persuasion.

Weeds of the chickweed and shepherd's purse description have a very slight hold on the soil, and are delightfully easy to pull up; but thistles and the like send great roots right down into the earth, and resist stubbornly any attempt to evict them. A tussle with a strong thistle is often quite exhausting. I once had a desperate fight with a thing called black bryony which lasted half-an-hour, and left me prostrate and exhausted. It was a harmless-looking little weed when I attacked it, having only just

come up; but I was told that if left to itself it would send out great creeping stems that would cover the whole garden, and even climb the trees. So, though it was a pretty soft grey-green thing, I thought I had better pull it up. I gave it a little pull, but found that its hold on the ground was firm, like that of a thistle. So I took the fork, and running it in beneath the leaves tried to draw the root gently up. I was surprised to find that it did not move. I attacked it from every side, bringing my whole strength to act as leverage; and still it did not move an inch. I began to feel hot and cross, and repeated the attack with redoubled energy. It still sat calm and unmoved. Then I began digging round it with a fork, and taking up handfuls of earth and throwing them out on to the bed. I found it had a great thick forked root like a colossal parsnip that, as far as I could see, went right down into the bowels of the earth.

Had I been sensible I should have left it at this point. But my temper was roused. I felt I must conquer or die in the attempt, and I continued to dig like a sort of fury. When I had gone what seemed to me several miles into the earth, and found that the root instead of beginning to taper was growing thicker, I began prodding at it with the fork, feeling desperately that I must do some-

thing to it. After prodding viciously for some minutes it occurred to me that I might cut it through, so I started prodding it all round, sending the fork in up to the hilt. Then taking hold of the top I pulled with all my might. There was a crack, and I found myself landed on my back in the gravel walk, with the top half of the root in my arms. I got up panting and smoothed my ruffled hair. I saw Max coming towards me. "Look!" I cried, holding up the bit of root triumphantly. "It's no use," he said, "unless you get up the whole root. If you leave a scrap in the ground it will grow again before you know where you are."

Though I have not much sympathy with weeds in general, and tear them up ruthlessly, there are some that I cannot bring myself to wage war against. The leaves of the little celandine, even when the golden cups have disappeared, make a beautiful dark green carpet beneath the trees, and are far too ornamental to be destroyed. And woodruff brings a breath of meadow air into the garden, which one could not bear to chase away. I am even somewhat loth to destroy chickweed; for it is a pretty thing if allowed to grow thickly together. There is a fir-tree in the corner of the garden growing in the midst of a circular bed,

which, happening to be empty in the early spring, chickweed took possession of and filled so completely that nothing else could find a spot. The pale green made such a pretty mat for the dark fir-tree to rest upon that we let it alone till it had grown to form a soft pale-green feathery cushion, that was one of the most ornamental things in the garden. Only yesterday it was rooted out to make room for violets, which are now being separated and planted out.



XX

THE SPUDDING MANIA

IT was after I had spent a week walking about the garden on my hands and knees pulling up weeds that I was seized with a "spudding" mania. I was in rather low spirits about the plants at the time, and much oppressed by the thought that the weeds were absorbing all the life of the garden, for they were growing with such furious vitality that everything else seemed paralyzed—feeling no doubt that it was useless to compete with such exuberance.

My eyes, from being continually bent on the ground looking for weeds, had assumed a downward droop. The condition of the lawn was not a thing that interested me till, when walking across it, I all at once became aware that it was, like the flower-beds, full of weeds. All sorts of things that had no business to be there were growing luxuriantly.

Tufts of dandelions, mats of daisies, and "pancakes" of plantains were dotted about so thickly, and spreading so rapidly, that there was hardly any room for grass, and hundreds of yellow dandelions, white daisies, and grey "cocks and hens" that had escaped the machine were holding up their heads with effrontery, as if they imagined the lawn was nothing but a field.

I sighed a despairing sigh. If they were not uprooted at once they would spread all over the garden, and turn it into a wilderness again before we knew where we were ; and stooping down I tried to dislodge a plantain. But it was too firmly embedded in the grass, and I only succeeded in breaking off its head, leaving a strong root ready to start again. I resolved to buy a spud and employ my spare minutes in "spudding."

The ironmonger showed me a variety of instruments warranted to dislodge the most obstinate thistle. There were some with mechanical devices. You pressed something and something occurred, I did not clearly gather *what*. Others had a metal cylinder at the end which cut out the root of the weed. These made deep holes in the ground, which you were to fill up by putting in the root upside down. It was assumed that it would not know how to grow again upside down,

an assumption which my dealings with weeds during the past week led me to look upon as somewhat rash. I finally walked off with an ordinary two-pronged fork, which had a piece of iron at the back for a lever and a long handle, so that I could spud without stooping.

I had intended to employ only my odd moments in spudding, but I found that there was a curious fascination about it, and that my footsteps were continually wending towards the lawn. I kept the spud just inside the front door, and whenever I went out I mechanically took it with me, and went straight to the lawn and began to uproot the objectionable plants. If I forgot it, and happened to walk across the lawn and saw a plantain or a thistle, I could not resist going back for it. I made a plan to attack the plantains first, and, when I had entirely annihilated them, to go on to the thistles, and then do the daisies. But I gave this up after a day or two, and took to doing each in turn—plantains first, then thistles, then daisies, and then odd plants whose names I did not know. After a time I was not satisfied unless I had had a turn at each kind every day.

Then I took to collecting the uprooted plants in heaps, and counting them, and seeing how many I could get up in a minute. This greatly added to

the fascinations of the pursuit. I used to say to myself when I was starting to go for a walk, "I will just do twenty plantains before I go;" and when I came back, "I will just do a dozen daisies before I go in."

Soon I began to get up early to see if I could do a hundred before breakfast. But even this did not satisfy me. The impulse to spud would come upon me at all sorts of inconvenient moments—when I was engaged in writing a letter, or even in entertaining a visitor—and would worry me so persistently that frequently, in order to get rid of it, I was obliged to stop what I was doing, and go out and do a hundred thistles.

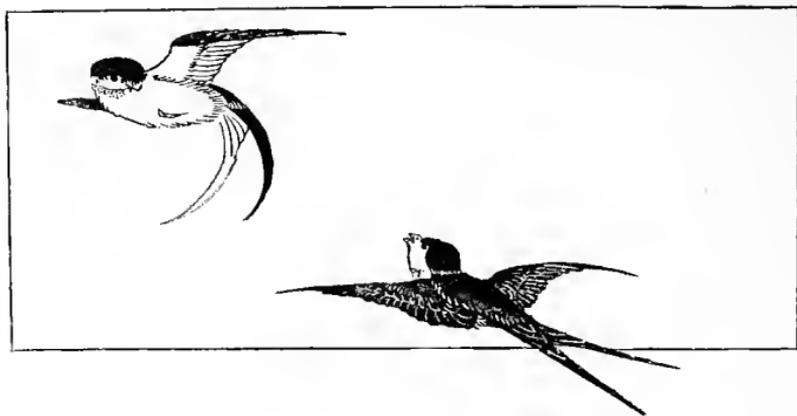
I was in the midst of ordering the dinner one day, and was surveying viands in the larder, and conversing with the cook. We had got as far as puddings when my attention began to wander. It wandered out to the corner of the hall where my spud stood, and then out on to the lawn where the thistles and daisies were basking in the sun. I tried to get it back to puddings. I even kept up a rambling, incoherent conversation about puddings. "Let me see: we had a gooseberry tart yesterday. Suppose we——suppose we——" But it was no good. My mind was beyond my control, spudding on the lawn, and I had to follow it. I told the cook

I would think about puddings and let her know, and I left her looking rather surprised, and went off and began digging up daisies.

As I dug I suddenly realized with a sort of shock that I was becoming a monomaniac. When I considered my behaviour during the past week, it seemed to me that my time had been almost entirely taken up with spudding. I had thought of nothing but plantains, thistles, and daisies all day long. My one idea had been to see how many I could uproot in a day. I was perpetually counting them up in my head, and making plans for the division of the lawn into sections that should be attacked in turn. Even my dreams consisted of thistles and daisy roots arranged in geometrical patterns. "If you give way to this," I said to myself solemnly, "you will become a lunatic. You must put a stop to it at once."

At first I tried mere resistance. I walked about on the lawn and looked at the disfiguring patches, and resisted to the utmost the impulse to dig them up. Occasionally I was victorious, but, as a rule, it ended in my saying, "I will just do this *one*." When I had once yielded, it was all up with me. I at once fell to, and did a hundred. After a day or two of perpetual struggles, which were beginning to wear me out, it occurred to me that I had better

treat myself homœopathically. I would deal with myself in the matter of spudding as confectioners are said to deal with new assistants in the matter of eating tarts—force myself to do nothing but dig up weeds till I gave it up for ever from pure weariness and satiety. I got up at seven the next morning, and spudded for an hour before breakfast. Immediately after breakfast I went out and began again. By ten o'clock, to my joy, I felt that satiety was setting in, but I spudded on. By eleven I ardently desired to stop, but I spudded on. By twelve I wished that I might never see another plaintain, but I spudded on. By one I sank prostrate on the lawn, physically exhausted, and absolutely sick of spudding. Homœopathy triumphed. I have never had the slightest impulse to spud since.



XXI

“SUMMER IS ‘Y-COMEN IN”

FOR a whole fortnight my eyes have been bent towards earth. I have been so much absorbed with the weeds that it has not even occurred to me to look up and see what was going on overhead. When I did so I looked up at a different world. The trees have been gradually and silently putting out their leaves and spreading, as it were, a new canopy over the garden. Whereas a short time ago one saw nothing but bare stems against a grey sky, now one looks up into fresh green leaves, through which one catches glimpses of blue. The chestnuts, of which there are a good many in the garden, are almost in full leaf, and make quite a thick shade over some of the walks. The sunlight filtering through the transparent young green gives one a feeling of midsummer. They are thick with

pyramids of pink and white buds, some of which have already burst into blossom. The lilacs are not only covered with leaves, but are being weighed down to the ground with great branches of sweet-smelling white and mauve, which stretch out and invite one to smell them as one walks about the shrubberies. Laburnums, syringas, and pink and white thorn are green all over and thick with buds, which look eager to be out and enjoy the sun.

The three patriarchs of the garden—a weeping willow, a walnut, and a mulberry—do not show the eager haste of the younger trees and shrubs, but are putting out their leaves in a dignified manner. The weeping willow has been least able to resist the encouragement of the sun, and is already pouring its feathery green down on to the lawn; the walnut is covered with reddish-brown tufts of leaves and catkins; and even the twisted, knotty branches of the aged mulberry, the most backward of all, are bristling with little buds which are already tinged with green.

Best of all, the nightingale has come. We heard him for the first time ten days ago. He was a little chary of his song at first, and shy of coming near the house, and in order to hear him we had to wrap up and go out into the garden between eleven and twelve at night and

stand very still listening. But he is getting bolder and bolder, and last night he piped and jugged in a tree beneath my open window with such a will that, when at last I went to sleep, I dreamt I was writing indignant letters to the newspapers insisting on the suppression of street noises. For even the nightingale may become a bore if he sings at the wrong time—when one is trying to go to sleep, and his persistent pipe and liquid “jug” is the only thing that disturbs the silence of the night.

The first time that I heard a nightingale I was very much disappointed. I had heard so much about him that I expected something more strangely wonderful—something, in fact, not like the song of a bird at all. “That a nightingale!” I said. “Why it is not a bit better than a thrush.” But familiarity with the nightingale’s song does not breed contempt. It grows more beautiful, and more unlike the song of any other bird, the more one hears it. One has only to listen to it in a garden with other birds to feel what a thing apart it is. The twittering and piping of thrushes, blackbirds, finches, and other birds resolve themselves into a hardly noticeable background, against which the nightingale’s song stands out distinct and vivid as a shining river in a mist.

Beautiful as the sound is, it does not bring the whiff of midsummer that comes with the cuckoo—the delicious suggestions of summer sunshine, shady trees and running water, green meadows and haymaking that he always brings with him. If it were not for these associations many of us would, I fancy, vote the cuckoo a bore. For when he once begins, he sings all day with a persistency that has a tendency to get on one's nerves. He insists, too, on being heard. It is almost as if he knocked at the drum of one's ear; for, do what one will, one cannot avoid hearing his note above all the drowsy hum of summer.



XXII

THE KITCHEN-GARDEN

HITHERTO I have taken very little interest in the kitchen-garden. Beyond occasional glances through the gap in the privet-hedge that separates it from the flower-garden, and one tour of inspection which I made early in the year, I have been hardly aware of its existence. An ideal kitchen-garden should, I think, be old—old enough to have seen centuries of vegetables run their course. It should have an old grey-stone wall running round it, covered with fruit trees; borders of old-fashioned flowers growing very much as they please; a hedge of lavender, another of sweet-briar, and a corner filled with herbs with old-fashioned names.

Ours is by no means the kitchen-garden of my fancy. And the fact that it falls far short of my

ideal may account for the small amount of interest I have taken in it. It is surrounded by a privet-hedge instead of a wall. Over the hedge one can see into a field, now golden with buttercups, where earlier in the year the starlings used to peck about. A privet-hedge with a gap in it separates it from the flower-garden. The last time I looked through the gap, the general impression was of flat, empty beds, box borders, and gravel paths. But during the last week the peas have been staked, and the ground is criss-crossed with tall hedges of branching sticks, which give it an appearance of everything having suddenly grown up. There are thirteen rows of peas of various heights—some with their leaves only just unfurled, and others, the most advanced, forming bushy green hedges, covered with white buds, and pulling themselves up as fast as they can by the sticks, and bending to look at the world through the branches.

It seems that there is an art even in the staking of peas. A day or two ago bundles of branching sticks arrived in a cart, and soon after I saw my two old friends the potato-planters standing in the midst of them under a group of chestnuts in the corner of the garden, busy slashing the end of each one to a point with a bill-hook. They made quite a pretty picture with the stack of cut wood—

always a picturesque-looking thing—and the green chestnuts, reminding one of forest woodcutters and brush-makers, and I watched them for some time, admiring the scene and their dexterity.

A hedge of branches was put on each side of the row of peas—not straight upright, but the two sides sloping in opposite directions. Each stick was just about a foot apart, and the spaces between were filled with smaller branches with a good many twigs, so that the small pea-plants might have something to catch hold of. When they were all driven in, the tops of the branches, and any untidy twigs that showed a tendency to straggle, were trimmed off with the clippers, so that the hedges present a neat and tidy appearance.

For the kitchen-garden is nothing if not neat. Everything is made to grow symmetrically in rows and rectangular patches. Between the hedges of peas are rows of young spinach, looking very fresh and green, and beyond, at the other end of the garden, are numbers of rows of little green things coming up as fast as they can—carrots, turnips, lettuces, cauliflowers, celery, and a number of other things too young to answer to their names. All are models of neatness and order; and here, at any rate, the weeds are not having it all their own way. The little espalier fruit-trees that stand

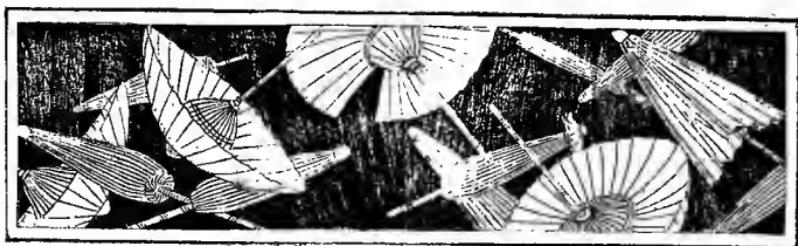
with outstretched arms along each path, about a yard inside the box-borders, have within the last fortnight covered themselves with blossoms, and are making pretty pink and white streaks everywhere, which add greatly to the appearance of this part of the garden. The strawberry-plants, too, especially "Stevens' Wonder," are covered with clusters of white blossoms, and are unfolding green shining leaves, and growing into big bushy tufts that are rapidly covering up the brown soil.

At one end of the garden is a long strip running the whole length of the privet-hedge, which I foresee may develop into the herb-garden of my ideal kitchen-garden. Running the whole length in front, is a border of young parsley, just beginning to form curly tufts. The rest of the bed is divided into square patches, only tinged with green at present, but labelled with such pretty old-world names as "Basil," "Sweet Marjoram," "Thyme," "Balm," "Rosemary," and "Hyssop"—not much more than names to me, but full of suggestions of sweet old-fashioned formal gardens, with terraces, yew-trees cut into various shapes, peacocks, and ladies looking like Dresden china figures.

But perhaps the thing that has drawn my footsteps most frequently to the kitchen-garden during the last few days is a small prickly berberis, one

of a row of flowering shrubs that have been planted in front of the privet-hedge. This little tree took to straggling up in one long untidy stem, with the object, apparently, of looking over the hedge into the field, instead of making a neat ornamental bush. So according to the approved method of dealing with plants that have a tendency to gawkiness, the main stem was cut straight off. Max, who performed the operation, took up the discarded branch and was examining it, when he noticed a sort of swelling on the bark, which looked as if the tree were suffering from some disease. He touched it with his finger, and found that it was soft. He gave it a little push, when it moved, and betrayed itself as no disease of the bark, but a fine, fat caterpillar, so exactly resembling the bark of the branch it was resting on in colour and woody appearance, as to be undistinguishable from it, and lying in so limpet-like a fashion on the branch, that it was impossible to say where the caterpillar ended and the tree began—pretending, in fact, in order to mislead the birds, that it was part of the tree, and not something good to eat. When we pushed it, it tried to lie quite still, evidently thinking it was attacked by some bird, and must keep up its character of being part of the tree, if it wished to save its skin. It wanted

several prods to force it into betraying itself hopelessly by budging. Even then it only moved an inch, and then settled down carefully again as if it hoped it might escape further observation. Curiosity and a certain amount of pity for it draw me to gaze at it several times a day. What an existence! To have to pretend all day long you are a tree, when you are really a caterpillar! It makes one positively ache with fatigue to think of it.



