

Flower-Patch Neighbours

By
FLORA KLICKMANN

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Flower-Patch Neighbours

Date of first publication: 1928

Author: Flora Klickmann (1867-1958)

Date first posted: Oct. 16, 2018

Date last updated: Oct. 16, 2018

Faded Page eBook #20181019

This ebook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>



A PATH AT THE "FLOWER-PATCH"
From a painting by Maude Angell

Flower=Patch Neighbours

By
FLORA KLICKMANN

Editor of
“The Girl’s Own Paper and Woman’s Magazine”

Author of
“The Flower-Patch Among the Hills”
“The Carillon of Scarpa”
“The Lure of the Pen” etc.



LONDON
RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY
MANCHESTER, TORONTO, MADRID, LISBON,
BUDAPEST

Printed in Great Britain by
Wm. Clowes & Sons, Ltd., London and Beccles.

Dedicated to
Harriet Moore and
Marian Moore

Flower-Patch Neighbours [Flower-Patch Series #4]

The S.O.S.

When Aaron Glummick dumped outside my cottage back door the sack of potatoes which I had ordered from a neighbouring farmer, he had no more exciting prospect in the near future (so far as I knew) than the handling of the shilling which he expected for his services.

But it happened that the day was warm; and as a bottle of lemonade always stands on the kitchen dresser for the refreshment of the weary wayfarer (deserving characters preferred), Abigail asked if he would like a glass.

After shoving his cap over his left ear, and scratching his head over his right ear, Aaron replied that he didn't know as how he minded if he did. He was therefore invited into the kitchen out of the sun, where he sat for a few minutes discoursing in a sociable way on the most important events of the day, such as the universal shortage of black currants, the death of Sarah Ann Perkins' cow, and a wedding which was due next day—Saturday. We all referred to it as "*the wedding*," and you will see its importance when you hear details.

The bride-elect had been walking out, only a few months before, with a young man who looked steady and kind-hearted, but whose looks, alas! had belied him. At any rate, he had married some one else. Abigail said it served her right; and she could never make out what he had seen in her. Still, we were all very sorry for the girl's disappointment.

A couple of days after the news of her lover's perfidy reached her, she went to a field adjoining a farm, where there was a pond—only a very shallow one—and placing her hat, handkerchief, moiré-silk bag, and best gloves conspicuously on the bank, she laid herself down carefully in the water (with

her head well out of it, however), and all this in full view of another steady-looking, kind-hearted young man, who was at the opposite end of the field mending a gate.

Naturally he took some notice of the occurrence, and, according to the girl's statement, he promptly risked his life to rescue her and save her from "drowning."

His own version, later, when he was interviewed as a hero by all and sundry, was that, though there wasn't much water, being July and droughtish, it was a damp spot for a girl to take a nap in; and he felt he was justified in knocking off work for a bit in order to tell her it wasn't over-dry just there.

Well—that was how it began: and to-morrow they were to be married. Naturally, such a romantic wedding was not to be missed, and the whole countryside intended to be present. The butcher's young man delivered my Sunday joint at 9 a.m. on Friday morning. When Abigail inquired *Why?* he replied: "You see, miss, I'm going to the wedding."

And when the washing failed to materialise on Saturday, as it is wont, this was also due to the wedding.

At all hours of the day children knocked at the back door with the request: "Please will you give me some flowers for the wedding?" And one aged patriarch hobbled to our house to ask if the master would mind a-loaning of him one of them thur Onion Jacks as we put up on Empire day and the King's birthday, as the wedding would be passing his place, and he'd like to show 'em a flag.

It was even rumoured that the bride had an "At Home" day, printed in silver, on her wedding cards.

So, of course, we were anxious about the weather, since the only reception-room at the bride's home, a kitchen twelve feet by sixteen, would scarcely provide adequate accommodation, should it rain, for the eighty-seven guests who had been formally invited, and no one could foretell how many additional children each woman would bring with her!

Aaron said we might take it from him that there would be bad weather before night, because the Windcliff had worn its nightcap till near noon. (According to local lore, when that dark green giant opposite us has a cloud resting on its summit which doesn't disperse before breakfast, rain is probable.)

But Abigail felt superior to all such signs and tokens. "There'll be no thunderstorm to-day," she said, with the brisk finality of one who is in close

touch with the Fountain of Information; “we’ve got wireless now” (it was in the early days of this wonderment, and ours was the first aerial to be displayed on our particular hillside), “and the weather forecast said that an anti-cyclone is moving rapidly eastward from the Atlantic—that’s us, you know—and the inference is fine dry weather for the next few days.”

Abigail reeled it off like the most practised announcer.

Aaron finished his lemonade with a surprised gulp, and asked what it all meant? And we weren’t the Atlantic, anyhow, so far as he knew the district, having lived in it all his life, and how could a wire know more about it than he did?

Abigail started to explain that we were situated eastward of the Atlantic; hence the anti-cyclone was moving in our direction, and——

But I had seen Aaron pass the window, and being anxious that every one who possibly could should be induced to instal wireless—and only those who live in the remotest wilds of the countryside are able to appreciate its blessings to the full—I went into the kitchen and asked the caller if he had ever listened-in?

Aaron said he had heard tell of ‘un. His brother-in-law from Cardiff had told him some rare lies; but he, Aaron, was not the one to believe that a wire stuck a-top of a broom-handle were a-going to talk to you like a Christian! Why, it was agin nature!

On being invited to experiment with his own ears, Aaron placed his cap respectfully under the kitchen table (we didn’t find the remnants till the following week, when the dog’s box was turned out!) and followed me cautiously into the living-room.

I demonstrated.

He eyed the machine suspiciously, sat on the extreme edge of the chair, and held the ‘phones timidly to his ears, his whole bulk keyed-up nervously, and ready to fly from the room should the mysterious creature “go off” in any unexpected manner.

Now it chanced that an ex-Prime Minister, whose Party had been swept out of the House of Commons holus-bolus at the previous election, was speaking at some meeting that afternoon; and while Aaron listened, he was explaining what a millennium we should have been experiencing, if only he and his Party had been returned to office; and what a disgraceful thing it was that the present Government should be permitted to do what they were doing, and not doing what they weren’t doing; and why didn’t some one do something about it?

Aaron held the same political views as the ex-Premier who was speaking; also, he had once heard him address a meeting in Cardiff, and had lived on the event ever since, till at last he had almost grown to fancy himself related to the ex-Premier. Hence, when he heard his voice once more, he clutched the ‘phones closer and closer to his ears, leaning over more and more towards the instrument, till his head nearly touched it, and was soon completely lost to his surroundings. He even said, “Hear, hear!” at appropriate places, as lustily as any of the audience.

When it was over, and we gently removed the ‘phones from his extended hands, he got up in a daze, merely ejaculating, “Well, I’ll be gingered! I’ll be gingered!”; and groping his way out, he shuffled off like a man in a dream, forgetting both his hat and his shilling——

But not for long!

Aaron was nothing if not “careful”—or, as some people described it, “near.” He was hard-working and industrious as his employer always said; but he couldn’t bear to part with a penny. Neighbours darkly hinted that he must have put by something in the best china teapot; but his wife knew that the teapot was empty; and talk how she would, her husband only gave her insufficient for the barest necessities. If it hadn’t been for her egg money, and the days she went out to work——

So we were not surprised when Aaron returned next day for his shilling. His hat we hadn’t missed—though he had! However, he was quite pleased with a second-best velour, from the large and unique collection of head-gear hoarded by the Head of Affairs, Abigail assuring him that *she* hadn’t taken his hat, indeed! What should she have done with it if she had?

We weren’t surprised that he returned for his money; but we wondered why he seemed so reluctant to leave us, even after I had presented him with a second hat; and why he shuffled first on one foot and then on the other, while he remained on the doorstep. I concluded it was his method of expressing gratitude.

But at last he blurted out: “We shall be a-histin’ a hair-rail ter-morrer. I’ve bin into Monmouth this morning, and they’re a-sending out a man with all the contraptions and fixin’s; and I thought you’d like to know.”

In other words, Aaron had ordered a wireless set to be installed straight away and quite regardless! No wonder that his wife occupied all her legitimate waking-hours, and many when she should have slept, reminding him that the roof leaked and needed retiling; that the pigsty needed rebuilding; that his shirts wouldn’t stand another patch; while she herself craved a wringer more

than anything else on earth. And where had he got the money from which he was fooling away on a wire that wasn't even any use as a clothes-line at that height?

Aaron took no notice.

Yet, in spite of the precipitous haste of its ordering, the machine didn't by any means assemble itself properly at first. Misfortunes began with a damaged valve, for which no one seemed able to account. That necessitated a few days' delay, while they sent for a new one. Mrs. Glummick meanwhile treated the instrument as though it were a keg of gunpowder with a light near by.

When the new valve arrived, it was found that some other important detail had gone astray *en route*. Further delay, while the instrument was returned to the makers.

And still more delay because the new machine, which should have been addressed to Tintern station, was obligingly sent to Taunton station in error, where it enjoyed a period of repose in the goods-shed.

But the crowning misfortune was the fact that Aaron never actually used his "wireless," for he lost his life quite suddenly in an accident, just as the installation was completed, and the instrument he had counted upon so much was left untouched on the side table in the kitchen, where he had planned to sit and listen-in when his day's work was done. It really was a pathetic sight to see it there.

Personally, I wondered how the wireless set stood in regard to his estate. Had he procured it on the hire system, and would it now have to be returned?

To my surprise, I heard that not only had he paid for it outright, but so careful had he been with his savings, that his amazed wife now found herself inheriting something like ten shillings a week, as well as the cottage she lived in; and this in addition to the old-age pension, which she had claimed only a short while before, though there was considerable argument among her acquaintances as to whether she wasn't really a year younger than she had said. But no birth certificate being forthcoming, and everything else being in order, she had drawn the pension for some weeks, and even before her husband's accident had grown to regard herself as one of the new-rich.

Now, since his death, she loomed large as a lady of independent means, which was only her due, seeing the way she had worked without wages for most of her three-score years and ten.