XXIII

NO RAIN!

DURING the last fortnight sunshine and a cloudless blue sky have compelled us to lay aside our winter garments, and don cottons and muslins: for we have been having a little foretaste of midsummer. They make one feel very lazy, the sunshine and warmth, when they first arrive—very little inclined to be up and doing. Instead of weeding and watering, I have lounged lazily on the lawn, under the shade of a huge Japanese umbrella, enjoying the warm air, listening to the nightingales, and the bumble-bees in the chestnuts, and feasting my eyes on the laburnums, lilacs, and pink-and-white may all now in full bloom. Running through the hum of birds and insects, as I doze drowsily I can hear the “jingle, jingle” of the little zinc barrel on wheels, journeying about the garden, and the

“swish” of the hose, and through the trees I catch sight of the garden-boy going backwards and forwards with cans of water; for we have had no rain for a month, and the kitchen-garden has been having a thorough watering.

William is a utilitarian at heart, and in his opinion it is more important that we should have fruit and vegetables to feast our appetites on, than flowers to feast our eyes and noses on. Consequently, the fruit and vegetables are his first thought in this dry weather. What is the use, he says to himself, of my having sown and staked all these rows of peas if they are to bear no pods, or of the master having bought all these strawberry-plants and fruit-trees if they are to produce no fruit? So he has devoted all his energy for several days past to emptying the tanks and wells of the water they stored up during the rainy season, wheeling it into the kitchen-garden, and “sousing” the vegetables and fruit-trees. So thoroughly has it been done that the kitchen-garden has the “earthy” smell one notices after a shower of rain.

For occasionally the “jingling” and “swishing” have roused me from my lethargy, and I have wandered to the kitchen-garden and looked on at the watering. It is very satisfactory to see how the things enjoy it. The peas seem to shake them-

selves with satisfaction as the water showers over their leaves and sinks in about their roots. The strawberry-plants drink it in like thirsty animals. Each of these has had the whole of a moderate-sized can to itself—poured into the very centre of the plant, that it might run right down among the roots. The young fruit-trees were treated with even greater liberality; each one had half a barrel to itself. The hose was turned on and allowed to play till they stood in a little pond of water. The ground about them remained moist for several days, so thorough had been the soaking.

After looking at this water-feast in the kitchen-garden, I walked through the gap to the flower-garden, and wandered among the beds. Instead of the nice brown, moist appearance the earth had a month ago, it looked grey, dusty, and dry. The plants, too, looked grey and dusty. Some of them looked petrified, as if they had lost all power of growth or movement, and would remain little stunted dwarfs for the rest of their days. They seemed even to have made up their minds to accept the inevitable, and were putting out stunted, dwarf-like blossoms—faded, melancholy-looking things, with no richness or life about them. Others drooped and lay heavily on the ground, too feeble to raise themselves, much less to think of making a blossom.

They seemed to implore me, as I passed, "If you cannot turn on a shower of rain, do go and get a watering-can and water us."

It would have been inhuman to resist such an appeal. I went in search of my watering-can, I tucked my petticoats up, and I set to work and watered. I watered hard for the rest of the day. And the next day, and the next day, I watered again. In fact, it seems that only just having recovered from the "spudding mania," I am in great danger of being attacked by a watering mania. I have journeyed backwards and forwards between the pump in the stable-yard and the flower-beds, till my back has ached, and my knees have begun to shake. For one watering-can, especially if it is a small one, goes a very little way. Occasionally I have varied the proceedings by trying a larger can—one that holds about three times as much as the small one. But it is so heavy that one has to twist oneself into a break-back attitude in order to carry it at all, and even then it is impossible to avoid the water going "slop, slop," over one's dress at every step. So that after carrying it once, I have gone back with relief to the little can, feeling that these inconveniences quite outweighed the disadvantage of the extra journeys.

The gratitude of the plants, however, more than

rewards one for any inconvenience one may suffer in watering them. They seem positively to beam when they see me approaching with the can. I can almost imagine I see them stretching their necks and looking out for me, as the animals in the Zoo watch for the keeper to come and feed them.

The difficulty is to harden one's heart when fatigue sets in, and refuse to water any more. When I have made up my mind to stop, and am carrying the empty can back to put it away, I invariably pass some thirsty little plant gazing at me beseechingly and begging for a little water, and I find it almost impossible not to yield and fill the can once more. If one did not sternly resist such appeals there would be no reason that one should ever stop watering. I have at last to be absolutely obdurate—to walk resolutely away thinking of other things, till I have deposited the watering-can in the tool-house.

It is a satisfaction to find that there are some plants that grow apace and flourish in this dry weather. One plant especially seems thoroughly to enjoy it, and to look brighter and greener the more sun it absorbs. It is one of those great Oriental poppies with floppy petals of a rich scarlet. It has been covered with furry green buds, about

the size of a pigeon's-egg, for some days. Yesterday I saw that one of the buds had burst at the side, and showed the inside tightly packed with what looked like scarlet silk handkerchiefs—not folded neatly, but stuffed in anyhow, and so crumpled that one could not believe it possible they would ever get rid of the creases. To-day several buds have entirely opened and shaken out an amazing quantity of scarlet silk petals, which are glorying in the sun, absorbing the heat, and quickly losing their creases. They are remarkable-looking things, and make brilliant patches of colour in the garden.

But these sun and drought-loving creatures are in the minority. The garden for the most part clamours for rain. It is true there have been one or two slight attempts at rain during the last few days, but they have not done more than slightly wet the surface of the ground—underneath is as dry and dusty as ever. A week ago we thought we were in for a thunderstorm, with a waterspout to follow. But we were disappointed. The sky clouded over, and the air became heavy with a suppressed storm. The clouds growled a little, and spat a few daggers of lightning at us, and some reluctant heavy drops fell; and then the greyness suddenly moved away and the sun came

out again. A waterspout would have been better than nothing. But what we really want is, as the American minister put it when praying for rain, "Not a violent storm, O Lord, that will wash away the fences and haystacks, but a gentle drizzle-drozzle, lasting about a fortnight."

I was amused the other day by seeing the device of a friend for protecting from the sun during this dry weather some little pansies that had just been planted out. The bottoms were cut out of a number of little paper-bags, such as a grocer uses to put a pound of rice in, and one of these paper cylinders was put over each plant. The shade they afforded seemed to be much appreciated by the newly-planted pansies. Whereas they had been limp and fainting from the sun, they became quite fresh and stiff again. They looked very quaint inside their little bags as we looked down upon them stretching themselves up, and, as it were, trying to look over the top.



XXIV

PLANTING OUT

I AM of a hopeful disposition. When I awoke in the morning and heard the unmistakable sound of rain showering on the leaves of the trees outside my window, I thought it would go on for a week. Max, who has what seems to me blind faith in that mystery the barometer, shook his head gloomily, and said it would not last. And, as occasionally happens, the barometer was right. The shower lasted only about an hour. But though it was short, it was very refreshing. It put a new face, as it were, on the garden. There was quite a pleasant dampness about the shrubberies and flower-beds after it. Some of the trees were actually dripping, and in walking across the lawn I got my shoes quite wet. It seemed, too, to stir everything up. The plants that had been half-

asleep in the beds woke up and set about growing. And William and the boy, who had been walking about watering and weeding in a half-hearted way, were suddenly roused to energy, and began planting out seedlings in all the beds.

For some weeks the frames had been full of young seedlings, waiting for rain, to be planted in the open garden. They had been kept waiting so long that some of them had almost grown up, and the frames were beginning to be very much overcrowded. They had had rather a dull time of it in the frames, for they were most of them in low seed-pans, and even by stretching themselves to the utmost they could not see more than the sky. As they were lifted out and put on the ground, and a passing breeze caught their leaves and ruffled them, one might almost have imagined they were thrilling with excitement at their first view of the world.

The sweet-scented tobacco, stocks, and portulaca seedlings interested me most. For besides being old friends, I had watched these particular plants from their infancy. There were, however, numbers of other things with long names (mostly beginning with P) that I did not know and took no special interest in.

The sweet-scented tobacco I had sown myself, and had watched every day from the first day the

seedlings appeared above ground. I had been interested, too, in the sowing of the stocks. They are flowers that I have always had a special liking for. To bury my face in a bunch of stocks fills me with indescribable sensations and memories of pleasant, hot sunshine in some garden-world long ago. I cannot definitely connect the sensations with anything in my past, and should like to believe that they belong to some previous state of existence when I was (perhaps) a ladybird living on a stock in a cottage garden. Pleasant associations give me also a friendly feeling for portulaca. It is a little plant with a marked character of its own, which, like stocks, suggests hot sun. It grows close to the ground, and is covered with bright-coloured flowers. The seed had come up well and flourished, so that there were hundreds of healthy little plants in the frames ready to be planted out.

Before the seedlings could be put into the flowerbeds, room had to be made. Early in the morning, while the rain was still going on, all the poor old wallflowers that had filled the beds for the past six months were dug up and piled up one on top of the other in a huge rubbish-heap in an out-of-the-way corner of the garden. They had been looking shabby for some time past, and the day before the

rain, when I walked round the garden and saw the straggling, untidy bushes, with the long stalks covered with seed-pods, and here and there a withered petal, I thought it was high time they were put out of sight. Still, I could not help lamenting, as I watched them being pulled up, and thrown in heaps on the grass beside the beds. The garden looked bare and empty when they were gone, and the little plants that were put in their place looked absurdly small and insignificant.

Most of my favourites were put into a long, deep bed that runs in front of the greenhouse, and has plenty of sun. Tobacco-plants were put along the wall in the back row. Then came a deep band of stocks of all colours, and in front one or two rows of tiny *Portulaca* plants. It was quite pleasant to see them taken out of the pans where they had been so crowded together, and put into a large bed where each one had plenty of room to grow and stretch its leaves. The ground was still moist from the rain, so that it was easy to tuck them in comfortably and fix them firmly, and William performed the operation very skilfully, I thought. In fact, after watching him for some time I felt moved to imitate his industry, and, putting on my gardening-apron, spent the rest of the day grubbing about, weeding and transplanting *mignonette*.

I had sown a long border of mignonette early in the year, and it had come up very unevenly. In some places it was so thickly crowded together that it had hardly room to grow, while in other parts there were gaps where the earth was quite bare. I went along the whole border, pulling up the little plants where they were close together, so as to leave each one that remained in the ground a square inch or two to spread itself over—little enough for a mignonette plant, which will, I believe, easily cover a square foot. When I came to the end of the border I had a basketful of the little pulled-up plants. I could not bring myself to throw the young things full of life on to the top of the cast-off wallflowers, so I set to work and planted them again. Some I put into the bare places in the border, and the rest I planted in groups round another bed near the house. They had tiny, hair-like roots, which in some cases came up complete, but a great many broke in the pulling-up, and I afterwards found that all these broken ones drooped and died after their transplanting. Those which had kept the whole root survived and flourished, and looked after a day or two just as well as those which had never been moved.

It was on Saturday that the rain came, and brought upon us this attack of energy, and caused

all the commotion among the seedlings. On Sunday morning when I awoke I listened again for the cheerful sound of a refreshing rain on the trees. But all was silent, and the sun pouring in at my bedroom window assured me that the rain had gone and sunshine was back again. And so it was. The sun shone all day. The lawn was quite dry by eleven o'clock, and by midday the earth had lost its moist look, and had turned grey and dusty again. Towards evening, as I was starting for church, I paid the transplanted seedlings a visit. We had left them looking fresh and well the day before. But the day's heat had been too much for them. They were all drooping and looking faint and ill. The large leaves of the tobacco-plants lay flat and limp on the ground. The little stocks were drooping sideways with all their stiffness gone, and the poor little portulacas had fallen flat and lay in the most dejected attitudes, looking past recovery. Their first day in the world had been too much for them.

The church bells were ringing, and I was obliged to leave them, but I was haunted by the picture of their drooping attitudes, and all through the sermon I was carrying imaginary cans of water and showering it over them. I hurried back, resolved not to go to bed till I had watered them all. I

groped for my watering-can in the tool-house—for it was nearly dark—made my way to the stable-pump, filled it, and hastened to the flower-bed, and began watering. In the darkness the plants looked more nearly dead than they had ever done before. I filled the can again and again, and, beginning with the tobacco-plants in the background, and taking care as I walked about in the dark not to tread on the stocks, I watered each plant thoroughly. The moon rose while I was journeying backwards and forwards. It kept for the most part behind clouds, but every now and then it came out, and lighted up the greenhouse and the flower-beds with a pale light. A nightingale sat in a tree not far off, and “jugged” at intervals, and once I watered a toad, and he hopped heavily away from beneath the shower. Otherwise nothing disturbed the silence, and I felt like a person in a dream. The poor little portulacas were lying so flat on the ground that I was afraid they would never be able to get up again. So when I had emptied the last canful I set to work and picked each one up out of the mud, and propped him into an upright position with little stones and bits of earth. The clock struck twelve as I finished the last one.



XXV ·

BY THE RIVER-SIDE

IF I could be a plant and choose my surroundings, I would be a yellow iris living on the banks of a river. So I have thought since a day last week that I spent lying in a boat, in among the sedges, reeds, and irises, dabbling my hands in the cool, clear water, and watching the birds dip in and out along the bank.

For a month we had watched the green gradually dying out of the grass in the garden, and the young plants shrivelling away for want of moisture, till a longing came upon one for running water, and to see plants growing green and full of life on the river-bank.

A train carried us through miles of fen country—low-lying, flat plains of grass and crops, stretching till they mingled in the distance with a misty

horizon. Here and there the flatness was cut by long dykes of shining water, along whose banks bricks of dark-coloured peat ran piled up in walls. Now and then we passed a windmill standing black against the sky, and sometimes groups of men and women hoeing among the crops, or a pair of great horses, with proudly arched necks, dragging a harrow over the dark brown soil. It was refreshing to find that the dryness that our little plot of earth was suffering from had not spread over the whole earth, and that there were miles and miles of country like that through which we were passing where things were moist and green.

The train took us to a little red-roofed town with a river running through it. The country was still flat and wide, but trees had begun to appear. Pine-woods hid the horizon, and the little station stood against a background of big green oaks. Beneath the trees, in the midst of great stacks of cut wood, was a sawmill at work. The ground was carpeted with chips, sawdust, and shavings, and a sawing sound issued from a black shed near the engine. The trees were big and tall, and thick with green—the pale green of early summer—and made a cool, shady canopy over the encampment.

We hired a boat that lay idle in the water near the bank, and paddled lazily through the archway

of an old grey bridge, and up-stream to where the river ran among fields.

It was a small river. But the water, unlike the sluggish waters we had passed on our journey, was deep and swiftly flowing, and so clear that one could see right down to the bottom, lined with green weeds and water-lily leaves, which had not yet reached the surface. To plunge one's eyes through clear running water into the cool green shade of fern and moss-like things, gently stirred with the current, felt like taking a dip with one's whole being. I leaned over the side of the boat, and gazed down till I could imagine myself a water-nymph moving in and out among the leaves, or one of the fish that now and then darted, swift and dark, disturbed by the dipping of the oars.

Here and there the weeds rose to the surface of the water, and lay in thick masses, through which it was difficult to cleave one's way; or an early water-lily leaf lay flat and shining in the sun. Near the banks were carpets of the pretty little white water-ranunculus — hundreds of white blossoms standing upright from a matting of green, thick enough for a bird to walk on. At one part we passed an island of this crowfoot, with miniature trees and shrubs growing on it. A water-wagtail

had taken possession of it, and was wagging and pecking about, so much monarch of all he surveyed that he was not disturbed by the boat gliding by—merely paused for a second to glance at us, and then continued to peck and wag.

All along the banks, crowding close to the water's edge as if to drink, and sometimes standing right in the water, were plants growing with a luxuriance that made me envious for my poor dried-up garden. Rushes, sedges, and reeds of all sorts stood out in the river, being swayed by the running water; great clumps of yellow irises, covered with buds and here and there a flag already out, made a fringe nearer the bank; while the banks themselves, and the ledges and peninsulas that jutted into the river, were thick with water-plantains, "codlings and cream," comfery, docks, and many other less familiar river-side plants. Some of the docks had grown to such a size that they looked quite magnificent, the shade of the large leaves forming attractive sheltering-places for water-side animals. A water-rat ran out from behind one as we glided past. We watched him swimming along close to the bank, disappearing and appearing again among the docks and irises, holding his head well above the water and looking like a diminutive walrus.

The river-edge curved and formed a little bay

of clear, still water at one place. We pulled the boat in close to the bank, dragging ourselves gently by the rushes till it nestled comfortably in the midst of sedges. A stump sticking up on the bank served to tie the boat to. For though the water looked still as in a pond, had we not been tied we should have drifted slowly down stream with the current. Near the bank, growing in the water all around us, were hedges of irises and clumps of docks. Looking in among them one could imagine it a miniature jungle. I lay and indulged in dreams such as one dreamed in childhood—that I was but two inches high, the Thumbeline of Hans Andersen's fascinating story, pushing my way in and out among the irises. Pulling myself up, in fancy, by the stalk, I reached one of the buds just unfolding, and buried my face in the yellow flag. Then slipping down again I found myself on a little ledge close to the water's edge—a tiny peninsula nearly surrounded by water, whereon grew one of the huge docks. Its great palm-like leaves spread out and overhung the water. From the ledge I slipped into the water and swam a tiny stroke or two till I reached a water-lily leaf. Here I lay, and looking over the edge gazed into the depths at the wonderful bowers of green. Then when, in imagination, I had gazed to my heart's content, I swam back to the dock, where



I found a white Persian cat, without a tail, browsing on one of the leaves.

The sight recalled me from the world of dreams to that of reality, and to a sense of my size. The Persian cat was a huge caterpillar, as long as my middle finger, with red whiskers, a black nose, and long white fur. He was devouring the dock-leaf as if his life depended on it, which it probably did. With two little hands in front, he held on to the dock-leaf, and his small black nose went up and down as his teeth cut into the green stuff, making a rapidly widening hole. He had a business-like methodical way with him, and evidently took his meals on a system. The soft part of the leaf he ate in semi-circles, till he came to a rib. He then ate along the rib, being careful to crop it close and leave no untidy edges. Then with sudden determination he attacked the rib, cut his way through it, and proceeded with the next section.

“Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.” I picked a rush and tickled his nose with the sharp point. He started back and stood for a moment motionless with his head in the air as if wondering what it could possibly be. Then, as if he had made up his mind that it was only imagination, he fell to and began eating again. I took the rush and tickled him again. He started

more violently than before, and assumed an attitude of surprise and indignation, which suggested that if he could only discover his tormentor he would certainly "go for" him. After a pause of one or two seconds he fell to on the dock again.

I tickled him once more, and this time his discretion got the better of his valour. He turned tail and scuttled down the stem of the dock-leaf at such a rate that we laughed aloud.

Following him with our eyes we came upon a smaller counterpart—a Persian kitten as it were—seated on another dock-leaf and also engaged on a meal. I tickled his nose with the rush, when he promptly and hysterically tumbled off into the boat, and disappeared beneath the boarding.

"He'll be drowned!" I exclaimed in dismay. "We must break the boat and get him out!" and I looked round wildly for some means of rescuing him. He was equal to the emergency, however, for in another second his black head appeared from beneath the board, and walking at a great rate he was half-way up the side of the boat before I had recovered from the shock. I held a leaf beneath him, pushed him on to it, and transferred him from the boat to his dock island and his mother—who quite oblivious of his peril was hiding in a corner, still wondering what had pricked her nose.

We thought we had presumed enough on our advantage, so we left them to pursue their pleasant lives unmolested, and untying the rope that bound us to the shore, slid out, and down the stream home.

As I walked about my poor thirsty garden in the evening, and saw how dry and dusty the plants looked after a long day's baking, I longed for a river or even a little stream running through their midst. I went to look at the irises which I had collected into one bed in a corner of the garden. The leaves looked dwarfed and grey after those on the river-bank, and the tips drooped a little. If I could only dig them all up and take them down to the river for a fortnight's holiday with the docks and their cousins the yellow flags! How they would enjoy it!



XXVI

IN THE GREENHOUSE

ON cool days, when it is too chilly to sit out of doors, the moist heat of a greenhouse is very pleasant. There is always plenty to occupy one—seed-pods or dead leaves to be snipped off, weeds to be removed from the pots, and things that are trying to climb to be given a helping hand.

But when the sun beats down through the glass roof day after day, and is absorbed and breathed out again by the walls, the pots, and the plants, the heat becomes unbearable. Some of the plants even, especially the young ones, seemed to find it too hot when the heat first came. They drooped and looked faint. Then we began to think of blinds. We consulted catalogues and price-lists, and made calculations, and came to the conclusion that to cover the roofs with blinds would cost about thirty pounds.

William smiled when we mentioned this to him, and said that three-pennyworth of "skim milk" and two-pennyworth of whiting would answer the purpose just as well. So we took his advice, and, instead of thirty pounds on blinds, expended five-pence on skimmed milk and whiting, with which he whitewashed the roofs and sides of the greenhouses. It had the effect of a cool white blind, which saved the plants from the heat of the sun, and those which had begun to droop revived at once.

At present the greenhouse seems to be chiefly filled with *calceolarias* that have been raised from seed. They have been covered with blossom for a month, and make great splashes of red and yellow down each side. Some are curiously spotted, others plain and velvety. They are showy things, and the colours are sometimes very fine, but like all flowers that have an abnormal shape, they are to me unattractive and unsympathetic. A flower should, I think, have petals and an eye of some sort—something which one can look upon as a face. I find it difficult to look upon a bag with a hole at the top, as a flower at all. There is a want of personality about it. As a child, when one lived much in the world of "pretence," it was a favourite pretence that flowers were people; but *calceolarias* were never anything but dolls' purses.

Pelargoniums have been in full flower for a couple of months, and have been vying with the calceolarias in decorating the shelves. The colouring of these is also very fine and gaudy—running through all shades of red and mauve—with deep velvet splashes. My favourites are those with sweet-scented leaves. Like most things that have scented leaves, the flower is small and insignificant, compared with those that have no other attraction than bright colour.

But the things that have attracted my attention most lately, have been the tigridias. There is something fascinating about these curiously brilliant things. If the calceolarias suffer from want of personality, tigridias have so much that they are almost human. They are things which, I believe, do equally well out of doors, and under glass, and we have several clumps of them in the garden which we hope will flower later on. The first time I saw one in flower, I thought it was a red Passion-flower, growing by mistake on a bulb. At a distance the appearance is somewhat similar. It has an upright fork pistil rising from a cup-shaped centre. But instead of a ring of petals standing out, it has three large ones that droop backwards, and three small spotted ones like tongues, filling the gaps in between. We have

three colours in flower at present—a brilliant crimson, a deep “blush” pink, and a bright yellow. In each kind the central cup and the little tongue-like petals are spotted with deep crimson.

When the flower comes out it only lasts a few hours, so that unless one watches, one may miss seeing it altogether. The bud, like an iris bud, looks like a neatly rolled up umbrella. It unrolls itself (when you are not looking), remains expanded for an hour or two, then rolls itself up again into an untidy sort of mother gamp, instead of a neat umbrella, becomes moist and nasty, and falls off.

From childhood I have always wished to see a bud opening out into a flower, and have never been able to account for the fact that though buds are unfolding and becoming flowers all day long, I have never been able to catch one in the act. Only the other day I thought my wish was about to be gratified. I came upon a large white evening primrose-bud that seemed to be on the point of opening. The petals had been a little loosened, and I felt for a moment that I could see it trembling a little before they fell apart. I stood and watched it for some moments, but it remained perfectly motionless. Then I thought it was showing a tendency to shut up again. Perhaps, I said to myself, it thinks I am staring too rudely. I will

walk away, go once round the kitchen-garden, and then come back quietly and watch it, from behind a tree. When I came back it was wide open. I felt inclined to beat it.

In the same way I have watched tigridia buds, till my patience has been exhausted, but have never once seen one opening. As long as I am in sight they remain tightly rolled up. As soon as I go away they unfold, and when I come back I find them with all their petals spread, and, as it were, a look of triumph on their countenances.

We have at present a good many crinums and cannas in flower. The cannas I do not care for. The flower looks like an ill-shapen gladiolus. But the crinums, with their great tufts of lilies, like an amaryllis, are rather fine. The huge bulb, too, is interesting. It fills the whole of an enormous flower-pot, and has to be chained down, or rather tied round with wire, or it would grow and burst the pot. A row of tiger-lilies in the background is in flower too, and nod their spotted orange-blossoms over the other plants in a protecting manner.

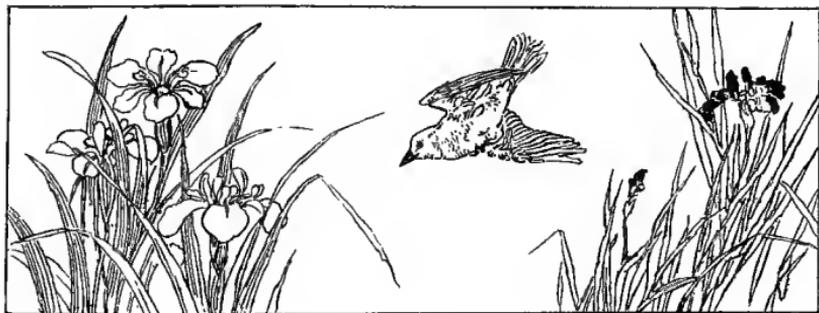
These things make a good deal of gay colour in the house, but there is much bare wall and naked post to be covered up before it has the green bowery appearance of a pretty greenhouse. We

have put a variety of climbing plants at the foot of the posts, and along the walls, and given them all the encouragement we could in the way of things to catch hold of, tying them up with bast, and directing them in the way they should go. Two things—a tacsonia and a plumbago—that we put at the foot of the two main posts, have done very well. When we planted them four months ago they neither of them reached the stage, which is about three feet from the ground. The plumbago is now within a few inches of the roof. It has sent out numerous branches, and flowered the other day for the first time. The tacsonia reached the top some time ago, and is now about a couple of yards on its way along the main beam of the house. It has an advantage over the plumbago in having tendrils by which to pull itself along. It uses these in the most curious way, catching hold of anything it comes across with them, twisting them round the object, and even tying knots to keep them firm, and then gradually twisting the tendril into a spiral spring that will give, but not break, if it is pulled. There is a black bryony in the garden which has been busy during the past month, climbing a laurel-tree. An insect has eaten little holes in some of the laurel-leaves, and the other day we noticed that the bryony had taken advantage of this by passing

the tendrils through the holes, and twisting them tightly round and round, till it had firm hold of the leaf—a thing one can hardly believe its doing unless it possessed both sight and intelligence.

At the same time that we planted the tacsonia and plumbago near the posts, we planted a little climber called *ficus repens* at the foot of a bare wall. It has a small leaf which clings closely to anything it happens to climb, and a short time before, I had seen a greenhouse wall thickly covered with it, and looking at a distance as if it were covered with dark-coloured moss. Since it took up its abode with us, however, it has obstinately refused to make a single new leaf. It has stayed sulkily at the foot of the wall, showing not the slightest tendency to climb.

We are going now to try a heliotrope, which has been growing very rampantly in its pot, spreading itself over the shelf, and apparently very anxious to climb something. I once saw a small greenhouse almost entirely filled with a climbing heliotrope, the blossoms of which were tumbling from the walls and filling the air with fragrance.



XXVII

A PRETTY GARDEN

I REMEMBER on one occasion being both amused and pleased by the enthusiastic admiration of a foreigner—a native of Sweden—for the beauty of our English landscape. We were in a train, and were flying from Grimsby, where we had landed, to London. It was early in September. The corn had just been cut, and the country was looking delightfully green and fresh. The train carried us through miles of fields stacked with newly-cut corn, and divided by thick green hedges. Every now and then we passed cottages with thatched roofs and a haystack or two nestling in bowers of green trees. Picturesque groups of men and women were working in the fields, cutting and stacking the corn, and here and there sleek cows chewed the cud, or woolly sheep grazed in groups.

The foreigner gazed out of the window, his face glowing with the rapture of admiration, every now and then turning to me to ejaculate—

“Ah! It is beautiful! this country of yours; beautiful! beautiful! It is one huge garden—a perfect garden! I have never seen anything like it.” And then he added: “But this is not the way to see it, rushing past like this. One should be up in a balloon looking down at it. Then one could enjoy it! Not too high—just a little way up—so!” And he made a gesture as if he already imagined himself in mid-air gazing down at the landscape.

I have often thought of his enthusiasm and his balloon plan. And lately I have sometimes wished I could take a flight up into the air, and look down at the various gardens, looking so gay at this time of year with their show of flowers. A garden that I saw the other day would, I think, well repay a journey up into the sky to view it from a balloon—“Not too high, just a little way up,” as the Swedish gentleman said.

It was a small garden, made in a hollow that had once apparently been an orchard. For there were remains of the orchard, in the shape of old twisted lichen-covered apple and pear trees, woven in and out among the flowers, the gnarled branches

occasionally making charming frames to patches of gay flowers.

The house was in the middle of the garden, nestling down among flower-beds and shrubs, as if it were growing there like any other plant. Some houses stand aloof from the garden, as if they had nothing to do with it and took no interest in it. They appear to occupy themselves looking out into the road (if they are near enough) or watching the visitors who come to the front door. Such houses always seem to me to have a bored, gloomy expression. This house obviously took not the least interest in what went on in the road, nor in the visitors who came to the front door. Its whole interest was in the garden. It liked the flowers, and was perfectly happy in the middle of them. And the flowers liked it. They crowded up round it as close as they could, and tried to look in at the doors and windows. It was so thickly covered with creepers and trailing plants, that it could hardly see out of its eyes. There was a verandah shading the windows at one end, the roof of which was completely covered with a sweet-scented vine. And at another end a laburnum had been planted close to the house, and, leaning back against it, had spread its branches all over the wall.

A terrace ran along beneath the windows, gay

with borders of flowers, growing so thickly together that they had often to lean out on to the path because they had not room. Things of a kind were for the most part massed together, and made very effective patches of colour. There was one very brilliant patch of hybrid columbines, graceful things with long spurs and combinations of delicate colouring; another of Iceland poppies; and running through the borders in streaks and patches was the misty grey-blue of the large-flowered flax.

Over the tops of the flowers one looked down upon the hollow with the old fruit-trees, and following some stone steps dipped down into it from the terrace, and found oneself on a smooth grass lawn, with flowers and shrubs all around. At one end tall elms with the thick green foliage of midsummer rose from a still further dip, and made a cool, green shade; and at the other end lay a rock-garden, reminding one of some brilliant "impressionist" picture in the sun; while through the knotty branches of the fruit-trees, one looked up at a bank fringed with irises, beyond which one caught glimpses of a kitchen-garden, where rose-bushes seemed to be straggling and tumbling all over the paths.

Everything was growing with an untidy luxuri-

ance that was charming. One felt inclined to believe that the flowers had planted and arranged themselves, rather than that they had been planted by the hand of man. There was no tiresome symmetry. Things grew in irregular clumps, not in straight rows. Even the hedges of sweet-peas ran in curves instead of in straight lines, and the rose-trees, instead of being clipped into tidy bushes or tufts at the tops of bare sticks, made long wreaths and festoons that reminded one of pictures in the story of the Sleeping Beauty.

The slope nearest the house, as one looked up from the hollow, was covered with rose-trees growing in this way in a tangle of curved branches. Some of the branches were weighed right down to the lawn with masses of roses. They were red roses, for the most part, from the brightest to the deepest velvety crimson that is almost black. But here and there were branches of pale, lackadaisical-looking tea roses, with floppy petals—very graceful and beautiful things, but neither as rich in colour nor scent as the others.

Turning away from the roses, and making one's way through the apple trees, one found oneself in a sort of miniature dell at the foot of the iris bank, where tall blue delphiniums, yellow mulleins with their handsome grey-green leaves, peonies, white

and pink, and feathery spireas were massed in picturesque groups. At one end of this little dell were more of the pretty-coloured, long-spurred columbines, this time dotted about among grass, and with the tall shady trees as a background.

There was quite a garden of irises at the top of the bank—all collected together in a long bed, and most of them showing their delicate silken flags. They made a sort of platform from which one could look into the kitchen-garden beyond, where symmetry and order seem to reign (chafed at, however, by the rose-bushes, who were trying to make festoons over the paths), and down on to the flower-garden at the roses, and at the rock-garden, lying like a brightly-coloured island in the midst of the green. Rock-gardens are frequently built up against walls or high banks, and I had never realized till I saw this one how much prettier they are when growing, out in the open, with nothing behind them but trees and distant landscape. This one lay, a little stony mound, in the middle of the garden, not leaning up against anything, but standing by itself with garden all round, and trees as a background.

The sun was beating down on it, and lazy little plants were sunning themselves on the grey stones, or spreading themselves in the hollows, all their

flowers open to drink in the warmth. Here and there were groups of such things as red poppies and pink peonies. At one part there was a tangle of briar roses and irises, and high up on a ledge was a handsome plant of the shrub *Cistus Ladani-ferus*, with large white blossoms with deep purple patches near the centre. The plant that made the most brilliant display of colour, however, was the attractive little thing which is often called a rock cistus, but whose real name is helianthemum. It is a small plant with grey-green leaves, and covered with a constant succession of delicate flowers with petals that look as if you could blow them off if you tried, of every shade of colour, from yellow to deep red. It is one of the most effective things one can have in a garden, and is besides very easy to grow. Lately I saw a whole garden decorated with it, the result of one three-penny packet of mixed seed. Lying in clumps on the rock-garden, all its blossoms open in the morning sun, it was, I think, the prettiest thing I had ever seen, and was, indeed, the sight which reminded me of my Swedish friend, and made me wish to take a flight up into the air and view the garden from a balloon.



XXVIII

ROSES

AFTER seeing the rampant way in which plants were growing and flowering in somebody else's garden, I felt a little out of conceit with my own. The little six-months-old plants which had been stunted by the drought looked as if they were likely to remain dwarfs to the end of their lives. I was especially dissatisfied with the rose-bushes, none of which were more than a foot high. I sighed to think how many years must pass before they could grow into the great branching wreaths of roses I had admired so much.

As if to shame me for my reproaches they all began to come into flower, and in a few days the little bushes were so covered with roses that the rose-beds were a mass of variegated colour, some

of the tiniest plants bearing roses as big as themselves.

There are two long beds divided by a grass path. One contains nothing but tea roses, and the others nothing but ordinary roses—hybrid perpetuals, as they are called. Down the centre of each bed is a trellis which we hope will some day be covered with climbing roses. The plants were put in last autumn, and during the winter months were forlorn-looking little bare trees with labels flapping in the wind.

Early in the spring they were all cut down to the ground, leaving nothing but the stump. It seemed rough treatment at the time, and one wondered whether they would ever recover from it. But very soon new shoots began to appear from underground, and in a short time they were respectable-looking little bushes, much sturdier and healthier than when they were first planted. About a month ago we noticed that buds were forming, and now for more than a fortnight they have been in full bloom. The smallest plants seem to have the largest roses. Some of the tiny trees have roses bigger than themselves, and so heavy that they are unable to hold them up, but are weighed down to the ground with them.