Of course, we expected her to mourn. But we did not anticipate her taking to her bed, and remaining there for months, refusing to take an interest in

anything but her meals.

Each day she said she was weaker, though the doctor said there was nothing fundamentally wrong with her. “It’s her nerves” seemed to be the general verdict.

We all knew she had one secret trouble; her only surviving child—William Gladstone Glummick (otherwise known as Bill)—had taken himself off, years before, after a row with his father; and though it was reported from time to time that he had been seen in various parts of the country, he had never come back, nor communicated with his people. The last news was that some one said he had been killed in the war, and some one else vowed they had seen him in Sheffield.

We knew that Amelia Glummick watched and waited for her missing son—what mother wouldn’t under the circumstances?—but we had never known her to give way to any outward show of grief. She wasn’t that type. Life had been too hard a grind for her to have time to spare for many tears. Yet now she just lay with her eyes closed, and every indication of a rapid breaking-up.

A married niece, who lived near, saw that she wanted for nothing. However much we may object to “capitalists” on principle (and the niece’s husband always had a good deal to say on the subject of capitalists, and all of it “objection,” when discoursing at “The Spotted Cow”), we cherish one if we chance to have it in the family! And the niece took good care to make herself indispensable to the invalid, sparing no trouble in sending along her children to let me know when jelly, or beef-tea, or barley-water, or bottled chicken was running short.

She herself watched over her aunt’s possessions devotedly, borrowing all the saucepans in turn, lest moth should get at them.

“She needs rousing,” said the doctor. Yet nothing seemed to rouse her. Even when her niece, armed with a picture from a newspaper advertisement, tried to interest her in wringers by pointing out that she could now afford the latest and most complicated model, she merely flickered her eyelids and inquired what she should want with a wringer now? Thank goodness, the clothes in Heaven would be whiter than snow, so she needn’t take one with her—though how they would ever get Aaron’s that colour she couldn’t imagine! But in any case, could a lady who had all that a week be expected to do washing?

The niece related the conversation to me with real feeling; she was quite as keen as her aunt had been to have a wringer in the family.

I myself am inclined to think that the poor body took to her bed, in the first place, out of sheer relief at finding she could have a rest for once, with no one to object. And when she got there, she found it so comfortable, and such a pleasant change to be waited upon, that she decided to stay there. At any rate, stay there she did; and no persuasion on my part, nor orders from the doctor, induced her to budge. She seemed fixed there for the rest of her days. And when the niece borrowed, without asking, her carving-knife, she told me, with tears in her voice, that she guessed her aunt had cut up her last bit of pig-meat.

The niece's husband said hopefully that it was evident she wasn't long for this world, therefore they had better do the best they could for her, being her next o' kin. Why not bring her bed downstairs? It would be livelier for her, and handier, too, for people to pop in and out and see how she was getting on.

Amelia agreed to the move—if they would carry her down; walk she could not. So they carried her between them, and laid her out in her best nightgown on the bed, which was placed by the kitchen window, and hung a crochet antimacassar over the foot.

She flatly refused, however, to wear the stylish boudoir cap, sent by another niece (who was a tea-shop waitress in London, and who desired to be in the running when her wealthy relative made her will), said she didn't hold with these new-fangled ideas of going about so that people couldn't tell whether it was meant for your chemise or your best frock; nor all this wearing of your legs in public, to say nothing of women who were old enough to be grandmothers. And before she'd be seen with one of those ridiculous fly-aways on her head she'd as soon think of putting on pyjamas, and going on the stage as the Fairy Queen!

So the lacy confection, with its heliotrope ribbons and blue rosebuds, surmounted one of the bed-posts instead. I assured her it was often displayed thus in the highest circles.

They had just finished "settling her," when I arrived; and the niece, who was taking away some aprons as unostentatiously as possible, via the back door, explained to me that she thought it better, since her aunt was so frail, for her to see nothing which might remind her of work. Therefore she was going to keep the aprons "up to our place," also the best table-cloth and the roller towel.

"She won't need them to be laid out in," she said; "and you never know who might get in when she's lying there all alone."

"And of course we're the next o' kin," the husband added.

"I'm the next o' kin," the niece corrected him—she didn't intend there to be any confusion on that point.

I left them to settle the matter between themselves, and went into the cottage.

As I looked round for a small table to place by the invalid's bedside for the mutton broth I had brought her, my eyes fell on poor Aaron's wireless set. What a boon it would be to the desolate woman! She must certainly be induced to use it.

I had to work circumspectly; but at length, after the mutton broth (which was her favourite dinner, having no teeth, and did Abigail ever put marigold petals in it? her mother always did), I got her sufficiently cheerful to allow me to mention it.

I started by explaining to her how interesting it would be for her to hear the news. She merely had to have the 'phones to her ears at half-past six and she would hear about everything that had happened that day.

But she only asked me what need there was for Aaron to have paid all that for those black round things to get the news, when you could go to the doctor for a bottle of medicine any day, and sit waiting for hours in his surgery with every one else, and hear all the news and everything that happened to anybody for weeks past, and he only charged a shilling, no matter how long you sat there, and it was such a nice change and rest, and gave you a chance to see your friends, too, and after that, you had the bottle of medicine to go on taking.

This gave me the opportunity. I pointed out how terribly cut off from all social dissipation she was, now that she was no longer able to walk the three-and-a-half miles to take part in the joyful re-unions in the doctor's surgery. And what an advantage it was, under the distressing circumstances, to be able to lie in bed, and just listen to everything without so much as walking a single step!

Eventually the wireless won the day, and she consented to experiment.

I switched on the current, and also listened, hoping there would be something likely to interest the invalid. We happened, however, to have struck one of those interludes which will occasionally occur even in the best regulated programmes, when the last item ends a little too soon, and the next performer is not quite due. Whereupon that obliging pianist who seems to live in the B.B.C. studio, and sleep under the piano, straightway sat down to the instrument and started to fill in the gap, playing Doddervinski's famous Nocturne in B sharp major, the one entitled "Camel Masticating its Driver."

If you don't happen to know this inspiring work, I would explain that it is one of those wonderful musical compositions which are all "atmosphere," and have neither beginning nor end, nor indeed any middle that one can ever get hold of. So far, I've not been able to discover whether the noises produced are supposed to be the driver's very reasonable though somewhat raucous protests, or merely the camel's aftermath of indigestion. But be that as it may, I feared the solo was a trifle too modern for Mrs. Glummick's untutored ears, and I was about to suggest that we should wait a few minutes longer for the next item, when her eyes suddenly brightened, a smile lit up her face, and she exclaimed

"Oh, ain't it just lovely to hear that agen!"

I was surprised that she should know it, as it was one of Doddervinski's latest effusions, and I asked when she had heard it before?

But like all wireless enthusiasts, she continued her own monologue, without even hearing my interpolated question.

"Yes, they're a-dusting the pianner keys, right enough," she murmured. "I can hear it that plain; they're a-dusting 'em like as I used to be let do it when I was a gel, and helping with the spring-cleaning at the Manor House. Yes—they be a-polishing atween the black uns at the top now, they allus gets dusty, and want extry polishing there. They're doing of it very thorough, too, like as I had to. Well I never thought to hear that agen!" And her face radiated beatific rapture.

It was pleasant to reflect that, after all, Doddervinski had not lived in vain.

Without having reached anything that even distantly suggested a finale, or giving any hint as to the key in which he was supposed to be playing, the pianist suddenly ceased. And we concluded that was the end, no other conclusion being forthcoming.

Then a lady started a talk on "Right Feeding for Infants." I felt this was quite a safe and interesting topic for Mrs. Glummick. We both listened—a little stolidly, perhaps—while the lady gave the chemical constituents of milk and their action under acids; and when she branched off into the horticultural properties of fermentation, we showed signs of being bored.

But presently she got down to solid earth, and began to descant on feeding-bottles. What she had to say under this heading was doubtless very useful, but unfortunately we didn't hear much of it, for she began this section by telling us that on no account should the baby be given its milk in an old-fashioned feeding-bottle. Here was a detail of the subject which Mrs. Glummick could

understand. She felt she was competent to pass an opinion on it too. Dropping the ear-'phones, she said to me, "Does that ghostess who's talking expect you to take the baby down to the cow? Why, it's worse than the heathen the missionary told us about!"

I tried to explain in simple language the science of hygiene as applied to baby's feeding apparatus. But Amelia Glummick only looked pityingly at me. She had fed eight babies. I hadn't.

Fortunately, Auntie Somebody kindly sang just then, and I switched the invalid on to her.

The main item for congratulation, however, was the fact that Amelia had been induced to listen-in. The rest I knew would be quite straightforward. She would never be able to resist its allurements, with the 'phones lying on the table beside her.

It was that same evening that the niece hurriedly came round to see me.

"Aunt's going!" she said, with a certain amount of pleasurable excitement, but in low tones, as though her normal speaking voice would have been indecorous under the circumstances. "You told me to let you know if there seemed any change in her, and there is. She says she's heard *his* voice, and he's a-calling of her! I expect it's the warning that the end's near! You do hear such things! I remember when old Mrs. Bundle was near took——"

But I didn't encourage her reminiscences, knowing that if she once got well under way with talk, it would be uncertain whether we should be in time even for the funeral! So I told her to hurry back to her aunt, and I would come along soon.

I found the cottage moderately full, the niece, her husband and family being supplemented by all the nearest neighbours.

"She's heard his voice; he's a-calling of her!" the niece told me once again in a stage whisper—the others nodding acquiescence.

"She'll be passing soon. It's a sure sign," one woman confided to me.

"I'm afraid she will if she doesn't get more air," I said. "We mustn't crowd round her like this." I opened the door wide, the odour of the badly-trimmed paraffin lamp was enough to make any one ill, to say nothing of the aroma of the niece's husband's bad tobacco. The company took the hint and reluctantly withdrew.

Meanwhile Amelia, with eyes closed, but the 'phones to her ears, lay

without a movement. I sat down beside her.

“Are you listening to the music?” I asked.

She opened her eyes, and brightened when she saw me.

“No, ma’am; I’m listening for our Bill,” she replied.

“*Bill??!!*”

“Yes; I’ve heard our Bill. He don’t talk all the time, but he’s bin talking. I rekernised his voice the minute he spoke, though I haven’t heard it for fifteen years come next Saturday. There!”—with sudden animation—“he’s talking agin. Why, I’d know it was him anywhere.”

I picked up the other ‘phones, and what I heard was that special announcer whose voice we all know is one of the most beautiful and most cultured, probably, in the world. He was just starting the second news bulletin.

“But *that* isn’t Bill,” I said, remembering Bill, who as a young man was a rough hooligan of the first water, with no grammar and the accent of an uneducated Welsh labourer.

Whether she was wandering in her head, or merely deluding herself, I didn’t want her to be nursing false hopes. So I told her the announcer’s name, who he was and where he lived, and assured her he was not her long-lost son. Yet it seemed hard to convince her.

“It do sound like our Bill,” she kept on reiterating; “I could have sworn it was him talking.”

Whether the announcer would have been flattered could he have heard our Bill is another matter.

I have known more than one mother of a decidedly plain girl who has told me that her daughter was considered to be the very image of some celebrated beauty; and I have known more than one mother of a distinctly dull girl who has enlarged to me on the remarkable brilliance of her daughter’s brain. But it was the first time I had heard such a voice as Bill’s likened to that of the leading wireless announcer.

The niece was undecided whether to be pleased or disappointed at the turn in events. If that wasn’t Bill calling, then perhaps the end wasn’t quite so near after all. However, she kept up her own spirits with the aid of her aunt’s colander, assuring every one that it couldn’t be long now.

And indeed, when I went in a few days later, the aunt looked so feeble that I began to think she was really fading away.

“I’m borrowing the rolling-pin,” the niece had explained, with a mournful shake of the head, when I ran into it in the lane. “Pastry would kill her now, it would sit so heavy on her stomach. It would only make her sad-like to see it, knowing as how she’ll never need a pie again—not in *this* world, at any rate. And a bottle isn’t near so convenient.”

“Have you been listening-in to-day?” I asked.

To my surprise, Mrs. Glummick burst out with a certain amount of able-bodied vehemence: “What’s the use of saying we’re all equal, like some folks says, and every one’s as good as t’other? We ain’t! If I was rich and a lady they’d talk about me on this ‘ere thing; but as I’m only a poor old woman (or, at least, I used to be poor), they don’t bother nothing about me.”

“Why, what could they say about you?” I inquired in surprise.

“They might say I was a-dying, and ask Bill to hurry home, same as they tell all about other people being awful bad, and please come at once. It’s dreadfully interesting to hear what a lot of ill women want to get hold of their husbands and sons, and can’t find ’em nowhere. It beats me, though, how they manage to lose their *husbands* and forget where they put ’em! Sons is different, of course.”

That gave me an idea. Not that I had any hope of reaching Bill; but I felt I could at least give a little pleasure to a poor sick woman.

Next night I sat with the invalid when she was listening-in, and watched her as the following message, recited twice, with the announcer’s customary clear articulation, penetrated her comprehension—

“Will William Gladstone Glummick, who left home fifteen years ago, and was last seen in Sheffield, return at once to Greenacres, Monmouthshire, where his aged widowed mother lies dangerously ill?”

Amelia’s amazement can be imagined. Also her delight. I was prepared for these manifestations. But what I had not anticipated was that she there and then demanded her clothes and announced that she must give the house a thorough spring-cleaning as the only suitable reception for Bill. We persuaded her to stay in bed for the night and promised plenty of assistance on the morrow.

Next morning the niece’s daughter, who slept at the cottage, was wakened at five o’clock (summer time) by her great-aunt, up and dressed, asking where the coal-hammer had got to?

The girl, who never missed reading an account of a criminal case that came her way, promptly associated a coal-hammer, a lonely house, a beautiful girl,

and a wild-looking old woman with Tragedy! And, in a flash, saw the report (with photographs) in the papers, and the final ending “while of unsound mind.” She was therefore thankful to be able to say: “Mother borrowed it last week for father to open the tin of salmon; but I’ll soon make the fire.”

“Well, you’d better hurry; for Bill is certain to come by the night train, and he’ll be in by the 8.20.”

Then began a day of stirring events—so far as house-cleaning could help. Other people beside Mr. Glummick had by now installed wireless, and a constant stream of callers came round to discuss the S.O.S. with the widow and ask if Bill had turned up. Ideas seemed mixed as to what the announcement really was. I was told (1) That the Queen had sent to ask after Amelia. (2) That Bill was coming home to be married, and they were putting up the banns on the wireless. (3) That poor old ‘Melia was that bad, they were already inviting people to the funeral by wireless. (4) That Bill was coming home, and had sent his mother a telegrampt by wireless to tell her so.

But the sum total of it all was the Rousing of Amelia. Not only was she up, but she was also doing, although she was shaky from lying so long in bed. What she wasn’t equal to doing herself kind neighbourly hands came in and did for her. A wealth of practical Christianity can be found among country folk.

When I went round at noon, I met the next-o’-kin, harassed-looking and jaded, bringing back a large stewpan. She told a woeful tale of her aunt’s goings-on.

“Wants to boil a piece of bacon in readiness; started making pastry before we wus hardly up. And if you believe me, I’ve simply been trapesing to and fro, backwards and forwards, the whole morning!”

I could quite believe it! But I didn’t see why she need blame *me* for it.

The S.O.S. was picked up, and passed on to Bill by a fellow-workman in Glasgow. Even if he had desired to evade the summons, it would not have been easy, as the men in his shift not only drank his health, by way of farewell, at the nearest house of refreshment, but had generously made a whip-round “for the old lady.” They all basked in a certain amount of reflected glory, through their personal acquaintance with an individual who had been singled out so conspicuously for national notice.

If any of them had doubts as to the money ever reaching her, they were justified, for Bill found the journey from Glasgow to Greenacres so thirst-provoking, and he himself needed to be fortified so often, that he had precious

little in his pocket by the time he reached home. And a shadier-looking object we hope never to see in our village. Indeed, I'm not sure that I'm regarded as a local benefactor in having unearthed him and reimposed him upon an otherwise respectable community.

But in his mother's eyes he was as an angel from Heaven. Wonderful mother-love! that can see gold in the most disreputable dross, and can forgive even more than the seventy times seven!

Not that she told him any of this. Certainly not. When he slouched in sheepishly through the back kitchen, her first words of welcome were, "For pity's sake do go and wipe your feet on the mat, and don't come in tracking mud all over the clean place! Can't you see that the floor's just been scrubbed?"

To Bill, however, this was quite in order; it wouldn't have seemed like coming home if he hadn't heard it.

By way of introducing the boiled gammon, cooked beetroot, spring onions, black-currant tart, carraway-seed cake and rhubarb jam, eagerly awaiting him in the pantry, she said casually, later on, "I suppose you could do with a snack now? I'll see if I have a bit of anything in the cupboard. I'd have got something in if I'd known you was coming. But since your father was took, I've only enjoyed poor health."

Rightly, one ought to end here, with a close-up showing Amelia Glummick at one side of a well-spread kitchen table (wondering, volubly, whatever could have become of the carving-knife!), and William Gladstone opposite her, steadily working his way through the best meal he had eaten for many a day.

But there was a further little incident, very slight, but bearing on the case.

Having got into the limelight and attracted more public attention in one single week than had fallen to her lot in the whole of her previous existence, it was only to be expected that some of Amelia's acquaintances showed restive signs of jealousy.

The niece was anything but gratified by the return of the prodigal, especially as—to this day—Mrs. Glummick is still inquiring for missing oddments. Other women felt dimly that they had been defrauded of *something*, and had wasted sympathy on an undeserving object. Moreover, the airs Amelia developed with her sudden prosperity were an added grievance.

I was not altogether surprised, therefore, when she came to see me one morning, clad in her best widow's outfit, with the news that she had been

insulted. Never had she been called such names in her life before, and in her own home, too; and she intended to claim compensation (a popular word, with which, like the word *dole*, every one is familiar nowadays!).

She was on her way to her solicitor (she had acquired him at the settling-up of her husband's estate; and his name had added to her pomp and circumstance ever since); and would I kindly give her the name and address of the young man who had said it—the young man whose voice was like Bill's—and she could bring witnesses.

It was a little while before I could disentangle her grievance from a rich and rampant overgrowth of totally irrelevant matter. But at length, when stripped of accessories, it amounted to this: "That Jane Price" had been spreading about the news that she, Amelia, had been called an "aged" woman on the wireless—and for all the world to hear, too! And Jane Price had said that no one would call *her* aged, she'd take good care of that, without having to pay for it.

After many variations, mostly in a minor key, on the same theme, I gathered that it was Amelia's intention to instruct her solicitor to write to the wireless announcer and claim compensation for the insult. Jane Price had said she should make him apologise in wireless too, but Amelia didn't mind about the apology, so long as she got compensation. (Love of money was evidently going to her head!)

What did I advise?

I considered for a moment, wondering exactly where *I* came in, having supplied the announcement!

"Of course you can claim compensation," I told her. "But whether you get anything will depend on facts. And the first thing you will be called upon to provide will be the proof of your age. How can we set to work to find out exactly what your age is? I remember that came up when you applied for the old-age pension. I'm sure this is the first question the magistrate will ask you. If you are not over seventy, no one ought to insult you by calling you aged, and we must deal with the insulter; but if you have already reached old age, so as to be entitled to the pension, well——"

"Of course, I don't want to get any one into trouble," said Amelia hurriedly. "I'm a bit hasty myself at times; and I daresay I've called Aaron names, when it's been washing-day, that weren't exactly out of the Bible. But that Jane Price has been egging of me on. You can tell that young man to keep his compensation. I'll overlook what he said, and let bygones be bygones. I'm sure I'm the last one to bear a grudge against any one." And she got up to go.

“Oh, don’t decide too quickly,” I said. “Probably we can find proof of your real age. Think it over.”

“Yes, I will,” she said.

She is still thinking!

When I recounted the interview to the Head of Affairs, he continued to smoke placidly and turn the pages of the *Spectator*, merely remarking: “Blessed are they who expect no thanks, especially after they have butted in where no one asked them to!”