Every morning armed with a large chip basket

and a pair of scissors, I go out and pick till the basket is full, and there are enough roses to fill all the bowls in the house. It is surprising to see how little difference this wholesale picking makes. The rose-beds look just as gaily coloured after they have been robbed of their spoils as before. The best kind of vessels to arrange them in are, jugs for those with long stalks, bowls for those with medium stalks, and soup-plates for those that one is obliged to pick with very short stalks; and to this end it is well to begin by emptying the basket out on to the table and dividing the roses into three piles, of long stalks, medium stalks, and short stalks.

The rose-trees are so thickly covered with buds however that in most cases it is impossible to pick a long stalk without picking a number of young buds too, and as the plants are still very young and small one is loth to do this. It seems cruel to the little plant to pick young, undeveloped buds. On the other hand, a rose never looks so beautiful as on a long stalk with plenty of its own green leaves, and one would fain believe that it does the plant good to have its buds picked. Whether it does them good or not, I find myself much bothered by a troublesome disinclination to pick buds of any kind, and especially those of roses, carnations, and sweet-peas. In the case of carnations this means



practically not picking them at all, since the stalks are usually covered with buds. I have a friend who always picks sweet-peas in great branches, quite regardless of the buds. They look far more beautiful when picked with a good deal of their own green in this way, and arranged loosely in a vase, than as one usually sees them, in tight bunches with nothing but the blossoms; and I always admire her way of arranging them very much. It seem to me, too, that there is a generosity and lavishness in her way of picking them, that betokens a large nature, while about my way there is something that savours of niggardliness, and I have sometimes made up my mind to imitate her lavish generosity and pluck recklessly. But after picking a branch or two covered with young buds my heart misgives me, and I fall back to my own niggardly manner of picking them with short stalks. The other day we were given a magnificent bunch of carnations of very choice and rare kinds. One admired the generous way in which the giver had cut them—with long stalks covered with buds—almost as much as the exquisite colours of the flowers themselves.

The hybrid roses, from their manner of growth, present most difficulties in the way of buds and short stalks. The teas are more inclined to

straggle and make long branches, and even on these small plants one can often pick them with long stalks and leaves.

My systematic picking of the flowers has, I think, had a good effect on the plants. They seem to be determined to keep pace with me and not lose ground, and to be putting extra vigour into growing new shoots to make up for those they have lost. The plants have more buds now than they had a week ago, and I am told they will keep on flowering and increasing till August, in which month they will reach their zenith of beauty.

From continually walking about among them, I am beginning to learn some of their names. Hitherto my list of names has consisted of three only: Gloire de Dijon, Maréchal Niel, and La France, names which happen for various reasons to have been forced upon my attention. Other roses I have divided simply into red roses and white roses, and have not troubled to inquire whether they had names or not. So great was my ignorance that I imagined there was only one rose called a tea rose, and that it was so called because its colour was like weak tea with a good deal of cream in it. Now I find, somewhat to my bewilderment, that every rose has its name, in most cases a Christian name

and surname like anybody else, and that tea-rose is the name of a class in which there are dozens of different varieties.

Most of the tea roses were new to me, and at first I was inclined to be prejudiced against them, as new-fangled, affected-looking things, with washed-out colours and no scent to speak of, and like many people I had a weakness for the "good old-fashioned" sweet-scented red rose that one could bury one's face in. But I am beginning to think better of the tea roses. There is, it is true, compared with the ordinary roses, something lackadaisical and sentimental about the way they bow their heads and sprawl about, but at the same time there is something extremely graceful, and the buds, with their curled petals and delicate tints, are most beautiful. They are very easy to arrange, too, and a bunch of the various shades put carelessly into a jug, or any vessel over which they can lean their heads, looks charming. Some of them when wide open show their centres, and look like very large wild roses with untidy, graceful, flopping petals. Madame Pernet Ducher is one of this kind—a beautiful white, with deep cream towards the middle, and a cream-yellow bud. There are a good many extremely pretty ones of the colour one calls "old rose," some of them shading to deep cream towards the centre. Fran-

cesca Kruger, Ethel Brownlow, and Cleopatra are the best of this kind that I have noticed so far. Madame Falcot, an untidy pink-cream, is also very pretty.

My favourite rose in the whole garden, however, is in the other bed, among the hybrid perpetuals. It is called Sir Rowland Hill, and is one of those very deep velvety reds, with a most delicious scent. These very dark red roses are, I think, the most beautiful of all, and I wish we had more of them. A whole garden of Sir Rowland Hill would be delicious. Roses have a tendency to run too much to pink. And though some of these are very handsome in shape, a great many have no scent at all. And what is the good of a rose that has no scent? Some of the very pale pink, however, are much to be admired. There is one called Margaret Dickson, white, shading to pink towards the middle, which is most beautiful in shape and delicacy of colouring.

On the trellis down the middle of the beds, the climbing roses are doing very well. The two best are Reine Olga de Wurtemberg and Crimson Rambler. The former is a most beautiful rose, of a brilliant crimson colour, with a dash of blue in it. Our little plant, which was only put in last autumn, has been covered with buds and full-blown roses for some weeks past, and is rapidly making its way up the trellis.

Crimson Rambler is a well-known and popular climbing rose. It is a small cluster rose of very much the same light crimson as Reine Olga, and has very thick foliage. It is to be hoped it will like its surroundings and do well with us, for a great mass of it covering the trellis would look very fine.



XXIX

BUMBLE-BEES

I HAVE heard of a garden where the birds were on such friendly terms with the people who lived in the house that they used to fly to meet them in crowds when they emerged. They would perch on their shoulders and heads, and hop after them on the ground, chirping ecstatically, and behave in every way like the birds in the picture of St. Francis. Some member of the family with an especial sympathy for birds had established a tradition that the birds in the garden and the human beings in the house were on friendly terms. This had been handed on from bird to bird, and it no more occurred to one of them to be afraid of human beings than it does to a domestic dog or cat. It sounds an ideal state of things, and suggests Arcadia.

I have often wished that it were possible to live on like terms of intimacy and affection with insects—at least, with some insects. Of course there are insects and insects. Some, like dragon-flies and butterflies, seem to exist for decorative purposes only. A dragon-fly with iridescent wings darting in and out among the sedges at the water-side, or a butterfly flitting about among the flowers or chasing another in the sun, add to the beauty of the landscape, and may appeal to one's sense of the beautiful, and give one vague æsthetic emotions and feelings of sympathy with Nature. But whether flitting in the sun or stuck on pins in rows in a collection, like postage-stamps, they are to me utterly without personality.

Other insects—such as wasps, gnats, midges, household flies, earwigs, and the tribe of abominations, green-fly, black-fly, and the like that live on plants, seem to exist simply for the purpose of annoying, and one's impulse is to annihilate them speedily, rather than to try to make friends with them.

About spiders one's feelings are mixed. They are certainly not without personality. They err rather on the side of having so much personality as to be uncanny, and I suppose it is for that reason that one finds them so terrifying. For the same reason one cannot help having a sort of weird sympathy

with them, and I can quite imagine, under certain circumstances, making friends with certain kinds of spiders—small spiders, or even large spiders, if they were not too fat. There are numerous stories of human beings and spiders having become friends (generally in prison, when both have been hard up for companionship, it is true), which testify to an affinity between us and them.

But apart from these more or less impossible insects there are tribes of insects living in a garden, with some of which it would be quite amusing to be on friendly terms. In fact, if one happens to investigate a small patch of ground one is quite appalled by the number of curious creatures walking about in it, some of them so extraordinary to look at that it is really like the Zoological Gardens on a small scale.

The insect that above all others I should like to be on friendly terms with, and have for a pet, is a bumble-bee. There is something particularly attractive about a bumble-bee, and I have always felt that if we could induce them to look upon us as friends we should find them delightful companions. A bumble-bee has a charming personality—owing, I think, chiefly to his woolliness; and his manners, voice, gestures, and behaviour generally assure one that his nature is as charming as his woolly



personality—that he is a really delightful fellow. I feel sure too that if one understood what he was talking about one would find him most amusing. His gestures are always quaint, and there is at times a waggishness and slightly buffoonish air about them that convince one that he has a keen sense of humour.

He has a heavy, lumbering, good-natured sort of air that reminds one of the performing elephant at a circus; and like the elephant there is something irresistibly comic about his attitudes. One of the funniest things I ever saw was a large black bumble-bee sitting on its haunches in the middle of the road and (apparently) licking its front paw like a dog.

With all my aspirations I am forced to admit that my attempts to make friends with bumble-bees have been so far wholly unsuccessful. They look upon me at best as an idle busybody with a taste for interfering, and give me to understand, by polite gestures, that I had far better attend to my own business, and leave them to attend to theirs.

While the syringa has been in bloom I have idled away a good deal of time sitting on the lawn beneath one of the trees, which has been a mass of white sweet-scented blossom. To save myself from the reproach of absolute idleness, I have had an open book in my hand, at which I have occasionally

glanced. But the heat, the scent of the syringa, and the hum of insects have a soothing effect on one's mind, and I have for the most part felt too drowsy and contented to do anything but gaze out at the flower-beds across the lawn, pluck little bits of grass, and think vague thoughts about things in general, and watch the insects.

A little bank covered with moss and grass runs along one side of the lawn beneath the syringa trees, and makes a comfortable back against which to lean. And, resting on one arm, one can watch a whole army of bumble-bees, which, for some mysterious reason of their own, delight in burrowing in the moss. They are, for the most part, the large, black, woolly bumble-bees, but occasionally a tawny stranger takes part in the pursuit. I have counted as many as twenty, busy burrowing, and the bank is so full of the holes they have made, that it looks like a miniature rabbit-warren.

At first we thought they were making caves to live in, but as they never made the hole big enough to admit more than their head and shoulders, and also, after burrowing for some time in one hole, frequently went on and made another, that theory was abandoned. Some one suggested that beneath the moss there grew a small clover that bumble-bees considered a great delicacy, and that they were in

search of this. We investigated the soil beneath the moss, however, and could find no trace of clover—nothing, in fact, but brown earth.

During the drought there seemed to be more of them, and they appeared to burrow with greater energy than before. This suggested the idea that they were looking for moisture. I wondered that it had not occurred to me before, and hastened to fill a watering-can, in order to give the bank a thorough watering, that they might not burrow in vain. There were eight woolly backs partly concealed in the moss when I came back with the can. They all seemed to be busy digging with their noses and front paws like dogs, and reminded me very much of a young collie I once knew who used to delight in digging a hole in the moss in a certain wood, and taking deep-sounding sniffs of the moist earth. He would dig hole after hole, and plunge his whole head into them, and sniff loud sniffs of deep satisfaction.

Before giving all of them the pleasant surprise of an unexpected shower of rain, I thought I would give one of them a little water all to himself, and watch his delight. Vague stories of grateful lions and tigers floated through my mind, and I felt that I was probably about to make them all my friends for life by the cups of cold water I was about to

bestow to relieve their thirst. I chose a very thirsty-looking fellow, and pouring a little water on the bank just above him, let a tiny stream trickle down till it reached him. He raised his head when he felt the cold water touch him, and it immediately ran down into the hole he had dug, and made a little pond. Instead of plunging in and drinking eagerly and gratefully, he raised his paw and looked at the water beneath him in the greatest surprise, as if he was at a loss to understand what it was, and then, with a snort of unmistakable indignation, extricated himself from the moss and flew away humming loudly and angrily. I felt impatient at his want of intelligence, and, taking the can, let a shower of water fall on the bank and on the backs of the other bees. They all stopped digging, got out of the moss hurriedly, and flew off buzzing with annoyance.

It was some days before they would come back. And even then they only came in two and threes, instead of in dozens. I feel that I am further than ever from making friends with them, and I have not even discovered what they were digging for.



XXX

PICKING THINGS

THE occupation of gathering things I have always found particularly agreeable. Whether it be that, having the instinct of a collector, I like to see a little heap or bunch grow beneath my grasp, or that being by nature a lazy person I like to achieve a sort of spurious industry by the pursuit of an occupation that calls for exertion neither of mind nor body, I do not know. But whatever be the cause, it is a fact that I take an especial delight in gathering things—whether fruit, flowers, vegetables, or shells by the sea-shore.

On sunny mornings I find gathering peas a pleasant occupation. Nowhere can one be so completely out of the world away from the distractions of humanity as when seated between hedges of green peas picking the full pods. The green

shade and the twittering and sunshine going on above and all around one give a pleasant colouring to one's thoughts. The slight exertion of pulling the pods and the monotonous little sound they make when dropped into the basket among the others, soothe one into a sort of pleasant dreaminess, and encourage one's mind to wander lazily in the pleasant groves of memory, where one may catch glimpses of the time when the tops of the hedges towered above one's head, and between the rows seemed like long green avenues, and to split the pods and find five or six little green men sitting in a row thrilled one with delight.

My memory would have me believe that in those days the hedges of peas were taller, the leaves greener, and the pods far larger than now-a-days, and but for one little incident I would swear he was right. When I was about six years old some one told me that if I could find a pod containing nine peas I could wish what I liked and it would come to pass. Every year when the peas were being gathered I used to search for the magic nine, but never could find more than five or six, or at most seven. At last I gave it up in despair, thinking it one of the fables invented to annoy children.

When plucking peas the other day the fable came back to me, and I opened a pod and counted the

peas. There were nine. I opened another and another. They all contained nine, many of them ten, and in one I found eleven. So I am forced to believe that the pea-pods of the present generation are larger than those of the past.

There are many less pleasant ways of spending an hour on a sunny day than seated among the currant and gooseberry bushes plucking the ripe clusters of fruit into one's basket. There is not quite the same satisfaction to be got out of eating them as of yore, it is true. They seem to be far sourer than in days gone by, and more full of little hard stones.

But it is only when there are no flowers to gather that one spends one's time dreaming among the peas and currants. And in the month of July flowers are plentiful. The flower-beds are, perhaps, gayer than at any other time of year. The rose-garden is still a veritable garden of roses, and shows no sign of giving in, the tea roses especially being much more thickly covered with buds than they were a fortnight ago.

Most of my time just now, however, is spent in the kitchen-garden, where two sweet-pea hedges are in flower. In order to keep them in flower as long as possible, it is necessary to pick them rigorously, and especially to nip in the bud all attempts

to make seed-pods. As they come out very quickly and go rapidly to seed, it is no easy task to keep them in check. And the enormous bunches that are picked every day seem to make very little difference. I have not yet discovered an ideal method of picking them. If one pulls at them in the ordinary way it is difficult to avoid tearing off great branches of the plants. If one plucks them with a little jerk, so as to dislodge the stalk from the joint from whence it springs, it usually brings away a little new shoot. And cutting them with a pair of scissors takes about twice as long as any other method. Perhaps the most satisfactory plan is to vary the methods—to break and tear till one is disgusted at the havoc created in the hedge—to pluck with careful little jerks till one's arm aches, and the clusters of young shoots at the end of the stalks get on one's mind, and then to take one's scissors and snip. Whatever be the method, the time spent among the sweet-peas is always pleasant. And even if one took no pleasure in the picking, the result would reward one. Nothing is more deliciously fragrant in a room than a large bowl of sweet-peas with a little mignonette put in here and there among them.

It may be morbid taste on my part, but the colours I admire most and mean to remember for

next year, are the pale heliotrope and very pale salmon-pink. A small hedge of Princess May (heliotrope) and Adonis (salmon-pink) is just coming into flower, and the two delicate colours together are extremely pretty. Some of those bearing different names are, as far as I can see, precisely the same in colour—which may possibly be accounted for by the fact that the seed came from two or three different seed merchants. I can see no difference between Princess May and Countess of Radnor, both very pretty pale heliotropes; nor between Venus and Adonis, pale salmon-pinks.

Max, knowing my love of gathering and snipping, made me a present the other day of a new pair of gardening scissors—a small neat pair, such as drapers use, with rounded points that do not stick into the lining of one's pocket—and bid me employ my spare moments in snipping the seed-pods off the Shirley poppies, in order to encourage these pretty things, which are favourites of his, to keep flowering as long as possible. Consequently, my steps, instead of turning always towards the sweet-pea hedge, have taken to turning towards the Shirley poppy bed at the other end of the garden, and I have spent much time standing among the pretty silken petals with their delicate shades of pink and red, and snipping off the heads of those

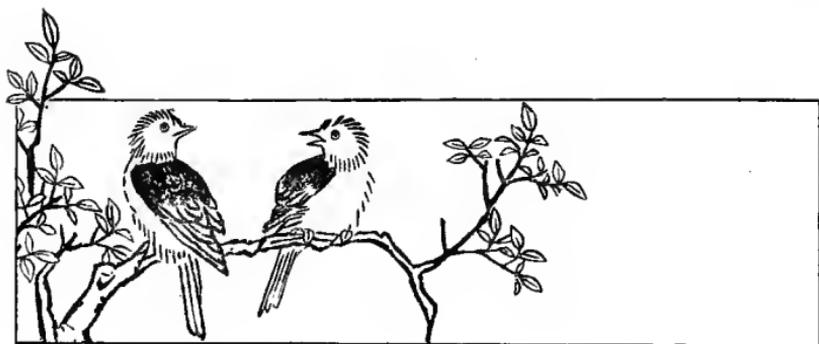
that have already dropped their petals. They are in one of the hottest corners of the garden—a spot where the sun always seems to beat down with especial heat, and the poppies catch it all, and flash their colours in the sunshine, so that one can see the bright-coloured patch from a great distance. As I often spend as much as an hour standing among them snipping, I should be in danger of sun-stroke if I did not provide myself with a Japanese umbrella, which, as the snipping only requires one hand, there is no difficulty about holding up.