A Flower-Patch Festival

I had been listening to a friend relating elaborate details of a recent illness—very long and painful and tedious (the illness I mean), and I was very sorry for her.

The following day it chanced that another caller also gave me extensive data concerning the same complaint—her husband this time. And I was truly sorry for him.

By the end of the week, I myself developed a pain, and it grew rapidly worse and worse. And as each fresh symptom presented itself for my consideration, I recognised every one. They tallied exactly with the descriptions I had received from my friends. Then I knew that I, too, had “it”! And I was more than sorry for myself.

Forthwith, knowing I had a long and painful and tedious illness ahead of me, I tried to be thoughtful for every one, and forgiving, and kind, and considerate for their feelings. And they, in turn, gave me mutton broth in an undertone.

When the doctor arrived, he looked at the broth and smiled—though I knew he would be sorry for the smile when he heard what was really the matter with me. So I told him, patiently and gently, and enumerated the symptoms and modestly indicated their whereabouts.

“Can’t be!” he said emphatically. “Pain’s in the wrong place entirely. You surely don’t think you keep your phonigeitisgramaglottis *there*! What you’re suffering from is over-work, and listening to too many ailment recitals! Go to the Flower-Patch at once, and stay there three weeks.”

As it was early in December, that meant spending Christmas out of London. And I wasn’t sorry. Things hadn’t gone particularly well the previous Christmas. Not that it was any one’s fault. It was merely one of those diversions which occasionally occur, even in the best regulated households—happenings which the men-folk are always certain could have been prevented by the judicious exercise of a little forethought, tact, and organisation.

The trouble the previous year was influenza, which laid low my domestic staff, leaving me lamenting a week before Christmas, and no one but Mrs. Bungle, the charwoman, to assist me in the entertainment of a battalion of

Christmas guests.

And then, just as I was wondering why Mrs. Bungle hadn't turned up that morning, and whether it wouldn't be wiser, after all, to call off the invitations, a small boy arrived with a note, in which Mrs. Bungle explained her inability to raise her head, it being full of water. But would I like Miss Jenkins, who lived upstairs, to come and do for me?

"I'll own she's a bit So-So," Mrs. Bungle wrote; "but at any rate she's clean, and she'd keep an eye on you till I can get round again to put you to rights."

I gratefully accepted the offer of Miss Jenkins, despite the So-So (whatever that might be). And when the lady arrived, she seemed a capable, sensible, middle-aged woman, though her hair was more brassy than is usual with the professional charwoman.

As the Head of Affairs was late getting home that evening, I asked her to keep the cutlets hot.

"That'll be all right, 'm. I'll pepper 'em well." Quite a bright person!

Next day, Mrs. Bungle, having a temperature, it was evident she wouldn't be back before the holidays. Miss Jenkins seemed anxious to do her utmost to supply all deficiencies. Said I need not put off my friends, as she was quite used to helping when there were visitors in the house.

"Ladies, are they? or gentlemen?" she asked. . . . "Both! That's a pity! If 'twas only gentlemen now, you could just *turn* the toilet covers, and make do. But you've got to be more thorough like when there's ladies. . . .

"Do you want 'em to come again? Or to clear out pretty soon and shake off the dust like? I can do 'em either way," she explained obligingly.

Nevertheless, I decided to cancel the invitations, and we looked forward thankfully to spending the time quietly by ourselves.

Miss Jenkins agreed to come round on Christmas morning to help me get the dinner—we decided to celebrate on roast fowl, as we were so small a household.

Next day, however, Miss Jenkins said she was sorry that, after all, she wouldn't be able to leave home Christmas Day because of her little girl, Kitty.

"*Your* little girl?" I queried in surprise. "How old is she?"

"Nine," said Miss Jenkins, quite unperturbed.

"Dear me!" was all I could think of at the moment, but I tried to convey

various things, all of them denoting disapproval, by my tone of voice.

“Yes; and one can’t leave a child of that age to get her Christmas dinner all on her own lonesome,” Kitty’s mother continued.

“Er—of course not,” I said. Then recollecting that it wasn’t the child’s fault, and there are four good helpings on a fowl, I told her to bring Kitty with her.

She accepted with alacrity. And all seemed well. Yet the following day she came with more regrets.

“It’s on account of my son John,” she explained. “He’s on the Bakerloo Toob, and finds he’ll be off after twelve.”

It was useless to express further surprise. And there would be a fair-sized piece of boiled ham with the fowl, and no lack of pudding and mince pies; so I said, still with disapproval—

“You had better tell your son to come round here for his Christmas dinner.”

She thanked me effusively. Then an idea occurred to me; and I asked—

“Are there likely to be any others coming home that day?”

“Well”—she paused thoughtfully, apparently reckoning up the pros and cons of a lengthy list—“I don’t think any of the rest of ’em can get off, unless it’s Gertie. She’s kitchen-maid at the Cedars, and her mistress did say that if the fambly went out to dinner Christmas Day, she could——”

“How many children have you?” I interrupted her.

“Six,” she said complacently; “but they aren’t all in London.”

In desperation I told the butcher to send me six pounds of sirloin on Christmas Eve. I meant to take no risks! He promised a nice cut. When it arrived, it weighed thirteen pounds.

Miss Jenkins praised its appearance. Said she had told Gertie of my kind invitation (though we never got as far as that); and would I mind if Gertie brought her young man? Such a nice, steady-going, quiet young fellow, with no mother. (I was relieved to think that at least I shouldn’t have to provide for her.)

I hurried upstairs as soon as I could get away from the young man’s biography, because I feared that John’s young lady was also waiting in the offing!

I was kept very busy all Christmas morning, cooking for Miss Jenkins's party, to the accompaniment of eulogies on the excellence of my assistant's children. I wasn't sorry when a neighbouring friend 'phoned to ask us to spend the evening with them.

Miss Jenkins said she was quite willing to stay till we got back, and we weren't to hurry on her account, she was used to late hours. As she had Kitty and John and Gertie and Gertie's young man for company, with provisions galore, I surmised that she wouldn't be dull.

She wasn't!

At half-past seven we rang her up to know if everything was all right. But, as no amount of ringing got any answer, we decided to go home and see if she had left the premises in our absence.

Long before we reached our gate, however, we understood why no one had heard the 'phone bell, for the sounds of bawling merriment coming from our establishment could be heard afar off. We let ourselves in unnoticed, so great was the uproar. We found our dining-room in the possession of fifteen people, most of them in various stages of intoxication, who were informing the neighbourhood lustily that "Little Baby's gone to Sleep" (though no one would have believed it, hearing the row!). Gertie's young man was accompanying them on his concertina, aided by Gertie at the dining-room piano.

Assuming we should not return till late, Miss Jenkins had sent out for her friends and relations, likewise for stronger refreshment than I had supplied.

The Head of Affairs dealt promptly with the company.

As we carried the drawing-room chairs back to their proper place, and collected up my best engraved glasses (one of them broken), and the dining-room china and cutlery which was strewn all over the place, we agreed that Miss Jenkins was decidedly So-So!

It's a wise mistress who knows what goes on in her house during her absence! I knew of a case where the daughter of one of our oldest ducal families left her country house in the south, at the end of July, for the shooting in Scotland. All the servants went with the family, excepting the gardeners. The house was vacated at ten o'clock on a Saturday morning, a gardener and his wife from one of the two lodges being installed in the mansion as caretakers.

By four o'clock that same Saturday afternoon, both the lodges were occupied by parties renting them (from the gardeners) for the holidays; the

mansion was filled with several sets of people; the gardeners and their wives, from the two lodges, running the house like a residential hotel. In addition to the money they made in this way, they sold peaches and grapes and nectarines from the glasshouses, to the boarders.

All might have gone well for the gardeners' pockets, only—the master of the house appeared unexpectedly! It was thought that an under-gardener, dissatisfied with the “pickings” allotted him, was responsible for this. At any rate, the owner's wrath reached a climax when he found four husky young men installed in her ladyship's special suite of rooms, utterly regardless of the value of light brocades and satins and delicate furnishings.

You never know!

To return to the Jenkins episode. Though that had happened the year before my phonigeitisgramaglottis affliction, somehow it still lingered in the air, and seemed to put the Christmas spirit out of gear. I found myself waiting for signs of oncoming indisposition in the kitchen, which would again necessitate a few days off duty at Christmas. And I saw Mrs. Bungle again laid low with a temperature, and another So-So lady deputising.

It was really a relief when I had such a good excuse for leaving London, and journeying to a spot where at least I knew everybody's relations to the third and fourth generation, and need not fear having an unlimited family sprung on me unawares.

Feeling cheerful, as I always do at the thought of seeing my cottage, in a fit of expansive exuberance I invited a famous author, who chanced to be in my office the day before I left town, to bring his wife and celebrate Christmas with us.

He accepted. Said he had often wanted to see the flowers.

It wasn't until I had taken two hours, in a dense London fog, to get from the City to my home on Sydenham Hill, that I remembered it was December, and anything but a month of flowers. And I wondered why I had invited a man whose existence centred on London, and whose world was typified by his club in St. James's Street. His wife, an extremely brilliant woman, I knew and admired greatly—at a distance. But she had never stayed with us. And I wondered!

Our last visitor, a Miss Blank, hadn't proved herself entirely a gem of purest ray serene. And after she left us (with her car charges to pay, and no tips for the servants) I did say I was done with visitors for ever and all the future.

She was a relative-in-law several times removed (though not removed nearly far enough to suit me!). And she had ‘phoned unexpectedly, one day when I was at my Flower-Patch, saying she happened to be just passing through Tintern, and where did I advise her to put up?

What could I say, except “Come here”? At any rate, I knew that was what I was expected to say.

It is amazing how many people manage to find themselves “just passing,” when we are staying at the cottage—more especially the people whom we merely love in a Christian spirit, but don’t *like*! And yet, when our friends come here for a pre-arranged visit, they most of them congratulate us on having a place that is so unget-at-able, so out of the way of everywhere, so on the road to nowhere, and so completely at the back of the world. And they add that they are sure they could never find it alone and unaided. Yet, judging by the number of our uninvited callers, we might be the central junction where every one had to change for everywhere!

Miss Blank explained that she was on her way from London to Torquay. I suggested that she might have found it a still shorter cut if she had travelled via Aberdeen. She replied by asking if she was to pay the assistant in the office for the ‘phone call, or had we an account with them?

When she finally reached us, she was brimming over with complaints about the distance from the station; but added that she knew I was just the sort of person to have a house at the back of beyond.

That is the worst of Miss Blank; she always knows just what you will do (particularly after the event!). She is one of those wonderful women who only need to look at you to size you up immediately—especially your frailties.

For instance, the way you sharpen a lead pencil may seem harmless enough to you, but Miss Blank will deduce quite a number of your secret sins therefrom. Do you sharpen it with the point looking *away* from you? Then, probably, that implies a domineering disposition, a tactless temperament, a partiality for broad beans and a leaning towards bigamy.

Mind, I don’t say it does mean all that, because I myself always make the pencil look in the opposite direction when I sharpen it. But Miss Blank can discover down-grade tendencies in all your actions, with side-ramifications equally shady, till you get lost in her maze of sub-conscious indications. And by the time she has explained where a partiality for broad beans is leading you (downhill, of course), you feel you could easily commit bigamy, if you chanced to be Miss Blank’s husband, merely to escape from her brilliant brain.

This is to explain why I wasn't overjoyed at the unexpected visitation. However, it fortunately happened that we had a specially respectable dinner that night—always a source of satisfaction when a guest arrives uninvited.

After Miss Blank had finished the final course, she said, "I really was undecided whether it would be worth while to come up here, after I had 'phoned you. But I'm glad I came now, for I've enjoyed that meal."

It was as well to understand clearly that she hadn't come with any idea of enjoying my society. Not that I had had any illusions on that point!

Next morning, after she had breakfasted in bed, I heard a strident voice calling:

"Dear! *Dear!!*—Oh, there you are"—as I appeared on the stairs and found Miss Blank in a sketchy outfit, at the bathroom door. "Will you be so kind as to give me some other soap?"—extending towards me a cake of really superior soap, which I reserve for visitors, as it is rather choice and expensive. "This soap has a most objectionable odour," she continued. "I always detest it, and I can't think how you can use it. I'd like some other kind, please."

I promptly got the lady a lump of yellow primrose soap, and left her to it.

Lunch that day was of the cold meat and salad variety. Miss Blank, having seated herself at the table, surprised us by suddenly rising again, and, seizing a glass dish of beet-root, carried it away and placed it viciously on the sideboard.

"You won't mind my moving that, will you, dear? I can't *bear* beet-root; can't think how any one can eat it." And she re-seated herself complacently; while those who liked beet-root gazed at it affectionately from the distance.

I was glad she proposed to leave us by the afternoon train. It is surprising what an amount of irritation a visitor of that type can induce, even during a short stay.

Though perhaps I am to blame. Yes—I daresay it is my fault.

Not long ago, a stranger wrote and begged for my autograph for her collection, explaining that it was the one thing needed to complete her life's happiness. As I do try occasionally to be a really nice person, I let her have it by return post.

A few days later, she sent me an analysis of my character as revealed by my handwriting; and though I had always known I possessed a large number of defects (my relatives never having shown undue reticence on this matter), I had no idea I owned anything like the array the unknown autograph collector discovered. She said she was always perfectly frank with people (I could quite

believe it), and added that her usual fee was five shillings; but in my case, she would accept half-a-crown!

Doubtless it was my fault, and I was unreasonable to allow myself to be irritated by Miss Blank. But when she left us without even saying, "Thank you," I did feel I would never again ask any but intimate and well-trying friends to stay with us. And I wondered therefore, why I had invited Mr. and Mrs. Author, who were not at all likely to be intrigued with a place where they would be out of touch with what *they* would call civilisation.

"I'm not certain that I was wise in inviting them," I said to the Head of Affairs when I got home.

"I'm quite *sure* you weren't," he replied conclusively. "Mr. Author is the very last man to be able to stand winter in the country with nothing doing. He'll be bored in an hour. And though Mrs. Author is a charming woman, she's sure to catch cold. She'll come in high-heeled slippers and with nothing on; and then what will you do with her?"

"Lend her a sunshade!" I said. But all the same, I realised I had made a mistake.

"It will be misery for all of us," continued my husband, warming to the work, "to have that unfortunate man cooped up in a house, miles from everywhere, with nothing to do but watch the clouds rolling down the hills, while he listens to announcements of further depressions from Iceland. And people from an expensive service flat like theirs, with every known labour-saving gadget, will never fit into a cottage where there isn't even electric light. But don't worry," he ended generously, "I'll take him to the Wood-house, and he can help me saw up those big oak logs."

And the thought of Mr. Author, with his lily-white hands and always immaculate clothing, being invited as a special Christmas treat to saw up logs in the old Wood-house nearly gave me hysterics.

I could only hope that, as there were yet fourteen days to Christmas, Providence would kindly intervene and something occur to prevent what, I foresaw, would turn out a catastrophe.

“December Sunshine”

But when I reached the Flower-Patch, and looked around, things brightened. At any rate, it wasn't bare, bleak and barren as the City I had left behind. For one thing, in place of black fog, the sun was shining.

And then the violets were in bloom, and a good many primroses. The laurestinus bushes were covered with clusters of coral-red buds and creamy pink blossoms, against ever-green leaves. Some clumps of polyanthus were making a brave show of flowers. The yellow jasmine was smothering the walls with its stars, the long stems hanging down like cascades of sunshine. A scarlet anemone was in bud. Spanish irises and daffodils and crocuses were pushing up through the soil. Here and there some courageous daisy opened a bright little face to the sun. The small purple violas had not all gone from the rock garden; several pansies were in flower, and a few stocks were doing their best to add to the garden colour. While the marigolds had never left off blooming. In sheltered nooks the wild strawberry was actually in flower. And most touching of all, four roses were still doing their best to bloom, not great blooms, but still they were roses; and a spray of the ever-green honeysuckle, which smothers a south window, had one or two blossoms to its credit.

No one can realise how lovely a few flowers can be, unless they come on them unexpectedly like this, in December, after enduring the perishingly cold fog of town!

Even the bare trees didn't look desolate, for though they had shed their leaves, they hadn't shed their lichens; also apples and pears and hawthorn trees were nearly all dangling great bunches of mistletoe covered with white berries—the splashes of bright green giving the trees quite a festive look. It was a good berry year; the hollies were literally gleaming crimson; while the rich dark green of the ivy (which ought not to be allowed to clamber up the trees, but does it just the same) always looks especially beautiful when the leaves are off the trees. And, in company with the ivy, some trees were waving silvery tufts of Traveller's Joy, that darling of the woods that climbs and climbs and festoons everything it can lay hands on, till at last it surprises one by blooming gaily, and in a most frivolous manner, at the top of some venerable oak or dignified fir tree.

The larches were bare, but the pines and other conifers were in prime condition; and lots of golden-yellow leaves were still rustling on the beeches.

As there had been very little frost, the ferns were as green as in summer—greener, in fact, now that the heat was over; and the many clumps of saxifraga, stonecrops, and pinks which carpet the borders, all helped to give the place a furnished look, so different from the desolate garden we had left behind in town.

And then the birds—such quantities of them, and all busy; they made everything seem so alive. Robins, wrens, and thrushes were singing as cheerily as though it were spring. Tits were carrying on their interminable conversations in every fir tree. Great yellow-tits, blue-tits, the jaunty little cole-tits, and the fascinating long-tailed tits—such sociable little fellows.

A party of over a dozen gold-crested wrens were twittering all over the spruces and deodars. I am told that some of these birds migrate for the winter, but with us they remain all the year round, and hardly a day passes without their gentle little voices being heard about the garden.

In London, even if one be fortunate enough to have a big garden, December is a blank month of lost hopes and pathetic endings. The evergreens simply gather soot, and most of the other plants wisely betake themselves to winter quarters underground, while a cheerless absence of sunshine, with often a dark pall over all, disinclines one even to look at the garden, much less walk in it.

Therefore it comes as a real enheartenment when one reaches the Flower-Patch to find a garden, in December, bursting with new beginnings, in addition to much that is reminiscent of the previous summer.

Of course it rains, gallons of it, at intervals—where *doesn't* it rain in the British Isles? But there will be plenty of dry weeks, when the sun shines all day, and the sky is blue, with piles of silvery white clouds. The day after we arrived, the thermometer registered 79 degrees in the sun—not bad for the time of year!

The scents of the garden in a mild winter are lovely. First and foremost I put the tussilago, or winter heliotrope, as it is erroneously called. It belongs to the daisy family, its only connection with heliotrope being a strong resemblance in perfume. What a lovely scent it is! And to think that before I had seen its blossoms I used to root it out as coltsfoot! I quite agree it can be a nuisance in the garden once it gets a footing in the borders; its roots go down and down and on and on, till it takes a lifetime to eradicate it. But if it can be allowed to roam over a bank, or enjoy a corner of the orchard, it will scent the place when most other flowers are over.

Another perfume which haunts the winter garden is that of the violets. Even the leaves have a delicate cool odour. A few violets in a bed, and some late sprays of mignonette, will easily make one forget it is December and fancy it is September, so poignant is the perfume that pervades the soft moist air.

While most of the flower scents are over for the season, and balm, bergamot, and the various mints have settled down to their winter sleep, there are still any amount of delightful leaves to rub and sniff as you pass along the paths. In some places you cannot walk without treading on lemon thyme, rosemary, cotton lavender, winter savoury, marjoram, sage, the ordinary lavender—all of which have long since wandered beyond their allotted corners over the border-stones, and spread themselves out where they have no business to be.

Outdoors it seemed so soothing and refreshing, after the grime and gloom and smells of London. I took heart again, and thought that Mr. Author might easily find himself in a worse place on Christmas Day.

But the Head of Affairs was not so optimistic.

“He won’t want to spend his time looking for glow-worms; nor paddling in patent leather shoes through that brook running down the centre of the lane!”