I find it almost as fascinating an occupation as, earlier in the year, I found spudding, and just as difficult to stop. When I have made up my mind that I have spent quite enough time at it, and am turning to go away, I invariably catch sight of a group of heads that have quite escaped me, and find it impossible to resist going back to snip them. It requires, indeed, great strength of mind at last to put the scissors in my pocket and absolutely refuse to snip one more.

By dint of much practice I have acquired considerable dexterity. The scissors click and the poppy-heads fall almost as quickly as I can count, and I rarely snip off a bud by mistake. At first I very often made this mistake. Not that the furry green buds that bow their necks, and have pink

silk showing through the cracks, at all resemble the little stiff seed-pods, with crowns on their heads and ruffs round their necks, but they grow so close together that the stalks are often entangled, so that it is difficult sometimes to see which is which.

Max excuses himself from performing this office for the Shirley poppies, on the ground that he is occupied with the carnations. We have a large bed of these which are just coming into flower. A great many of them were nibbled down to the ground by a hare in the early spring. But they recovered, and do not seem to be any the worse for the treatment. Every morning new ones come out and have to be passed judgment on. The single ones and those whose colour is not approved of are ruthlessly rooted out and cast on to the rubbish heap, while the best and handsomest are "layered" in order to make extra plants to fill the gaps. This is done by separating the outside shoots from the main plant, and (without removing them altogether), making a little cut on the underneath side of each, and pegging it down as one does a strawberry-runner, when it will start an independent root of its own. Some very fine crimsons, salmons, and yellows have come out, and also one or two of the various shades of heliotrope, which are, I believe, the newest thing in carnations.



XXXI

PORTULACA

CONSIDERING the treatment they received from the sparrows when they were first planted out, it is a marvel that any of the portulacas survived at all.

Sparrows, like street urchins, indulge in certain pastimes at certain seasons of the year which are even more annoying to gardeners than those of the street urchins are to the passers-by.

Early in the year they play the game of tearing the yellow crocuses—a game as disastrous to the poor little crocuses as it is exasperating to those who planted them. The game consists in tearing the petals of the crocuses to ribbons, and the object seems to be to see who can tear most in a given time. Judging by the keenness with which the game is played, I should say there must be prizes for the most accomplished crocus-tearer. Crocus-

tearing remains in season for some weeks, as long indeed as there are any crocuses to tear; until, in fact, the poor little things, who have pluckily tried to keep their heads up and go on blossoming, give in, and lie prone and torn to shreds on the ground.

Then comes the game of nipping the heads off the peas, as soon as they appear above ground. The sparrows take up their position in a tree commanding the row of peas, and watch, and, as soon as a crack comes in the ground and the seedling shows its head, they hop down and nip it off. It is a game requiring, I should think, greater dexterity and quickness of eye than crocus-tearing, and is (probably on this account) not so universally popular—though quite popular enough.

Then, when the seedlings have grown too big for any fun to be had out of nipping their heads off, comes the dust-bath game, and it is this game that the poor little portulacas suffered from.

This may possibly be more in the nature of a "Kur" than a game. It may be that sparrows find it necessary to take a course of dust-baths once a year, just as some of us find it necessary to go abroad and "take the waters." But, whether the motive be the pursuit of health or of amusement, it is an obnoxious habit, and one which a gardener cannot view with equanimity.

They choose sunny spots in the flower-beds where seeds have just been sown or seedlings just planted out, and where the earth has been turned up and raked fine, and, settling down in the middle of the seeds, or on the top of the seedlings, scratch holes in the earth with their bodies and legs, and rub themselves down into them. The result is that the seeds and seedlings are sent flying, and lying exposed in the sun shrivel up and die. They usually form parties for the pursuit of this pastime. I have seen as many as six of them sitting close together in their various baths, scratching and pecking about, fluffing out their wings and feathers, and keeping up a continual flow of conversation with each other.

The portulaca bed, lying in full sun all day long, and having a fine, dusty soil, attracted them at once, and soon became one of their favourite resorts. They flocked to it in crowds every day for their dust-baths, and scratched and dug with such energy that if I had not mounted guard over them I doubt whether a single plant would have been allowed to grow up.

My plan was to hide behind a tree in the neighbourhood of the bed, and watch till about a dozen of them were comfortably established in their baths and engaged in exchanging commonplaces with

each other; and then suddenly to dart out at them with a roar, and a Japanese umbrella, which I would open and shut noisily in their faces. They would all fly off with screams to the nearest tree, and sit there shrieking and talking about it, and it would usually be some time before any of them would venture to approach again. By repeated onslaughts I instilled into most of them a wholesome awe of myself and the Japanese umbrella, so that dust-baths considerably decreased in popularity, the repeated shocks to the nerves, I suppose, detracting from the benefit to be derived from the cure. After a time I found it quite enough to leave an open Japanese umbrella on the grass beside the bed. Being a light thing and adapted to catch the wind, a slight breeze was enough to set it moving. And whether this created the impression in the minds of the sparrows that some one was concealed behind it, or whether they attributed its behaviour to supernatural agency, I observed that they never ventured to alight on the bed if the umbrella was anywhere near.

In spite of being sat upon and dug up every day, the portulacas showed throughout the most stubborn determination not to be beaten, and really held their ground with remarkable pluck. And as soon as they were relieved from the sparrows they began

to grow with all speed. So rapidly did they put out branches and spread over the ground that in a very short time, instead of the two little rows of scarcely visible seedlings, there was a long border about a foot and a half deep of thick green matting. Then the buds began to appear, and soon the matting was dotted all over with coloured blossoms.

During the late hot weather, when everything in the garden has been burnt up and in want of rain; when the sun has scorched down with such force on the grass that one has scarcely dared to venture from beneath the shade of the trees and walk across it; and when even the roses and sweet-peas have begun to hang their heads and look limp, the portulacas have been quite a refreshing sight. They positively revel in the hot weather, the scorching rays of the sun, and the dry, powdery soil. They lie sunning themselves in the dust, absorbing heat, and looking gayer and gayer day by day, as new blossoms keep opening out. The flowers are extremely pretty and bright-coloured. I counted seven different shades the other day in a small patch—bright scarlet, crimson lake, pale pink, pale salmon, deep yellow, pale yellow, and white.

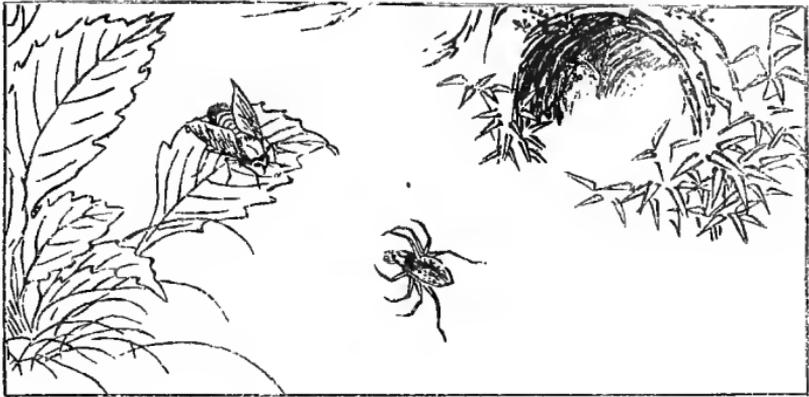
It has always seemed to me that this little plant has a very independent character of its own. It shows indeed an obstinacy and determination to have

its own way not at all unlike that of human beings. If it does not want to grow, nothing you can do will persuade it to do so. If it makes up its mind to grow, it will do so in spite of any obstacles that may be put in its way, and I have known it to indulge in unmistakable "sulks" from jealousy.

The border, which is now revelling in sunshine, was grown from seed sown in a pan under glass in the spring. The seedlings all came up well, and seemed strong, healthy little plants. When they were about an inch high they were all, with the exception of twenty-five, planted out into their present position. The five-and-twenty were destined to be given to a friend who complained that he could not raise portulaca from seed, and so were left in the pan till a convenient opportunity occurred for transferring them to his garden. Apparently they resented being left behind; for from that day they absolutely refused to grow another scrap, but simply sat and sulked in the pan. At the present moment each of those that were planted out, covers about three-quarters of a foot square, while those that were left in the pan have remained precisely as they were when the others were removed, and are still little inch-high seedlings.

In the background behind the portulaca is a row of sweet-scented tobacco. They are large plants,

from two to four feet high, and from five o'clock in the afternoon, on, are covered with white blossoms. During the daytime they are rather shabby plants, being covered with dirty-looking, tightly-rolled-up buds. All through this hot weather they have slept peacefully with the sun scorching down on their heads, much to the disgust, it seems to me, of the portulacas. "Look at those stupid old tobaccos!" they seem to say, "asleep on a day like this! They really ought to be ashamed of themselves." About five o'clock the tobaccos waken up: all the white blossoms open out in the evening air, and, bending over, they look with equal contempt at the portulacas, which by this time are fast asleep, with all their eyes tightly closed.



XXXII

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

IT was a hot sultry day, and I had spent the morning picking roses. Tom Tug, my young bull-dog, had gone with me—as he usually does—following me in a heavy, lazy sort of way, from bush to bush, and flopping down in the shade while I picked. Then when I had picked a basketful of tea roses, he had carried it down the white, dusty road for me. We took the roses to a friend, and, when we had emptied the basket, went into her garden to look at a large purple clematis and a white everlasting pea that were climbing luxuriantly up a wall. She picked some sprays covered thickly with the purple and white blossoms and filled our empty basket, and Tom Tug carried it up the road

again, looking solemn and dignified beyond his years with the weight of responsibility.

Lunch was waiting for us when we got back. I put the basket on the table, meaning to put the flowers in water afterwards. It was a common white chip basket. But the flowers had arranged themselves picturesquely, as flowers will if left to themselves, and were tumbling over the edge of the basket in graceful sprays, so that it made a pretty object, standing on the corner of the table, not far from a dish with a ripe yellow melon.

The room was hot. The blinds were down, but the windows were open, and a slight breeze stirred the blinds and let in every now and then streaks of the hot sunshine from out of doors. A party of flies were dancing round on the ceiling, and occasionally making descents on to the lunch-table and disgusting us by nibbling the sugar, and taking sips at the fruit-tart, and setting one wondering how it was that civilization had advanced so far without having invented a means of annihilating household flies.

Another party was annoying Tom Tug, who, hot and tired after his walk, lay stretched full length on the carpet, in a flat and loose way, suggestive of an ideal state of repose. "What a disgusting bore these flies are!" he seemed to say, as he lay watch-

ing them with half-closed eyes. Every now and then he made a vicious snap and click with his jaws, but he never seemed to catch one. They flew away laughing—up to the table to annoy us, or to join the dance on the ceiling, or merely made a little circle in the air, and returned to tease Tom Tug.

Two or three of them were playing round the basket of purple clematis, making circles in the air and alighting on the handle. One of the grey-purple clematis buds that hung over the edge of the basket was nodding gently up and down. As I watched it idly I caught sight of a greeny-brown spider moving about and apparently engaged in making fast his tackle. Suddenly he swung himself off the bud and climbed rapidly up an invisible ladder till he reached the handle of the basket. Here he paused and sat down for a minute. One of the flies alighted on the handle of the basket, a few inches from where he was sitting. The spider apparently saw him; for he crouched down for a second and then ran underneath the handle and “lay low.” We could just see the tip of one of his legs sticking out from underneath. The fly began walking in the direction of the spot where he lay hid—but along the far edge of the handle, which was a broad one. When he got near, he apparently caught sight of the projecting black claw, for he

turned and began deliberately walking towards it. I put my fingers in my ears, expecting a pounce on the part of the spider. The fly walked calmly to the edge, and looked over. There was a spasmodic jerk of the black claw, and—the fly flew gaily off and joined the dance on the ceiling:

As soon as he had gone, the spider came out from his hiding-place, and ran backwards and forwards along the handle, laying his net. Once or twice he let himself down with his legs sprawling into the middle of the flowers, and after running about from one blossom to another, hauled himself up again, or climbed up some invisible ladder to another part of the basket—on one occasion even running across a suspension-bridge to the melon, hastily laying a few nets there, and then going back to the basket by the bridge, and taking up his position on the edge.

After dancing on the ceiling for a few seconds while the spider was thus engaged, the fly came back and alighted on the handle just above the spider. He imitated the action of washing his hands (to show his unconcern, I suppose), and then giving a kick to his wings with his hind legs, proceeded to walk down the handle. The spider on the edge of the basket at once began walking towards him. He seemed carefully to have timed his pace so that they must inevitably meet when

the fly reached the foot of the handle. And so they undoubtedly would if the fly's courage had not failed when he was within an inch of the bottom. He hesitated, faltered, and then, with a "bizz," flew off and described several circles in the air, in which he contrived almost to brush the spider's face—a proceeding that enraged that "insect" so that he could hardly contain himself. Each time he passed close to him he raised his paw, as if he would have liked to grab him; but the fly was so quick that he never even succeeded in touching him. After describing about a dozen circles the fly again alighted on the handle and proceeded to perform rather an elaborate toilet. The spider meantime, I suppose to give vent to his feelings, or perhaps merely to show what could be done, employed his time letting himself down to the table-cloth—all his legs flying—and hauling himself up again—a proceeding that somewhat alarmed the fly, for he flew off to the window, and it was some seconds before he ventured to come back again. When he did, the spider seemed somewhat to have recovered his self-control, and for some seconds he busied himself with his web, running backwards and forwards on the basket and in and out among the flowers, leaving a little thread wherever he went.

A little gust of wind blew the blind aside and let a band of sunshine on to the table and showed us the basket enveloped in a perfect net-work of silken threads. After running hither and thither for some minutes and making knots, he sat down and watched. Then a sort of game began—a game of “catch-who-catch-can,” or “I-spy-I”—between the two. The fly would go as near as he dared to the spider without being caught, flying off as soon as the spider made the slightest movement. As he got near, the spider would crouch down and settle himself for a pounce. The fly would go so near that the pounce seemed imminent, and I would instinctively put my fingers in my ears and lean away from them with my nerves taut to snapping point, when just as they were in each other’s arms the fly would whisk off with a little “bizz” of mockery—perform a circle or two in the air, during which he would, so to speak, pull the spider’s nose in passing—and, alighting at a safe distance, would again perform his silly toilet. After a round or two of this the spider seemed to be quivering with rage and excitement, and to be hardly able to control himself. The curious thing was, that the fly seemed to be quite proof against the dangers of the web. Whether it was that he saw the threads and picked his steps so as to avoid them, I do not

know, but he walked about among them without so much as stumbling.

Once or twice the spider seized the opportunity of the fly's circling round to hide himself behind a leaf, doubtless thinking that if the fly did not see him he would have a better chance. But even this subterfuge failed. The fly would spot him at once, and alighting at a safe distance from which he could easily escape if the spider darted out, remark slyly, "Ah! I see you, hiding behind a leaf!" and fly off again. When he did this the spider nearly burst with rage. In fact, after the game had gone on for some minutes, he seemed to be positively worn out with excitement, and to be trembling in every limb. The fly, on the other hand, remained as cool as a cucumber.

I could stand it no longer. I gave the fly a shove, and tried to push him into one of the webs, but he flew off laughing at me as he had done at the spider. Then I said to the spider, "I am very sorry to disturb you, and break all the little webs you have taken such trouble to make; but, believe me, you will be far happier on the jasmine outside the window, than in this hot lunch-room, being teased by rude flies;" and I lifted up the spray of clematis on which he happened to be sitting, and carried it to the open window. By dint of sundry

jerks and shakes I succeeded in transferring him to a jasmine leaf that was looking in at the window, and left him sitting there, probably a little bewildered at the sudden change in his circumstances.

As I turned back from the window to put the flowers in water, Tom Tug made a successful snap at a fly. He chewed it a few minutes, swallowed it thoughtfully, and slept on. I do not know one fly from another, but I shall always believe that that tiresome fly met with its reward.



XXXIII

IN THE DARK

IT is in hot, sultry weather such as we have had lately that one sees something of the garden under a different aspect—in the dark. The night air entices us from our houses into the open, where, with a deep transparent sky over our heads instead of a roof, and a moist dewy earth beneath our feet instead of a carpet, we can enjoy the cool darkness and silence that have taken the place of hot sunshine and the chatting and humming of birds and insects.

My dream of having plenty of sweet-scented tobacco has been fully realized, and at night for some weeks past the garden has been fragrant with it. In the spring I sowed the better part of a very small threepenny packet of the seed in two earthenware pans. The results are two rows of about sixty

feet in length of tall plants which have flourished splendidly in the hot, dry weather, and which are covered with the, white trumpet-shaped blossoms. On hot, still nights, the air is so laden with the scent that it finds its way through the open windows into the house.

There is something curiously impressive about these flowers that keep a night vigil while everything else slumbers. In one of the beds of herbaceous plants in the flower-garden is a plant of *Oenothera eximia*, one of the largest of the evening primroses, towards which our footsteps have constantly turned of late. Its white blossom is one of the most remarkable things I have ever seen. The foliage, something like that of a dandelion (though not so much so as that of *Oenothera taraxacifolia*), lies in flat tufts on the ground; and the blossom, which is by night a pure luminous white, rests on it with its petals outspread, and its face exposed to the sky, looking like a pale earth-moon in the dark. Ours is a small plant, and only one blossom has opened at a time. The solitariness adds, I think, to its impressiveness, and also lends it a curious conspicuousness, so that the pale disc attracts one's attention from a distance. Lying there, white and shining in the midst of darkness and slumber, it looks awake and alive in every fibre,

and as it were poised in expectation of something—the visit, it may be, of some winged night moth or insect. That these blossoms of the night receive such ghostly visitors is a fact with a suggestion of “eeriness.” They make themselves as conspicuous as possible, it is said, in order to attract them. For in their eager search for honey the insects brush the pollen about and fertilize the plant. *Oenothera eximia* has an enormously long neck. One might almost think that, in its desire to be seen, it was craning it upward—stretching itself as far as possible up away from the ground—which for aught I know may be the case.