And later—still bent on being cheering, “Just think of the car that brought us up from the station—why it’s positively getting bald and growing side-whiskers! How will he take to that after his gorgeous Daimler! But there! I expect they’ve forgotten all about the invitation by now!”

Only they hadn’t! A letter arrived next morning:

“We shall come two days before Christmas, if that suits you. We are so looking forward to the peace and quiet. And do please arrange for us to have good old-fashioned Christmas weather. We long to see some really white snow.”

Not wishing them to be disappointed when they arrived, I wrote back that there was no likelihood of a Christmas-card landscape, as the weather was mild, and we seldom had snow. But I told them their Christmas dinner was strutting about the orchard in fine form; the Christmas-tree had already been cut and brought down from the larch-wood, and the Yule logs, which had been felled a year ago, were waiting in the old Wood-house.

Preparing for the Festival

I hadn't much time, however, to meditate on the trials that were in store for our guests; there was so much to do in the few days before their arrival.

First, I had to see about the prizes for the Sunday-school children, not only in our own village, but also for those in the next village. The books had come down in packing-cases, and were now piled up about the study floor, as well as on tables and chairs. They had to be sorted, and dispatched to the two responsible clergymen—one village being down in the valley below us, and the other up, upon the top of a three-miles-away hill.

Next we did up the presents for our friends and neighbours. Some were more useful than ornamental, perhaps, but none the worse for that. We knew old Mrs. Blossom would be delighted with her aluminium hot-water bottle; she had been bemoaning how her crockery bottles would persist in cracking.

Some presents had a history. Being one day in the garden belonging to a lady whose place adjoins one of our woods, I was surprised to see a mad-looking collection of empty tins, rusty trays, old hats, derelict umbrellas (open), streamers of white rag, and other *objets d'art*, all suspended from strings stretched over her vegetables.

“What in the world——?” I inquired.

“Yes! Isn't it awful!” she said. “But the gardener says it will scare the pheasants. He's cross because they've eaten the vegetable marrows, though, for my own part, I'd *give* them the lot, I do so love to see the beautiful creatures strutting about the garden.”

I felt guilty, because they were *my* pheasants. Wild ones, it's true. But they live in that wood. I also love them; and never a shot is allowed to be fired at them. I hate all killing that goes by the name of sport. Still—that doesn't justify other people's vegetables being devoured, and their garden turned into an exhibition of old junk!

When Christmas Day arrived, the lady found on her doorstep a large pumpkin (from the row hanging in my kitchen) inscribed, “With the Pheasants' Best Wishes.”

Abigail's motto for Christmas presents is “the bulkier the better.” And when she pointed out to me that we never used the wringer which lived at the

cottage, while Amelia Glummick had always longed for one, we tied a bow of blue ribbon to the handle, and ticketed it for Amelia.

I needn't go over all the items. Every one knows what an intriguing matter the Christmas presents business is. By the time we had remembered everybody we wanted to remember, a large table in the study was heaped high, the parcels being grouped according to locality, so that any member of the household going in a particular direction could deliver those for that area.

Followed the pleasant occupation of getting out the "best things" for company. I do like a festival to be really festive; and it adds so much to the feeling of importance if one gets out special frills and furbelows for the house, and puts up fresh curtains—not that you could tell whether they were just put up, or had been hanging a couple of years, for nothing gets soiled in the clean air. And a house which stands in the midst of grass and flowers and trees, with no road and no trains near, and no traffic passing by, never has dust blown in at the windows. There is no dust to blow!

Then came the decorations. We had none of the electric lighting stunts so popular in towns; but we had unlimited holly and mistletoe and ivy trails. If one can be recklessly lavish with these, a place looks Christmassy at once. Great bunches of red-berried holly hung from all the antlers on the walls; festooned ivy linked them up. Tall vases were filled with yellow jasmine, low bowls with violets and primroses in moss and fern; and with sunshine streaming through the windows, not much else was needed in the way of Christmas decorations.

Finally, the tree was placed in the study. It was a noble one, and looked lovely when hung from its tip to the base with long tinsel streamers, through which could be seen a fascinating assortment of coloured balls, chocolate cats, pink sugar mice, small dolls, sugar watches, and many other small oddments, without which no Christmas-tree would be worthy the name.

The tree had a special mission that year, being for the delectation of two little orphans who had appeared unexpectedly in our midst. Their parents had died of some epidemic in a remote part of China, leaving a boy of nine and a girl of seven to be passed on drearily from one to another, across the continent, till they had reached Shanghai, where some one in authority had sent them home to England.

Here, the only relative forthcoming was an aunt, a semi-invalid with next to no income, staying for her health in our village. She was prepared to lavish unlimited love on them; but unfortunately that didn't go far towards feeding

and clothing them, though she gave them her own meals gladly. She thought she could manage the little girl's clothes, but the boy's were a problem. And they would need boots. And——

As we happened to arrive that same week, she called to ask me how I thought £75 per annum could best be laid out, so as to support the three of them. That was all she had, even if dividends came up to expectation, and they didn't always!

Of course I immediately got into touch with orphanages.

Nothing was settled as yet, however; and we were concentrating on giving them a happy Christmas.

Straightway another difficulty arose. Mr. and Mrs. Author had no children, nor any nephews and nieces. Also, they were "looking forward to peace and quiet." Obviously, they weren't expecting to spend Christmas Day entertaining unknown youngsters.

More discussions!

At last we compromised. We wouldn't ask the children to Christmas dinner. The grown-ups should have that in undisturbed tranquillity. Then, if the afternoon were spent basking in our adult intelligence, possibly it wouldn't be too much of a strain for them to endure a children's tea-party, and we would wind up with the tree.

Having settled it thus, I hoped for the best—though I knew, alas! from a chequered past, that few things seem more thoroughly determined to go wrong than do one's good intentions! And the more blameless they are, the greater the likelihood that they will finally succeed in upsetting somebody's apple-cart!

I remember an old party in the village who, after long and verbose details of her objections to various other women who attended the sewing meeting, finished up (apropos of nothing at all!)—

"Ah, well, it's just like the minister read last Sunday, 'Woe unto him who does his best to please everybody.' "

By this time the preparations had reduced me to that exhausted condition which seems essential if one is really to enjoy one's visitors on any festive occasion! Even the dog had been running under our feet most of the day, picking up every bit of evergreen he could get hold of, and trotting with it to any one who would give it attention—it being part of his official duties to retrieve pencils or other oddments I may drop under my writing-table, and to

assist estimable persons who bring in sticks.

But after he had managed to get in everybody's way, and was nearly annihilated beneath a step-ladder which collapsed, Abigail exclaimed—

“My dear Patch, if you can't find a suitable job, do, for pity's sake, go and get the dole, and be done with it!”

I think I must have become slightly less poised, and unruffled, and serene, than is my aim in life (*i.e.* when I chance to have a leisure moment in which to “aim”). For when I apologised to Abigail for having been perhaps a trifle too—we will say, exigent, she replied—

“I reckon saints and sinners all get equally ratty when they've a cold in the head coming on; the only difference is the words they use.”

I sincerely hoped I hadn't a cold in the head coming on. And I wished I knew under which heading I was classified.

At last the moment arrived when we surveyed our happy home with conscious pride, and said, “*Don't* we look nice!”

“It isn't bad,” said the Head of Affairs, when he was appealed to, in our craving for further approbation. “Not that I can see much difference myself” (he is nothing if not truthful!) “excepting the broken pair of steps. But it's as well that you gathered some green stuff and flowers, for it's turning very cold. The wind has gone round to north-east, and the thermometer has dropped considerably; I shouldn't be surprised if there were several degrees of frost to-night.”

Next morning, when Abigail brought my cup of tea, she said—

“Have you seen outside?”

“No? Don't say it's raining!”

She drew back a curtain, and, behold, a world so whitely radiant that surely Heaven itself can hardly show greater purity. All silently and unexpectedly the snow had piled up an average of six inches deep. The branches of firs and cedars bowed under the weight of it; small bushes had become large round-topped mounds. All paths were lost, and the many flights of stone steps about the garden were so merged in snow as to be most treacherous, unless one knew exactly where they were.

As I looked out, snow began to tumble off the branches of the belt of conifers known as the Squirrels' Highway. I soon saw the reason, as streaks of

reddy-brown fur flashed from bough to bough, and Bushy-Tail with his wife skipped along to the big Scotch fir and ran down the trunk to where the nut-boxes hung. They were very disgruntled when, after digging the snow out of the boxes they found their breakfast was not in its usual place, and only a few empty shells in the bottom of the boxes—these they flung to the ground in a most indignant manner.

And they were not the only breakfastless little people. Dozens of birds sat, a hungry crew, in the surrounding trees, keeping watch on the windows, till the Dispenser of Provisions should put the daily ration of rolled oats on the birdboard and window-ledges. As soon as I appeared at the window, a robin darted on to the ledge outside, and, half-buried in the snow, cocked his little head on one side, and looked inquiringly at me.

The Christmas-card landscape was complete in every detail.

And the visitors were due to arrive at four o'clock that afternoon!

Only one thing now remained to be done—fresh apples had to be arranged on the various hearths.

I wonder if you know what the scent is like, when apples stuck with cloves are placed near the fire, and left to roast as they please—not for home consumption, but merely for their perfume? Crab apples are far and away the best for this purpose, their scent is so strong and spicy. Failing these, cider apples are the next best; whereas the large, handsome cookers, so popular when baked, are the least “scenty” for hearth-fire purposes.

As there are always any number of crab apples, and cider apples, lying about the lanes, and in the fields, during October and November, it is an easy matter to keep the home supplied. They last three days, and then the scent begins to fade, and we put down fresh ones. The cloves, which are a mild extravagance, are not really needed with the “crabs,” as the perfume of these little apples is extremely aromatic, and quickly fills the house.

Even people who don't like the odour of raw apples, invariably like the apples roasting on the hearth, as their scent is quite different from that of the raw fruit; and it fills the house with a sweet, almost appetising scent, suggestive of all sorts of pleasant things; and it is especially delicious on cold frosty winter nights.

So I renewed apples, before going to meet our guests—a little row on each hearth, fairly close up to the blazing fire.

The Authors Arrive

Owing to the snow, the station car couldn't get all the way up to the house, but had to drop our visitors a little lower down the hill, necessitating a climb of a couple of hundred feet up a narrow steep path which winds through a wood on the hillside, with a succession of rough stone steps at intervals, and overhung the whole way up by forest trees. In the morning the postman had been obliged to crawl up on all fours in places, the loaded branches were hanging so low.

Since then the gardener had made it just passable: but the north-east wind had been still busier, and had frozen all the moisture on the path and steps into solid slippery glass. I dared not venture down it, even with my spiked alpenstock. I could only wait for them up above, and wonder in what frame of mind they would arrive at the top. Would they be suffering from what Virginia calls "complex parallaxes" or merely be temperey-mental?

The silence of a wood muffled in snow is awe-inspiring; the only sound was an occasional thud when some branch got rid of its load. The little dog was the one blot on the picture; his supposed-to-be-white coat looked a most disreputable grey against the snow—and we had given him *such* a bath, too, only the day before!

Then voices were heard in the distance.

Far below me I saw my husband assisting Mrs. Author over the stile which gives entrance to the wood. The dog precipitated himself downhill with a welcoming tail; once started, he couldn't stop—the ground slipped from under him.

I halloaed. They looked up and waved to me.

But to take one's eyes off one's feet on such a footing was disastrous. Next moment both visitors landed on their hands and knees, and my husband, in trying to save them, followed their example.

By slow degrees, and with several further tumbles, they got half-way up the hill, and then paused for a breather, while we exchanged greetings across the intervening space. When they started for the final "lap," Mr. Author once more kissed the steps in front of him, and in so doing let go his walking-stick, which promptly made its way right down to the bottom of the hill, and not by the path, either! It took a direct course, slithering over the frozen snow

between the trees, and might be lying there unto this day, had I not seen and marked its wicked career! And it was his best stick, of course—a gold-mounted presentation article, only taken out on high-days and holidays such as this!

Cautiously I got down the path till I could grab hold of Mrs. Author, and I hauled her up. There was nothing for it but to leave the two poor men to clamber down among the snow-covered rocks to retrieve the stick; and we could only hope we should see them again some day! But I didn't want the lady to go rolling down after them.

I confess I had become a little nervous on the score of Mrs. Author, owing, probably, to the many defects I had discovered in my cottage when trying to look at it with Mrs. Author's eyes, and comparing it with her super-up-to-date West End flat. Not that I had ever known her to be critical. It was rather an aloofness as of royalty which seemed to surround her. When I had met her in London, she always had the air of a kind and gracious princess, but a princess all the same, and a high-brow one at that, Persian literature being her speciality. I had been studying the subject myself of late, in order to be able to fill up gaps in our conversation, should any occur.

But the more I studied, the more I wondered what excess of impulsiveness had ever prompted me to invite such a star of the first magnitude to visit my simple home, and in the country too, with an abbreviated domestic staff.

By the time we got near enough to shake hands, I was in a state of abject apology for everything, including the weather. Only she said—

“Isn't it glorious! It exceeds all my dreams. I never saw a more beautiful wood.”

And she seemed to mean it too!

She was wearing stout Russian boots and tweeds, and a big coat suited to the weather. At least I needn't worry lest she would catch cold. Her face glowed with the exercise and keen air. I took heart, and determined to hope for the best.

“What's that?” she said suddenly, sniffing the air, as we continued climbing—up the garden by now. “Whatever is that delicious scent? It can't be a flower in all this snow!”

“It's the oak and apple-wood we are burning on our fires,” I told her.

“It ought to be put in a bottle. It's perfectly lovely.” And she continued to take long sniffs of it.

And yet, when we got inside the house, and she exclaimed, “Why, you haven’t any lights yet—and it’s past four!” my brain was still so confused that I felt this was a sin of omission, and I was being reprovved for my negligence—only she didn’t *look* reprovving. She continued—

“And to think we’ve had the electric light burning the whole day, every day, for the past fortnight. Isn’t it wonderful to have daylight, and that lovely sky, at this hour!”

Then my head cleared, and I realised that it wasn’t my fault this time! I explained that we never under any circumstances have to light the lamps before sundown; also, we have daylight an hour and a half longer up here than down in the valley.

But again I felt apologetic, remembering her superfine electric lighting. How would she regard our collection of decidedly antiquated lamps, which didn’t even boast up-to-date shades with fashionable forms of embellishment? Indeed, only that morning I had seized a length of satin with lace insertion, which I had intended for a camisole, and had manipulated it (deceptively, I hoped) till it had a distant resemblance to a lamp-shade. Abigail said it was perfectly exquisite, and at the time I had been rather pleased with it myself. But now——Would our guest recognise its origin?

The men breezed in at that moment, and I heard Mr. Author saying—

“That was a game little machine to bring us along like that.” (The reference was to the side-whiskered car!) “I don’t believe my car would have tackled such a hill in that condition.”

At any rate, I needn’t worry about our local cars!

By the time we had got through tea—a sit-down country tea, with meat patties, ham, poached eggs, honey, cream, and similar local products—I began to think it might not be so difficult, after all, to entertain our visitors for a few days. They seemed so willing to enjoy it all.

We had the greatest difficulty in keeping Mr. Author from eating the roasting crab apples!

Mrs. Author, scorning any idea of being tired with the journey, started to go all over the house directly after tea. She saw everything there was to be seen, excepting—an edifice in the garden, which Mrs. Widow, my caretaker, had elaborately papered with a large bundle of old Christmas-cards I had put into the waste-paper basket some time previously. She had taken me out to see (and admire) her handiwork almost as soon as I had arrived, explaining that

she had been most careful to put those bearing inscriptions from my own relations all together in a special place of honour on the wall, where they would be in full view of any sojourner, who could study their beauties at leisure!

But, apart from this, Mrs. Author had seen most of the premises; and before another hour had elapsed she had taken the linen cupboard to her heart, so to speak; revelled in the oddments on my pet dresser in the living-room; and gone into ecstasies over the china pantry.

This last is really a small room, with a nice large window looking out on to a slope of grassy hillside—yellow and purple and blue in spring, with primroses, violets, daffodils and bluebells; later it becomes pink and yellow and white, with rosy vetch, milkwort, birdsfoot trefoil and moon daisies.

And in the right season a pair of tree-creepers build their nest behind the ivy which surrounds the window, and several years in succession have raised a family there.

Inside there are rows and rows of wide shelves edged with hooks, filled with enough china and glass to stock a shop, much of it having come down to me through several generations. Visitors usually say this is one of the nicest rooms in the house! And the feminine mind is invariably captivated by the chest of drawers in one corner which holds my private store of what an American called “utilitarian domestic fabrics,” such as tea-towels, glass-cloths, dusters, polishing cloths, all quite distinct from those appertaining to the kitchen; also a stock of aprons (muslin, print, rubber, and gardening) used indiscriminately by any of my visitors who may be seized with a commendable desire to make themselves useful; and always appropriated by Virginia and Ursula when gathering peas, slicing beans, or attending to the flowers. My big store-cupboard also stands in another corner.

Close beside this room is a small apartment which in grandiose moments we call “the butler’s pantry”! It contains a lavatory basin with hot and cold water, a plate-rack, shelves, and rails for towels. This is reserved for my exclusive use. Here I do any washing-up when necessity calls for it, or my spirit craves a change from office work. Being right away from the kitchen, which is in another wing of the house, I interfere with nobody when I wish to embark on such-like operations.

Mrs. Author was enthusiastic over the arrangement. Hauled her husband out to see it, explaining its attractions. He endeavoured to look as intelligently interested as do most men, when called upon to admire domestic equipment.

And though on several occasions that evening I endeavoured politely to

steer the conversation in the direction of Firdausi, Hafiz, and other Persian literary celebrities, Mrs. Author generally responded absentmindedly with some such remark as—

“Of course, you wouldn’t trust the washing-up of that best china to any one but yourself.”—“So nice to be able to get a tea-cloth and hot-water without having to go into the kitchen.”—“And only using them yourself, they’ll keep a good colour, too.”—“Even if a saucer gets broken, the cup would still be decorative on a dresser-hook, wouldn’t it?”—“So handy to have vases and water close at hand when you want to do the flowers.”

The subject was still under discussion when a diversion occurred. Mr. Author had just been remarking on the intense all-enveloping silence out-of-doors, when soft voices, outside the living-room window, started to sing a carol. Not the bawl and gabble of the beggar who howls into one’s London letterbox, and has to be routed at frequent intervals for weeks before Christmas. This was the small church choir from a neighbouring parish, which had braved the weather and come specially to sing to us.

The vicar and his wife were there, and the little party, muffled up and standing with their lanterns in the snow, seemed to carry one back to the days of Washington Irving and Dickens. The singing was simple, but very reverent. One felt it was exactly what carol singing ought to be. Mr. Author was charmed with the event, its whole atmosphere so unlike one’s painful town experiences.

Of course, the singers had to come in for refreshments. When they were finally leaving, the vicar murmured, for my ear alone, “We’ve brought the washing!” And to my surprise the large laundry basket stood in the back entry.

Seeing the laundress, as they were driving over to us, they had asked if there was anything to come our way. Gratefully, that hard-working woman had put the basket on the car.

Such is the kind thoughtfulness of country life.

After supper, as we sat round the big wood fire in that peaceful frame of mind which is engendered by warmth, a satisfying meal, and nothing needing to be done, or to be worried about, at the moment, Mrs. Author suddenly said —

“I wonder how you managed to import so exactly the right atmosphere into the place?”

It was kind of her to assume that we *had* the right atmosphere, whatever

that might be! But no one can import atmosphere—not as a permanency. Most people impart something of their own particular personality to their environment (for better or for worse), or impress it with their ideas; and atmosphere may result from this. But it can't be procured by the yard, or arranged according to schedule.