The wakefulness of these night blossoms seems to throw the slumber of the rest of the garden into relief. The plants whose forms one sees dimly outlined bow their heads in sleep, and if one listens one seems to hear a universal breathing, so that one instinctively hushes the scrunching of one’s footsteps on the gravel path, and lowers one’s voice to a whisper.

For Tom Tug, the bull-dog, these night rambles in the garden palpitate with excitement. The darkness is alive with things, smells, and sounds that are hidden from our grosser senses. His eyes, ears, nose are everywhere, and his march along the darkest path a series of surprises and thrills. Be-

yond giving an occasional glance to see that we are following properly, his attention is entirely riveted on the gloom—peering into the darkness, pricking his ears, starting suddenly in pursuit of some invisible winged creature, or pursuing some earth-bound insect with his nose to the ground.

Sometimes the object is conspicuous enough to be apparent even to our clumsier senses, and following close upon him we have been in time to see a pale moth flit in among the plants, or a fat worm rapidly withdraw its length into a hole in the grass, or a toad hop heavily away into the bushes.

Like other people, toads prefer the cool darkness to take their walks abroad in, rather than hot sunshine. There have been so many of them sitting about in the paths enjoying the night air, that we have been glad of Tom Tug's services as forerunner to hurry them out of danger from our footsteps. This he does very effectively by pursuing them along the ground with his nose, and occasionally giving them a shove which causes them to hop. Having discovered that he had only to touch the toad with his nose (pull the string, as it were) to make it hop, he becomes so enamoured of the game that he persists in it till the toad gives in from fatigue and refuses to hop any more. He then tries stirring it up with his paw. But this we



think rough on the toad, and have given him to understand that it is against the rules of the game to employ anything but his nose.

During the hot weather I have rarely met with a toad in the daytime. They prefer, I suppose, to stay in their holes or in the shade behind stones or the leaves of plants. The other day, however, when in the midst of the heat we were visited by a refreshing shower of rain, dozens emerged from their hiding-places and enjoyed shower-baths. I took refuge in the greenhouse and sat there while the shower lasted, enjoying the sound of the rain-drops rattling on the glass roof, and hoping it would go on for several hours. It lasted only a few minutes—enough, however, to turn the grey earth brown, and to give a delicious moist, dewy appearance to everything that had been dry and dusty. This the toads seemed to appreciate, for when I went round the garden afterwards I saw numbers of them stirring about among the weeds in the shrubberies and sitting in the paths. I watched a very fat (presumably) mother toad taking three very small toads for a walk in one of the flower-beds, and showing an energy that was quite untoadlike, and can, I think, only have been inspired by the rain.

The greatest surprise which these walks in the

dark have produced, so far, for Tom Tug has been a hedgehog, which we came upon one night in the middle of the path. Tom saw it first some way ahead. He suddenly stood stock still with his ears pricked and "pointed." Following his gaze we could see a round dark object on the path, which might have been a stone, except for an appearance of softness round the edges. Tom's behaviour, however, indicated that it was something far more unusual than a stone. After gazing at it for a second or two, and obviously making some mental ejaculations, he darted forward and proceeded to smell it all round very cautiously, turning to us with eager excitement as we came up, as if to beg us to look at the thing. "What an extraordinary creature!—covered with pricks, too, by Jove!" he exclaimed, as he inadvertently smelt it a little too close. It was a pathetic-looking little object sitting there in the dark with its shoulders hunched up, trying to hide its nose away, and, like Tar-Baby, "sayin' nuffin."

The most impressive thing about these slow-moving creatures, toads, hedgehogs, and the like, is their silence and dumbness. They seem to have so much more to say, and to be so much less capable of saying it, than creatures that move rapidly. There is nothing so eloquently dumb as

a toad. A frog is talkative compared with it, and as for such rapidly jumping and running creatures as "bunnies," they positively annoy one with their chatter.

Tom Tug showed a disposition, after having had his nose pricked, to engage in conflict with the hedgehog. He pranced round and barked remarks apparently calculated to rouse it to action. "Now, then, old prickly-bag! Come on and have a game!" He became so boisterous at last, that we were afraid of his molesting the creature, and were obliged to take him by the collar and lead him away to a safe distance, where from the shadow of a tree we watched the hedgehog extricate his head and walk off into the bushes.



XXXIV

ROSE-BEETLES

THE poor roses were being destroyed. And the destroyer was an innocent little beetle, not much bigger than a ladybird, with pretty bronze wings. There were four or five of them in each rose, busily eating large holes in the petals. They had quite finished a great many of the roses. Nothing was left but the centre, with a few ragged strings—the remains of the petals—hanging from them. I loathe killing things; but as I gazed at my poor eaten roses I swore that those beetles should die, if I had to massacre them with my own hands. I cast round in my mind for a way of dispatching them that should be at once summary and inoffensive. I remembered that one of my brothers used to prepare a sort of lethal chamber for butterflies with crushed laurel-leaves in a bottle.

The laurel-leaves sent them to sleep, and, as he explained to me, "When they woke up they found they were dead."

I hunted about till I found a large earthenware pot. I half filled it with young laurel-leaves, which I crushed till they gave out a pungent smell of bitter almonds. Then I went to the rose-bush and resolutely shook the roses over it till the beetles fell in. When I had half cleared the bush I looked in to see how they were getting on, and was surprised to find that they were not yet asleep. They were walking about among the laurel-leaves—lazily, drowsily, it is true, as if the lulling effect had begun—but were apparently quite awake. By way of hurrying them up, I turned the pot upside down on the grass, and, putting a large stone on the top, left it for half-an-hour. Then I came back, meaning to bury the corpses and finish off the rest of the beetles. I lifted up the pot. I am not prepared to say that none of them had closed their eyes; but whether they had or not, they at once opened them again. They all walked out from under the laurel-leaves in a brisk, business-like sort of way, saying, "Well, that is about the poorest attempt at a lethal chamber I ever came across;" unfurled grey cobwebby wings from under their bronze

sheaths; there was a whirr-r-r! round my head, and they all flew straight back to the rose-bush, leaving me sitting on the grass.

I was obliged to admit that they had scored, but I was not going to be beaten. I called William to my aid, and without telling him of my feeble attempt asked him what he thought would be the best way of exterminating the horrible little beetles that were destroying the roses. He looked at them, picked a few off the flowers, squashed them between his finger and thumb, and threw them on to the ground, with as much unconcern as if he had been picking bits of thread off his coat, and suggested syringing the bushes with tobacco-juice. I told him to go and get some. While he was away I searched for the beetles he had pinched and thrown on the ground, and, as I expected, found none of them quite dead. They lay mutilated and maimed on their backs, kicking their legs in the air. I finished each one off carefully by stamping on it, but made up my mind I would have no more killed that way.

He came back in a few minutes with a can full of dirty brown stuff and a syringe. As he began to fill the syringe, preparatory to squirting the bush, I indulged in a few sentimental reflections over the fate of the poor little beetles whose only

crime was that they ate rose-leaves, who were now without warning or preparation to be squirted into eternity with tobacco-juice. And then I stood aside to let him squirt, anticipating a shower of little corpses on to the ground, where I made up my mind they should be swept up and given decent burial.

Swish! went a fine shower of tobacco-juice over the roses. And then there was a pause, during which William and I watched the beetles, expecting to see them all tumble down dead. But tobacco-juice was obviously not quite such sudden death to them as I expected. One or two of them put their noses in the air and sniffed, as if to say, "Who's smoking bad tobacco?" Then they buried them in the roses again and continued browsing. "You must give them some more, William," I said; "that wasn't quite enough." He filled the syringe again and soused the tree. Then again, and again, till he had nearly emptied the can. They had apparently made up their minds that it was only a rather dirty shower of rain. One or two who got very wet stepped out of the rose and shook themselves; and some of them moved to another blossom. But as for dropping down dead, it did not even occur to them. I looked at William. "They don't seem

to mind it much, do they?" He smiled. "No, they don't, m'm." And he proceeded to pick some more off, and pinch them—this time a little more vindictively—and throw them on to the ground. "That's no use, William," I said, hastily. "It would take a week to kill them like that. I shall try dropping them *into* the tobacco-juice. That is sure to kill them at once. Give me the can, and you can go back to your work."

There was still a good deal of the brown liquid at the bottom of the can, and a mass of sodden tobacco protruded above the surface. I held the can near the bush and began boldly shaking the beetles off into it. This onslaught seemed to cause them some alarm. Some of them became hysterical and lay on their backs with their legs tucked away, pretending to be dead. But I was determined not to be overcome by sentiment. I continued to shake violently and resolutely for nearly five minutes. Then I looked into the can. They were all struggling and swimming about in the dirty brown stuff, and climbing up the tobacco mountains, as lively as possible, and apparently no nearer eternity than they had been on the rose-bush. I sat and watched them for a whole minute, thinking that every moment would be their last. And then—I blush to relate—I could bear

their struggles no longer. I took a piece of grass and helped them all out. They showed their gratitude by flying straight back to the rose-bush.

I sat down on the grass and wondered what I had better do next. Obviously I must have something much stronger than tobacco-juice. I be-thought me of a bottle of carbolic I had in the house. One of the directions on it was, "To destroy insect pests, mix half-a-pint in a gallon of water." I went indoors and prepared a cupful, about six times stronger than that recommended, for I was determined that this time death should be instantaneous. I would witness no more struggles. I carried it out to the rose-bush, popped a beetle in, and watched the effect. He swam about apparently none the worse, but he seemed to dislike the smell, for he tried to get up the side of the cup. I put the cup down and determined not to look at it for the space of two minutes. By that time he would certainly be dead. I took out my watch, and seating myself on the grass proceeded to count the seconds. In spite of my resolve I kept involuntarily glancing at the cup every few seconds, and could see from the commotion going on in it that the beetle still lived. At the end of two minutes, which seemed an eternity, I went and looked at him. He was

climbing up the side of the cup, and had nearly reached the top. I had a momentary impulse to push him back again, but I resisted it as base and inhuman, and sat and watched him. In another moment he had got his hand over the edge of the cup, and had pulled himself up. He spent a few moments drying his under wings, which had got a little damp. Then he spread them and flew straight back to the rose-bush.

I was standing looking helplessly at the poor ragged roses when Max and a friend of his came into the garden. "Look at these dreadful beetles!" I cried. "How is one to kill them? I have tried laurel-leaves, tobacco-juice, and carbolic. Nothing seems to have the least effect on them." "Boil them," suggested Max. I shuddered. "I couldn't," I said; "it would be too brutal." "Boiling is not the least use," said the other man, who seemed to know something about beetles. "It only stupefies them, and they wake up afterwards. A friend sent me a beetle from Africa a few years ago. He thought he had better kill it before he sent it, to keep it quiet on the journey. So first he boiled it. Then he packed it in creosote and sawdust in a tin box and sent it to me by post. It took about a fortnight coming, and when it arrived I unpacked it, stuck a pin

through it, and put it in my beetle collection. About a month afterwards I went to look at it, and found it slowly waving its hand in the air. It had just wakened up.

“No. There is only one way to kill a beetle. And that is, to grind it to powder with your heel. And even then you must keep your eye on the fragments, or they will get up and stick themselves together again.”

The beetles are still browsing among the roses.



XXXV

HOLLYHOCKS

IN August, if one walks about the country lanes, one may see hollyhocks in perfection in the cottage gardens. I passed such a garden yesterday, in the midst of which, by dodging the fruit-trees and bushes that grew round it, I caught sight of the thatched roof and eyes of a whitewashed cottage, looking as if it had dropped there by accident, and was too comfortable to move. The tall spikes of the hollyhocks shot up from what looked like a tangle of fruit-bushes and vegetables, and looked over the hawthorn hedge into the lane, flaunting their gorgeous pink, white, and yellow rosettes at the passers-by.

There is nothing so pink as the pink of a

hollyhock. It is as complete and satisfactory as a colour can be, and reminds one, in its effect, of one of those old Italian tunes whose chords and harmonies have a perfection and finish that completely satisfies. A tall, pink hollyhock is like a perfect Idyll—one painted with the delicacy of a Miss Mary Wilkins—whose predominant note is sunshine and delicate colouring. In the cottage garden the Idyll is of dairymaids in pink cotton frocks—of cottage maidens with pink cheeks—of apple-blossoms in an orchard, and the air is full of the breath of new milk and new-mown hay.

In the garden of the rich—for the hollyhock adapts itself to its surroundings wherever it is, and is as much at home in the palace as in the cottage—the Idyll has the formal grace of a minuet. Instead of dairymaids, it is of men and maidens in periwigs, ruffles, and silken gowns, of terraces with peacocks and clipped yew-trees, and the air is full of lavender and pot-pourri.

It is a flower that in its appearance and colouring belongs to the last century, and it almost seems as if Nature, thinking it out of harmony with the present day, were determined to destroy it. For, while man struggles to cultivate it and does all he can to encourage it to grow and flower, Nature wages incessant war against it by afflicting it with

all manner of disease. So persistent is she in her efforts to exterminate it, that gardeners are beginning to weary of an unequal combat, and are giving up trying to grow it.

For a long time the chief things it suffered from were those little pests called "red spider" and "thrip." Red spider looks to the naked eye like a little reddish-yellow dust on the underneath side of the leaf. If you look at it through a magnifying-glass, you see that the dust is made up of a number of nasty little crab-like-looking things. Under their malign influence the leaves turn brown and rusty, and the plant gradually shrivels away. Thrip is an objectionable-looking little black thing, with a long-shaped, pointed body, that lives also on the under side of the leaf, and whose effect on the plant is very much the same as that of red spider. They are both most troublesome things to cope with. They are not so sensitive to fumes as green-fly, and it is very difficult to smoke them out. The best plan is to syringe them or dip the plant into some pretty strong insecticide. When the plant is a small one growing in a pot this is practicable, but for tall hollyhocks growing out of doors dipping is an impossibility, and syringing so difficult as to be almost impracticable, each leaf having to be syringed underneath.

It often occurs to one when looking at these tiny creatures that live and have their being on plants—apparently as unconscious of our existence as we are of the inhabitants of another planet—to wonder whether we too may not be a blight on, say, some fruit, and the showers of rain that are poured down upon us the futile attempt of an irate gardener to syringe us away. Who knows whether red spider and thrip, living on their plant-world, may not have a system of civilization and society as elaborate as our own, perceptible only to themselves—a fabric of the imagination, as some philosophers would have us believe are the etceteras of life—dwellings, clothes, and the like—with which we surround ourselves?

It may be so; but until we have accurate information on the subject we cannot admit their right to exist, and we use all means in our power, fair or foul, to exterminate them. As if it were not enough that the hollyhocks should be afflicted with these two odious inhabitants, Nature has lately gone out of her way to invent a new disease for them—a special disease all to themselves. This is a small grey-brown fungus that grows on the under side of the leaf—always on the under side, where it is more difficult to get at it—and gradually spreads and eats the life out of the plant. When

the plant is attacked by this disease—and it is getting more and more common among them—the only thing is to pull it up and burn it.

Last week I saw a splendid set of hollyhock seedlings, in apparently a most flourishing condition. Although only this year's seedlings, they were tall, large plants, and most of them were showing for flower. The foliage was abundant and of a healthy green, and I was surprised when the owner said that the fungus had begun to attack them all. He said he was trying to keep it in check by picking off and burning the leaves on which the small brown spots were to be seen, adding that he considered it quite worth while to make the attempt to grow such ornamental things, even in the face of obstacles, and that if this collection succumbed he would certainly try again.

Though the ideal colour for a hollyhock is pink, some of the other colours are much to be admired. The yellow and the white shading to a delicate green in the centre, are very delicate and pretty, both in the double and single kinds, and there is a rich deep maroon that is very fine.

Like most flowers that grow on spikes, hollyhocks have a way of beginning to wither at the bottom before they have finished coming out at the top, which sometimes gives them an untidy, shabby

appearance. Wallflowers, foxgloves, delphiniums, "red-hot pokers," and most flowers with long spikes, have this habit, which makes them very tiresome to pick. One must pick them before the topmost buds are out, for if one waits till they have all opened, one has to put up with a shabby fringe of withered blossoms round the lower part of the stalk.

In the autumn we planted one or two bulbs of the much-talked-of *Eremurus*. They were interesting-looking things when they first came up, the large bulb leaves, folded round each other, looking like a gigantic asparagus head. It may be that the situation did not suit them, and that we did not see the flowers at their best, but I was much disappointed in their appearance. They produced tall thick spikes, covered with small whitish blossoms. But the lower blossoms withered and turned a dirty brown long before the top ones came out, so that from the beginning the spikes were untidy and unsightly.

One of the prettiest of these pyramid flowers, which blossoms about this time of year, is the white summer hyacinth, *Hyacinthus candicans*. It grows a tall spike several feet high, hung round with graceful white bells. It is a thing that looks very well in a border of herbaceous plants, but perhaps

even better among somewhat wild surroundings, and planted not too close together. Lately I saw groups of them dotted about among long grass, against a background of green trees. The whiteness and distinctness of the bells, which are hung far apart on the stalk—not clustered close together—made them conspicuous and striking-looking things among the green.

But the most perfect of these flowers in spikes that I have ever seen was a white campanula growing indoors in a pot. The spikes, of which there were several, were about three feet long, and quite two-thirds of each was entirely covered with pure white bells—every one, from the lowest to the topmost, quite perfect, and without the least symptom of withering.

If a hollyhock is the pinkest thing there is, the little scarlet tropæolum (*Tropæolum speciosum*) is the reddest. Unfortunately it is also one of those “contrairy” little things that will not grow unless it is so minded. But when it does grow it is so beautiful that, as in the case of hollyhocks, it is worth making many attempts. It grows luxuriantly in some parts of Surrey, and will cover a stone wall or a trellis with a thick matting of the pale green leaves covered with the deep scarlet blossoms—a scarlet so vivid that it catches one’s eye at a great

distance. Its sister, the common yellow *canariensis*, is far easier to cultivate. It has an amiable way of growing wherever you put it. It is a pretty, graceful little thing, but beside the gorgeous red of the other, reminds one somehow of a plain maiden at a disadvantage beside a beautiful sister.



XXXVI

HEATHER AND BRACKEN

AMONG plants, as among animals, there are some that refuse to be tamed. Do what you will—imprison them, treat them with severity, or even with kindness—they refuse to bend their necks to the yoke of domesticity. They have a sturdy independence that refuses to adapt itself—a wildness that will not be subdued.

Heather and bracken choose their own hills and dells and soil, and cling to them with a wiry stubbornness impossible to overcome. So strong an individuality and character of their own have they, that they seem to impart it to the air, for even if we burn and root them out their spirit seems to hover over the spot.

Long ago I tried to capture and tame a little bit of moor for a corner of my garden. There was a

sandy hillock, and a dell beneath a fir-tree, which I had set my heart on covering with heather and lining with bracken; and when about to return home from a place where heather and bracken ran wild about the hills and among the fir-trees, I spent a morning tearing plants from the grey sandy soil in order to transplant them to this corner of my garden. It was literally tearing. For the roots of bracken run about in a tangled mesh beneath the soil, and one small plant will often have yards of roots—dark-brown wiry roots, milky white inside, tough to pull up, and yet almost impossible to extract unbroken.

I succeeded with great difficulty in getting up about a dozen small plants and several tufts of heather. As I planted them far away from their native soil, in a garden which lay in the midst of cultivated fields and hedgerows, I wondered how they would endure to live away from their kind, where the air, instead of being the wild, pure air of a moor, was heavy with the breath of agriculture, of pasture lands, grazing animals, farm-yards, and sleepy villages. Perhaps it was my want of faith that took the courage out of them, for they made no effort to live. The bracken died down and never came up again. The heather grew on, but it became a different sort of thing—a kind of domestic

heath instead of a little wild heather plant, so that I lost all interest in it, and scarcely noticed when it, too, died away.

Since then I have realized what a foolish thing it was to imagine I could transplant the moor into such surroundings. As well might one think to transplant the Alps to one's back-yard by bringing back a bit of granite in one's pocket—or to entice the ocean into one's bedroom in a box of sea-salt from the grocer's.

Luckily, it is not only more convenient, but in most cases far pleasanter, to do as Mahomet did—go to the mountain, instead of wasting time trying to make the mountain come to us. Instead of trying to make heather and bracken grow in a garden where soil, atmosphere, and surroundings are uncongenial—where they are at best like caged beasts at the Zoo—one should go and see them on their own hills, where they are growing wild and untamed, and where sun, sky, mist, and breeze are pure and untainted by man and his works.

I had been away from the heather and the bracken for some time, and it seemed to me, coming straight from a garden of domesticated plants, lying in the midst of meadows, pastures, and white-washed villages, that the purple of the heather-clad hills was more intense, the green of the bracken

more refreshing, and the air and sun purer than I had known it before. There was a feeling of a wild, untamed bird about the place—a hawk it might be, or a night-jar, with the sound, startling and soothing at the same time, of its heavy flopping wings.

As I walked over the hills, following the tracks of silver sand that ran among the heather, listened to the hum of the bees swarming among the purple bells, and caught whiffs of the honey they were gathering, I wondered whether grossness, villany, or even low-spirits could live in such a place; whether even the impurest, most world-enslavenced soul would not be swept clean by such a breeze as that playing about me. All the worries of domesticity, of people crowding round, and the weariness of having to do the same tiresome thing every day, seemed to have been blown away. I had a brand-new soul. Life had a new face. Dull routine had had the dust and dirt swept off, and looked fresh and even interesting.

There is something about the texture and smell of bracken that rouses in me feelings almost "too deep for words," particularly about the smell and taste (for I have often eaten them) of the little woolly curled fronds when they first peep out of the earth. One of the things that has left a lasting impression on my mind is a walk at sunset over a

hill where the year before a heath fire had burned the heather and left the earth black and charred. All over the charred crackly blackness little points of green were appearing—tiny tufts of new green heather and soft curled fronds of bracken, with their little bowed heads bathed in the sunset glow. The young green things pushing up out of the dead blackness looked so fresh and living, and at the same time so touching, that I felt inclined to stoop and stroke their heads.

The smell of bracken is one of the freshest things in the world. The smell of new-mown hay is sweet and clean, but there clings about it suggestions of humanity: idyllic, arcadian humanity it may be, but linked with the squalor of civilization. The smell of bracken is as wild as a bird and as fresh and pure as a mountain breeze. One can imagine no existence purer or cleaner than to be in the midst of green bracken all day, and to make one's couch of it dried and brown at night. To awake in the early morning on a dried bracken couch with the keen air of pines and heather about one, would make one strong enough to face the world. When one compares it with the awakening in a stuffy lodging, enveloped in stuffy lumpy mattresses, pillows, and bedclothes, blinds and curtains, all heavy with suggestions of dirty humanity—one

longs to throw off the wrappings of civilization and be a savage once more.

Heather is in even closer contact with sky and wind than bracken, but more with the sun, perhaps, than either. The sun seems to beat down with more directness on heather than on anything else. There is nothing between them to interrupt the contact. The heather stretches its arms upwards and draws the sun towards it—and the sun pours its heat down, hot and fierce and undiluted. You feel that it has come straight, has not wasted any of its strength elsewhere on the way. I have seen the sun beating with a fierceness that scorched, on an old grey stone wall. But it was an old time-worn sun—not fresh from the fountain-head. I had seen it myself the day before resting on a whitewashed, thatched cottage; and the week before it was idly loafing among the beehives and gooseberries in the garden at the back of the farm. The creatures that live in the heather—grasshoppers, lizards, snakes, beetles, and spiders—are sun-lovers. They seem to lead a happier, healthier life than other insects—a free, Bohemian, gipsy sort of life, wandering about at will and basking in the sun.

As I sat on the heather bank leaning my arm on one of the little bushes that was quite warm

from the sun it had been absorbing, and looked down at the small patch beneath my feet—(a square yard it might be)—at the sandy, peaty soil, the scattered fir-cones, the little bits of stick and dried leaves, and tufts of bilberries (some with brilliant red leaves), and the beetles and spiders that were walking about, and drew into my lungs the clear, invigorating air, and felt, it seemed to me, more pleasantly warm than I had ever felt before, my mind wandered back to the time long ago when, in the midst of the heather I made a tiny garden in the belief that the fairies would come and play and garden in it at night. It was on the slope of a hill, where a sandy path had been cut. Just near the path, up a little bank, was a bare patch—a sort of clearing of stony, grey, sandy ground, with heather bushes all round it, except in front, where it looked down the bank. With my penknife I cut steps up the sandy bank—and then with small heather sticks made a paling and railed in the part that was open to the path, and put a gate at the top of the steps. Then I employed all my ingenuity in making flower-beds, and paths, and rockeries, and hillocks. I picked tiny fragments of plants in the real garden—buds or small blossoms, to fill the flower-beds. Early in the morning, before breakfast, when everything

was covered in mist and dew, and the spiders' webs were like diamond necklaces, I hurried down in the hopes of catching sight of the fairies before they had gone. I searched the sandy soil for tiny footprints, and so firm was my belief that the fairies had spent the night there, that I easily persuaded myself they were plainly to be seen.



XXXVII

BEEES

I WAS spending a week of perfect laziness away from home, enjoying somebody else's garden. The lime-trees were in full blossom and filling the air with a delicious smell of midsummer. I sat beneath them in a green bower, and looked up into the thick heavy foliage, weighed down by clusters of yellow blossoms, and absorbed the drowsy summer hum made of the blending of sounds far and near, that was going on all round me.

Gradually a vast humming in the lime-trees overhead seemed to separate itself from the rest and force my attention. It was as if the huge tree, having reached the height of its glory and splendour, were singing for joy. The yellow hanging blossoms that weighed the branches towards earth were being weighed down still further by millions

of bees that clung and clustered, burying their noses eagerly in the honey-laden blossoms, and pulling and tugging at them till the branches nodded and dipped as if stirred by the wind.

It was the bees' harvest, and between the lime-trees and the kitchen-garden a ceaseless stream of bees almost darkened the air as they flew. It was an old-fashioned kitchen-garden, full of old-fashioned flowers, such as bees love, surrounded by an old grey stone wall. Centuries of absorbing the sun seemed to have given the wall a heat of its own, which it shed out on to the fruit and flowers, so that the kitchen-garden always felt warm, even when the sun was not shining. Paths bordered with neat box ran through it, and round by the wall; and the borders on either side were gay with flowers—tall hollyhocks of all colours, scarlet poppies, blue cornflowers, white lilies, yellow marigolds, and untidy rose-bushes scattering their petals lavishly on the ground, and dappling the path with red and yellow.

It was only a short journey from the lime-trees to the garden, and the bees laden with honey-bags flew straight (in a bee-line) to the diminutive grey houses that stood in a row behind the gooseberry-bushes, beneath the shelter of the wall. The sun beating down on the wall and on the roofs of the

hives gave one a feeling that summer had settled down in this quiet, sunny spot, and meant to stay.

One had to make one's way through the prickly gooseberry-bushes to watch the ceaseless stream of bees passing in and out of the hive—a noiseless, busy little crowd; the new-comers laden with little yellow bags, alighting at the threshold and passing in through the miniature door, and the empty-handed coming out, spreading their wings, and away to the lime-trees for more.

We had taken the honey that morning. Dressed in bee-dresses, as a protection in case they should resent our intrusion, we had spoiled the hives, which we found well filled with honey. For the modern bee seems to have grasped the fact that he has to feed not only himself, but thousands of greedy human beings, and buckles to and makes a great deal more honey than he can possibly devour himself. Perhaps he thinks that if he does his best we may be content to take only our share, and leave enough for him.

One of the hives was literally overflowing with honey. The bees came swarming and tumbling out of the roof as we took it off. Not only were all the little square frames with which the hive was stocked, quite full, but from the roof hung great heavy lumps of honeycomb, which the bees were

busy rapidly filling with the clear, sweet liquid. They had filled the main body of the hive as full as it could hold, and then such profusion were the flowers yielding that they were piling it up in every available corner in great untidy lumps, such as they like to make if left to themselves. One or two bees were busy putting the finishing-touches to the squares of honey in the lower part of the hive—sealing the honeycomb, as they call it. In other words, they were putting the lids on the last of the hundreds of little honey-pots of which a piece of honeycomb is made.

What excites one's admiration in a bee is, next to the neat perfection with which he does his work, the little fuss he makes about it. Think of the amount of clumsy paraphernalia we human beings want for making jam-pots and filling them with jam—the huge buildings full of huge machines, the great furnaces to keep the machines going, the hundreds of carts to carry the materials about, the terrific noise, the awful mess—and then think of a bee. He just chews a little, and produces the material out of his inside without more ado. (At least, so I believe; but his ways are a mystery to me.) Then with his own hand he makes the most perfectly symmetrical and beautiful little honey-pot that can be imagined, of fine white wax, like the

most delicate porcelain. Then he journeys backwards and forwards to the flower-garden or the lime-tree till he has filled it to the brim with honey. Then he chews a little again, and produces a lid which he fastens on so cunningly that you would think it was part of the honey-pot. When one thinks that one small bee can do this all by himself without the help of a single machine, one feels almost ashamed of the human race, and begins to sympathize with the people who look forward to the time when each man shall learn to make one thing with his own hands extremely well, instead of making a thousand things horribly, with dirty, noisy machines.

“The bee is little among such as fly, but her fruit is the chief of sweet things,” I murmured as I watched them in the lime-tree. Thousands of years have rolled away since it was said, and yet what was true of the bee then is true of it still. She is still little among such as fly, and her fruit is still the chief of sweet things. From time immemorial bees have swarmed, have collected honey from flowers and stored it away for the winter, when the flowers had ceased to bloom. Their surroundings have changed, it is true, and they have learned to adapt themselves to them, but their ways and methods remain precisely the

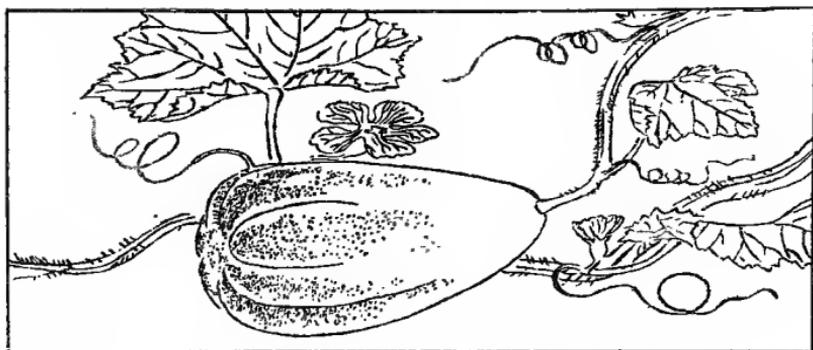


same as they were a thousand years ago. From having hidden her honey in the hole of a tree where it was safe, unless the savage or the bear happened upon it, she has learnt to store it up in all sorts of traps devised by man's cunning and greed—from the old-fashioned straw beehive of our grandmothers, that suggests thatched cottages slumbering amid an untidy profusion of flowers and vegetables, to the modern villa of a beehive fitted with all sorts of newfangled appliances, and filled with rows of little square boxes to teach bees to be symmetrical and make their honey in neat squares, instead of great untidy luscious lumps, as they were wont to do when they had nothing better than the trunk of a tree to store it in. But in spite of modern appliances and civilization generally, the bee remains the same. It continues to follow the dictates of its nature, and makes its honey and performs its functions in precisely the same way that it did in prehistoric ages. In which respect it is very much like everybody else. Human beings have learnt to live in different shaped houses, to wear different clothes, and to adapt themselves to different tools, but the man of to-day, and even the woman of to-day, are singularly like the man and woman of the prehistoric past.

We had tea under the lime-trees. And honey in a lordly dish was brought out—one of the great irregular pendants that we had taken out of the roof in the morning. As I took a large spoonful of it on to my plate I paused to count the little white honey-pots. There were nearly a hundred—all brimful of honey and neatly covered with lids. I thought of the little bee and the number of journeys he must have made to and from the lime-tree, or the flower-beds, as he helped to fill them, and how tired he must have felt as he made his last journey with the heavy honey-bags at his side. Then I put the hundred honey-pots on a piece of toast and scrunched them up, and thought how good the honey was.

When, afterwards, I lay in the hammock, and looked up into the lime-trees again to see how the bees were getting on, I found that all the ordinary bees had gone—home to bed, I suppose—and there were nothing but bumble-bees left. Of all insects the good-natured, pleasure-loving, woolly bumble-bee is the one for which I feel most affection. When I watch him burrowing his nose for honey among the flowers, I find it impossible to resist stroking his woolly back. As I watched them gorging themselves with honey among the lime blossoms, and dropping off drunk on to the

lawn, where they lay intoxicated with honey, I thought to myself that after all they have the best of it. Instead of toiling all through the summer to make honey for a winter which, after all, might never come, they give themselves up to enjoying the present. They make of the summer one intoxicating revel among the flowers, and die of pleasure before the winter comes.



XXXVIII

GOURDS

IT may have been the story of Jonah and the Gourd that suggested it; but when we planted the seeds I quite expected them to do something out of the way. We had bought a packet from a seedsman, containing about a dozen different kinds of gourds. They were for the most part labelled "Giant Melons," and were described as green, yellow, green with yellow stripes, and so forth. The seeds themselves were like those of a vegetable-marrow, only larger.

We planted them in pots in the green-house in April, and I awaited the result with some curiosity. From the first their behaviour was such as to justify my expectations. Instead of coming up quietly, like other seeds, they created a disturbance

in the pot, which gave it the appearance of having suffered from a shock of earthquake. To look at the surface of the soil beneath which they were buried one could hardly believe it concealed a dozen or so of quiet and apparently inanimate melon-seeds, but was inclined to think one must have planted beetles or snakes by mistake, and that they were all making violent efforts to escape an involuntary imprisonment; for the soil was all stirred up into hillocks and deep cracks. Through the cracks here and there one caught sight of a white loop, like the arched neck of a swan, that was pushing the earth up and creating a chasm. Some of these loops were as thick as my little finger.

A day or two later the loops had forced their way up, shaken the earth off their heads, and were all above ground. Some of them at this stage kept their noses in bags made of the husks of the seeds. They very soon shook these off, however, and showed two leaves folded together like praying hands. The next thing they did was to spread these out, stretch themselves upright, and show themselves to be unmistakable plants. In a day or two they looked like any ordinary cucumber or vegetable marrow. They grew rapidly, but with nothing like the rapidity ascribed to Jonah's gourd. Rapidly enough, however, to necessitate their being

potted into separate pots at the end of a week and transferred to one of the frames.

In one part of the garden is a triangular bit of ground with chestnut-trees along one side, which for some time past had been waste ground, growing nothing but coarse grass and weeds. It was an eyesore to Max, and he was continually wondering what to do with it, till it occurred to him to fill it with the gourds which were rapidly outgrowing the frame, besides occupying valuable space. The ground was dug up forthwith, and a series of round pits made all over it. These were filled with vegetable rubbish—dead leaves and manure—and, after a time, a gourd planted in the middle of each.

They continued to grow quickly, but in a quiet orderly fashion, forming large circular tufts of their big leaves, and showing no disposition to straggle about on the ground. Indeed, I do not believe it would have entered the head of one of those gourds to climb or straggle unless it had been suggested to them.

The pits, each one containing a plant, formed two parallel rows about three yards apart, which curved over the waste ground, making a sort of path with gourd plants on each side. Into the ground, close to each plant, were driven poles about fifteen feet long. These two rows of poles were

then bent towards each other and their tops tied together. This made a sort of tent-like corridor, which was strengthened by other poles fastened horizontal-wise the whole length of each side. When this framework of a corridor with its pointed roof was finished, I went and walked through it and tried to imagine it thickly covered with green. I looked at the gourds sitting at the foot of each pole, and thought to myself, "If Max and William think those little gourds are going to climb those enormous poles and cover this erection with green, I am afraid they will be disappointed." For I had never seen plants that looked less inclined to climb, nor more inclined to stay where they were.

Three or four days later I passed them by, and, to my great surprise, saw that one of them was already three feet up the pole and was apparently climbing it hand-over-hand as fast as he could go. The happy thought set the fashion. They one and all set to work to climb, and in an incredibly short time—a day or two it seemed; some weeks in reality, I suppose—they had all reached the top of the erection, and many of them were stretching their heads a good foot up in the air, like caterpillars, trying to see if there was not anything higher they could catch hold of.

Climbing plants are very seldom given an oppor-

tunity of showing what they can do in the way of climbing. Their aspirations are checked by the shortness of the poles or sticks put for them to climb. We had a row of aspiring scarlet-runners in our kitchen-garden this year that I was quite sorry for. Full of enthusiasm for climbing, they rushed joyfully up to the top of the sticks, and then found that they could go no further. They all stood waving their heads in the air in a melancholy fashion, feeling about for something to catch hold of. Some of them were even trying to pretend to themselves that they had sticks, and were drawing themselves up spiral-wise round nothing at all.

While climbing up the poles, the gourds had not neglected to send out side-runners horizontally; so that, by the time they reached the top, the tent-like corridor was thickly covered with green leaves, among which were dotted large yellow blossoms. The blossoms of vegetables are often very pretty, but we are apt to look upon them as a mere means to an end, and consequently despise them as flowers. Nothing is prettier than the blossom of the scarlet-runner, but because its function is to produce beans our minds refuse to look upon the blossom as worthy of consideration. The yellow trumpet flowers of gourds, vegetable-marrows, and

cucumbers are extremely beautiful, and if they were to stop there, and not turn into vegetable-marrows and cucumbers, they would doubtless call forth much admiration. As it is, their beauty is entirely lost sight of in the thought that they are one day to minister to our greed.

As an instance of the intelligence of gourds I relate the following incident. About a dozen of the plants were given no poles to climb. They were not wanted for the corridor, so were merely dotted about on the ground to fill up the space. Most of them were content to remain neat circular bushes on the ground, and produced their yellow blossoms and fruit in due course. But three of them, doubtless possessed of greater enterprise and originality than the others, looked about them, and, noting the fact that while some had been given poles to climb they had been given none, determined not to be outdone. They were a long way—several yards—from the nearest pole; but on the other side at a distance of from two to three yards were the chestnut-trees. For these they made, in an absolute bee-line, each one choosing the tree nearest to him, and not swerving an inch till they reached the foot. Only one of them, however, thought it worth while to climb the trees when they had reached them. The others apparently

acquired a taste for running about on the ground and making roots on the way, and lost sight of what had obviously been their original object.

Inside the tent the plants having climbed to the top and covered the walls with their large leaves and yellow blossoms, they set about making gourds. Like people blowing soap-bubbles, they seemed to vie with each other as to who could produce the most enormous fruit. Though I have occasionally come across overgrown vegetable-marrows and pumpkins, the size of these gourds was a revelation to me. Suspended from the roof and sides of the tent, they looked colossal. I almost trembled as I walked beneath them lest they should fall on my head, in which case they would inevitably have flattened me out. Many of them were so large that I could barely get my arms round them in an embrace.

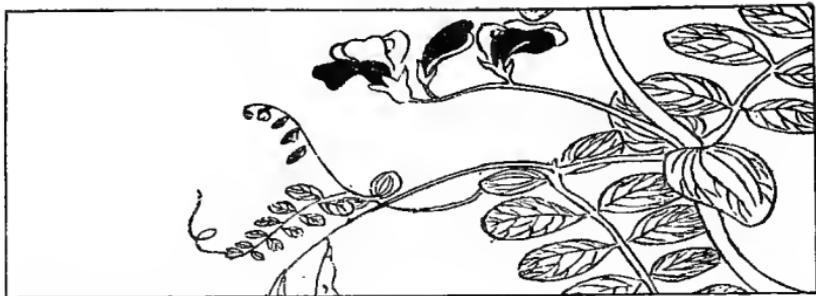
I did not try to lift any of them; but, from the way they hung, and the way some of them lay on the ground, they gave an impression of great weight, so that one wondered that the stalk, though tolerably thick, was able to support them.

“What shall we do with them?” I asked Max, as we walked through the tent looking at them.

“Give them to the harvest festival,” he answered.

“But suppose the harvest festival doesn’t want them?”

“Then we can send them to the jumble sale.”



XXXIX

A HEDGE OF SWEET-PEAS

It is September, and the garden begins to wear a look of autumn. There are still flowers in plenty, but the midsummer blaze of colour is gone, and a sombre hue has taken its place.

In a corner of the kitchen-garden a little splash of summer seems to have stayed behind. It is a hedge of sweet-peas, sown late in the season and now covered with blossoms. When I pass it by, and still more when I stand picking the flowers, I imagine myself once more in Aunt Matilda's garden where long ago I spent so many happy days.

What a luxurious paradise of flowers it was! There were great beds of roses, so thick together that when you stood in the middle you could see nothing but roses all around you, and could without moving bury your face in masses of crimson and

yellow, or clusters of white or pink. There were whole gardens of mignonette which scented the air, and to which all the bees in the neighbourhood came to gather their harvest. There were long borders of sweet lavender, the whole length of the kitchen-garden, along which one walked, and, as one crushed the fragrance in one's fingers, dreamt of old-fashioned gardens and last century maidens picking bunches to put among the linen in the old oak presses; and great thick hedges of sweet-brier and sweet-peas, whose delicious scent wafted on the air came and went in whiffs as one wandered about the paths.

Every now and then something brings back to me a whiff of the enchanting atmosphere of that garden. For, as a child, I spent several months of each year in it—playing and wandering at will, and helping my old friend to tend her flowers.

My love of sweet-peas dates from that time, and of all things they have most power to recall those happy days. For on one occasion Aunt Matilda poured twelve little brown seeds into my hand, and told me that each one contained a large leafy plant, with sweet-smelling blossoms packed away inside it and held prisoner by some enchantment, and that if I planted them in my garden and watered them, I

should break the enchantment and set them free, so that they would shoot up out of the earth and grow higher than my head.

I planted them, and watched for many days—for years it seemed—till one morning there were twelve little cracks in the brown earth, and twelve tiny yellow shoots peeping out of them. From that day I lived in my garden, watching them grow, and weaving romances for each separate plant. It is a long time ago, and the garden has faded to a dim, misty picture. But a whiff from a sweet-pea hedge wafted on the air, or the sight of a deep purple blossom, the first of the twelve to come out, carries me back like a flash, and I find myself, again, for a brief moment only, in that wonderful garden world, in an atmosphere where succulent green things growing out of the moist brown earth tinged everything with wonder and romance.

So when, last May, I saw on the counter of the village shop two little penny packets of sweet-peas, with gaudy pictures of the blossoms outside, and heard the old woman say they were the last she had, though I had long since sowed my sweet-peas for the year, I paid my two-pence and took them home, thinking, as in the old days, that I would plant them and set them free from their little prison-houses.

I walked about the garden looking for an empty spot to sow them in; but every scrap of space seemed to be filled up, for it was already well on in May, and late for sowing seeds. At last in the kitchen-garden I found a strip of ground in front of the currant-bushes that seemed to have been forgotten. With a trowel I dug up the earth till it was quite soft and fine and smooth on the top. Then I opened the gaudy packets and counted the seeds, pouring them one by one into my hand. They were generous penny packets—one hundred seeds in one and eighty in the other—enough to make a triple row if not sowed too close together, for the strip was about fifteen feet long. I set to work and punctured little pits in the soft earth with my finger—one even row the whole length of the strip, and behind it a second, beginning midway between the two first pits, so that they might be alternate, and behind that a third. Then I popped the peas in, one little brown ball into each hole, and filled them up with some rich soil that the gardener kept for potting.

The baby sweet-pea's deadly enemy is, as I knew, the sparrow. He sits on a tree watching them, and as soon as they show their noses out of the earth he nips them off—not to eat apparently, for as often as not he leaves the poor little heads on the ground,

but simply because it amuses him. The best way to frustrate him is to hedge your seeds with a row of sticks driven into the ground, and then with a reel of fine black cotton go from stick to stick, this way and that, across and backwards and forwards, till you have made a wide-meshed net a few inches from the ground. When the wicked sparrow, having watched you safely out of sight, alights to nip off the innocent young plant that is taking its first peep into the world, he is so scared by this something he cannot see that his wings strike against, that he flees in terror from the spot and avoids it for the future.

It took me a long time—the better part of a hot afternoon—to make this protection for the peas. But it was a pleasant occupation, suited to the weather, and I did it in a leisurely way. I walked about under the trees, and picked up sticks of a suitable size till I had a goodly bundle. Then I sat in the shade, and cut them to the same length with my penknife, whittling one end to a point that it might run the more easily into the ground, and making a notched ring at the other to wind the cotton round. When I had finished I drove them into the earth in a line round the strip of ground where the peas lay buried, and wound the cotton from one stick to another across and across till I

had made an invisible net. This part of the operation, which entailed kneeling on the ground and bending over, was tiring, and made my back ache. Then with a watering-can I let a shower of fine spray fall upon the earth, backwards and forwards and along till I was sure the moisture had penetrated down each little pit and soaked the inmate till his brown husk was soft and pliant so that the yellow shoot could make its way through quite easily.

I went away and forgot about them for ten minutes. It may possibly have been ten days, but it seemed like ten minutes. And when I went back to look at them again, there they were all standing straight up in three even rows—little green shoots, each one with a leaf ready to unfurl, looking as pleased as possible with themselves and the world in general, and mocking themselves of the sparrows who sat watching them from a neighbouring tree, doubtless feeling they had been considerably scored off.

They grew up rapidly. A row of branching sticks on either side encouraged them to send out leafy shoots in all directions, and tendrils with which they caught hold of the branches and pulled themselves up till they formed a thick green hedge, through which you could hardly see the sticks, and

which quite hid the currant-bushes behind. And as soon as they reached the top the buds began to appear and open out noiselessly in the sun till the green hedge was a mass of variegated colour—deep purple, crimson, pink and white. Such profusion of flowers were there that they had to stretch out and tumble from the hedge to get at the sun. The quiet little corner of the kitchen-garden was filled with their delicate scent, and transformed into the most brilliant spot in the garden by their colour.

It almost seems as if they must know of the narrow escape they had of remaining imprisoned the whole year through, and that they are determined to make the most of their unexpected life.

It is September now—and the hedge is still in full bloom. Every day I pick great sweet-smelling bunches, and every day new buds open out to take their place—so that it looks always the same. In fact, at this moment it looks as if it would bloom for ever.

As I walk along picking, picking, with the sun beating down on the hedge and on my head, I say to myself, “Is it possible that only three months ago all this beauty was packed away in two little packets of tiny balls that I could hold in my hand, and which I bought in the village shop for two-pence?”



XL

AUTUMN

As summer whisks away and autumn glides in, a solemn grown-up air seems to come over the garden. Instead of giddy little annuals blazing with colour, rioting about on the ground, and jostling each other to hold their faces up to the sun, the borders are full of tall, thoughtful bushes, sunflowers, dahlias, and the like, hanging their heads pensively, flowers of more sombre hue than those of midsummer, dusky reds, browns, and above all of the colour that seems to belong most of all to autumn—yellow.

It is as if, after the excitement of summer and seed-making, there came a sort of lull, while the plants reviewed their past and made plans for the future.

As one walks about one feels a subdued hush.

The plants have had their time of levity and hilarity, and are beginning to settle down and ponder on the shortness of life and the mysteries of creation. A spirit of thoughtful repose hangs over everything, the same (only to a greater degree) as that which falls over the garden at twilight—the unconscious foreshadowing, it may be, of their long slumber to come during the winter months.

As for us, we feel a little pensive too. Summer has danced past us once more, and there are five or six sombre months to be gone through before we can see her gay colours again. We find ourselves beguiled by the spirit of meditation, and, like the plants, take to reviewing our past and making plans for the future.

Making plans for the future plays by far the most important part in our meditations. For hope springs eternal in the gardener's breast. The coming year is full of endless possibilities, and no sooner does one season draw to a close than we are eager for the next. The flowers for one year are no sooner over than we set about gathering seeds for that which is to come. We pore over illustrated catalogues and spend endless time planning what we shall sow. We wander about the flower-beds mentally rearranging, transplanting and uprooting, and we are full of eager anticipations as to what

our garden will look like when our dreams have come to pass.

Meantime a great gathering-in has begun. All over the country, people are gathering ripe things. Husbandmen are gathering corn and fruits in the fields and orchards; boys and girls are gathering nuts and blackberries in the lanes; and gardeners are gathering seeds in the garden. The seed-merchants are especially busy, collecting the seeds, sorting them, making them up into little packets and labelling them ready to be distributed all over the country to those who want them, and making illustrated catalogues describing the beautiful results that may be hoped for by those who buy and sow them. And so many people are there eager to buy and sow, that seed merchants grow rich from the sale of their seeds.

On a small scale we, too, have been busy gathering seeds in our little patch of ground. The more one sees of seeds the more does one marvel at them. I find myself continually exclaiming, "What *extraordinary* things seeds are!" with as much fervour as if it were a new and original remark. The queerness and diversity of shape in the vessels plants keep their seeds in is endless. It is as if Nature had amused herself seeing how many different-shaped bags and boxes she could invent,

and in how many different ways she could pack up the seeds. Not being a botanist I know not whether she has allowed herself to be governed by any law in her methods. To an ignoramus, with a very limited field of observation, she appears to have been governed purely by caprice. To one plant she will give a seed-pod containing only one seed. To another equally deserving, as far as one can see, she will give several thousands; it may be millions, but I fear to exaggerate. She will give to one small plant a seed as big as a bird's egg, while to another larger plant she will give a seed so small that a few hundred of them look like a little brown dust. She will give one plant an enormous seed-pod containing the stingiest allowance of seeds, while to another she will give a small insignificant-looking seed-pod so full and tightly packed that one wonders, as one pours them out, so small a vessel can contain them.

In the matter of the seeds themselves she does not seem to have displayed such bewildering ingenuity. Among such common things as I am acquainted with she seems for the most part to have been content to make beans and balls of various sizes and colours, and little wedge-shaped and triangular things. I noticed that she has taken pains to black-lead and polish the portulaca

seed, so as to give them a metallic appearance. But then she doubtless felt that portulaca ought to have seed a little different from other things.

When nuts begin to ripen one feels that summer is already round the corner. The brown of a hazel nut is autumn, with no streak of summer in it. It is like dead leaves with an October sun on them. We have a hedge of filberts in the garden that are brown and ripe, so that one can shake them from the husks. A young squirrel has discovered them, and enjoys many a meal among them. He is not at all like the squirrel we were brought up to believe in, who was always storing up nuts for the winter, for he consumes all he finds on the premises, and though I have watched him often, I have not seen him carry away a single nut.

I watched him the other day from behind a tree during a shower of rain. He looked very bedraggled running about on the tree with his fur plastered down and all the fluff gone out of his tail. If I had not been convinced that he could not see me, I should have suspected him of trying to show off how many nuts he could devour in a minute. I never saw a creature eat so rapidly. He ran about from branch to branch, pausing at the foot of each twig and looking along it interrogatively to see if there were any nuts at the end. If there happened

to be a bunch he trusted himself fearlessly to the slenderest twig, and while it swayed up and down with his weight, ran along, picked the bunch, and hastened back to a more solid part of the tree. There he sat on his haunches, and ate them as if he were being paid by the job, gnawing the shell through and dropping the bits on to the ground so rapidly that they made quite a clatter, and making such a grinding noise with his teeth that if I had not seen him I should have thought it was William sharpening his scythe.

A constant fight goes on between the wind and the sun at this time of year. "It is my turn now," says the wind; "you have had your fun, I want mine. You must clear out." And as soon as the sun shows himself in the garden he rushes at him and tries to chase him out. Sometimes they wrestle and play together—dodge each other round corners and tear about. But the wind gets the best of it in the end, and it is only when his back is turned, or he is having a nap, that the sun has a chance.

One wishes one could prolong the autumn, with its golden-brown hues and streaky fitful sunshine and wind. We should like to keep the tall plants with us for a month or two longer. But, clever as we may think ourselves with our gardens—our

sowing and plantings, our pruning and tending—we cannot beguile the seasons, capture the sun, or even tie up the wind. They will go their own way regardless of our coaxing.

Very soon these same tall plants, with their autumn gaudiness, will have drooped and made mouldy rubbish-heaps. Then we shall light bonfires and burn them, and all the old weeds that have also had their day—piling up, too, the branches and leaves from the trees that the wind will have blown down by that time. It is something to look forward to on misty October evenings, these bonfires with their ruddy glow, and the blaze and crackling they will make when we put on more rubbish and stir them up.

There will not be much to do after that—nothing in fact but to tuck the garden up in its brown coverlet and leave it for the winter.

THE END