(I knew a girl who wanted to give her home a literary atmosphere—said she would like to have a choice quotation on every wall, as a sort of inspiration. My friend Virginia suggested that she should start on the scullery, and hang above the sink—

“Break! Break! Break!
On thy cold grey stones . . .”

They never got any farther!)

However, the Head of Affairs meant our guests to have exercise.

“Come up to the Wood-house in the morning,” he invited them, “and take a couple of cuts from one of the great oak logs there. You'll find the atmosphere right enough after five minutes' play with the big double-handled cross-saw. I do my daily chores there, and, among other useful jobs, chop our own wood. Probably the lady of the house wrote and told you that our existence here is on simple primitive lines?”

“No! And it hasn't struck me in that light so far,” said Mr. Author generously. “But what she did tell us nearly moved us to tears. Fancy being able to rear your own Christmas bird, and know for a fact that he isn't frozen Chinese and a couple of years deceased! While to grow your own Christmas-tree seems like a fairy tale. And, above all, to be independent of coal strikes, whereas our ration was a half hundredweight a week—which we seldom got! We're aching to handle those logs!”

“You'll ache more after you have handled them and sawn them,” the owner of the cross-saw promised them cheerfully, as he piled up some more applewood and pine chunks on the fire.

“I've decided, when I get back to London, to smash *our* log,” Mrs. Author announced in a militant tone.

“You can't smash a log,” we both told her instructively. “Either you must saw it, or split it with a wedge and a sledgehammer.”

“Ours will smash! And I'm going to do it,” she said firmly. “It's a metal atrocity which lives in an empty gaping grate. It conceals electric bulbs, and has some fake ivy leaves and a bit of red glass—to add insult to injury! And to

think we've spent evenings in front of that mechanical, inhuman abomination, and imagined we had kindled a hearth fire!"

"But electric light is very useful," I said in a placating tone—remembering also how inadequate our lamplight must seem to them.

"Useful? Yes! And so is a dust-sheet. And they are both about as alluring!"

This was a distinct libel on electric light. But it brought us round to the subject of lamps; and after they had sung a pæan of praise concerning the luminosity of lamplight and the comradeship of candles, I became so expansive that I actually told about the silk which I had used to manufacture a lamp-shade in their honour—although I had vowed Abigail to secrecy!

"What a thrifty idea to make it do double service," said Mr. Author.

And then I had to explain most carefully that it hadn't a double purpose; never had been and never would be, a camisole! It was only the assistant at Harrods who had described the two yards I purchased as "ideal for camisoles."

But the Head of Affairs began to pay attention.

"I noticed you were putting up fresh curtains yesterday," he said. (Why is it that a man always gives these domestic secrets away?) "And I see they are a striped material. I do sincerely trust you haven't been trying to be thrifty with my new night apparel which I brought down with me. Those two lengths of stripes look very much like——And now that the steps are broken, how can we get them down at night!"

Our Visitors go Exploring

We had intended to give our guests a trifle of air, by motoring them to see the Abbey and other high-lights of local interest. But the snow settled all that. Next morning I expressed my regret that they couldn't go far afield.

“But why should we rush away,” asked Mr. Author, “the moment we've arrived, and start to look at some other place, when we haven't started to see this neighbourhood yet! If you don't mind, we'd like to go out on our own and just explore.”

“Not till you've made a cut through that log,” said the Head of Affairs briskly. “Because once you go out by yourselves, you're safe to get lost; and probably I shan't set eyes on you again till some native trails you home by starlight! And then, what assistance am I likely to get? And to-morrow is Christmas Day!”

So after breakfast the visitors went up to the old Wood-house. There, amidst long ivy sprays, which have crept in through the tiles, forming a lovely wall decoration, sunshine coming through door and window, and sweet spicy-smelling pine branches, cedar wood, apple boughs and oak—some well-seasoned, others newly down and exquisitely patterned with tiny ivy, green mosses, and silver lichen—they were initiated into the mystery of wielding a five-foot, two-handed cross-saw.

They fancied themselves frightfully when, after plucky but strenuous labour, the Head of Affairs sang out, “Stand clear,” and amid loud applause a great chunk fell with a resounding thud on to the stone floor. They wanted to go on indefinitely, but one cut is all we allow a novice at first. We don't want any one laid up with a stiff shoulder.

I suggested that if they craved an opportunity to do their good turn for the day, they might carry round several of the Christmas parcels for near-by recipients. There were still a good many waiting delivery. With liberal parting injunctions about not losing their way, they set off with a fair assortment of packages.

When they returned, they were bubbling over with data, having chatted with every person they had seen.

The first individual they met was a man carrying the main portion of a

birch tree on his shoulder. Complimenting him on his strength, they asked where he had felled it.

“In the Free Woods,” he replied. (A large tract of woodland along one hillside was set apart centuries ago for the poor belonging to the district; and any parishioner who chooses to regard himself as coming under this heading, is at liberty to help himself to timber for home consumption, but not for commerce.)

They congratulated the man on his good fortune in being able to get such fuel free, gratis, while most of the rest of the country was suffering from a coal strike.

“I don’t know as there’s much to be thankful for,” he replied. “After all, it’s got to be sawed up, and nobody don’t pay me for cuttin’ it up. Why should I be expected to work for nothin’, I’d like to know?”

I told them we have only one really bone-lazy man in the village, and I guessed they had come across him.

At the first cottage they visited, a dear old soul—a staunch churchwoman—was eager to show them the wireless set which her grandson had installed as a Christmas present.

“Of course, sir and ma’am, it’s only a crystal set, not one with two lighted handles” (alias valves) “like the one they have at the vicarage. I shouldn’t presume to have a set like the vicar; but I shall be able to hear quite as much as is becoming for one in my position, I daresay.”

Their next call was at a farmhouse, where they were soon deep in an agricultural discussion with the farmer. He had no particular grievance against either the weather or his crops or the Government. But he had a supreme contempt for the many amateurs who embark on various species of farming nowadays, without adequate experience; the so-called dairy farm adjoining his, which yields a prize crop of thistles, being the text of his discourse.

“But how do they manage to carry on if they’ve had no sort of training?” Mr. Author inquired.

“Well, first they reads the farming papers; then they buys barrer loads of books and studies ’em a lot, while the cows are a-bellowing to be milked; then they puts the milk in the churn; and after that they just sits down and sends along for my missus!”

At another cottage a man had shown them how to cut great blocks of rugged stone into clean, even slices, as easily as though it had been cheese.

They were now keen to add stone-slicing to their forestry accomplishments.

Mrs. Author had her own special admirations. She was amazed at the lovely china, old furniture, and even antique books, which are treasured in some of the cottages. And no dealer in antiques or summer visitor need hope to “pick them up for a song.” The owners know their value perfectly well; moreover, they won’t part with them at any price.

Once bitten, twice shy. We had a nasty experience in the district a few years ago. Some strangers took an empty cottage, ostensibly for the husband’s health; he posed as being a composer. The wife made herself very amiable, especially with her humbler neighbours; and began by asking if they would mind selling her a couple of chairs, or a table, or a few plates, as her own beautiful furniture (described in ornate detail) was warehoused in London and difficult to get at. Any old things would do, and she always pointed out the items she desired. She went to all and sundry with this plea, and gathered up all manner of valuable old furniture, china, brass, and ancient pictures for next to nothing—she paid sixpence, I remember, for half-a-dozen genuine old spode dinner plates and a tureen—the cottagers being kind-hearted and so sorry for the poor lady whose husband was really dying, although he looked so extraordinarily robust! Indeed, so feeble was he, that she had to keep a large cart and a strong horse, solely on his account; though some of us wondered why she didn’t have a governess cart, or something more comfortable for the poor invalid than a wagon!

Presently it was noticed that he continually drove loads of “something” covered with tarpaulin, to a distant station. Then a porter from that distant station brought the news that a certain table, which he identified as having belonged to his cousin’s husband’s aunt’s step-daughter (resident in our village), had been sent off by goods train, with a truck-load of other furniture, to an antique shop in Brighton.

Little by little it came out that the woman had squeezed everybody, right and left, and had secured every valuable she could possibly lay hands on, giving the merest pittance for them on the plea of the expense entailed by a sick husband (who, all the while, was working with the strength of a removal man, loading trucks with the spoil!).

Having skinned our village, she toured the county, till at length people slammed the door in her face when they saw her coming.

At the end of two years, having made a small fortune at the expense of the cottagers, she departed to plunder another district. To-day, if one admires some

antique in farm or cottage, the owner will often say, proudly, "That Mrs. Blank did her best to grab it, but I was too smart for her. I kept it in my bedroom. That's how I managed to save it."

In addition to china and old oak furniture, one comes upon various out-of-the-way things in some of the village homes. Mrs. Author was greatly impressed with a collection of horse brasses which she saw over the mantelpiece in one farmhouse, and all polished till they shone like gold.

But I think her greatest admiration was for a "herdsman" they met. Coming round the corner in a lane, they saw approaching them a string of seven large-horned fearsome-looking cattle, with no visible chaperon. The Authors only just had time to bolt through a field-gate and shut it after them, to escape possible death! By this time the foremost animals had reached the gate, and stopped to gaze at the strangers, with the usual local curiosity and natural interest. Then it occurred to terrified Mrs. Author that perhaps they intended to come into that field! But at that moment a shrill voice in the far rear piped out: "Now then! Get on, Daisy! Get on, Bossy! D'ye hear?" And the file ambled on in a leisurely manner, a little boy of eight bringing up the rear. As he passed them he flicked a thin twig about a foot in length, adjuring Clover, who was also inclined to linger, to "Get on." Then he said, "They won't do nothing. I'll see you're all right. Needn't stay in there." And, feeling very small, the two came out, thanking the valiant youth for his promise of protection. The cows had wandered out of the barn-yard and had been making their way to an upper pasture, evidently in search of grass, which had so mysteriously disappeared from the home fields, with the coming of the snow. The small boy had been sent to find the truants, and was escorting them back home.

"Now what *would* or *could* that child have done if they *had* turned round and gored us?" Mrs. Author asked me.

"He would merely have said, 'Get on,' and they would immediately have 'got,' " I told her. The domestic cow is a most amenable animal where humans are concerned, though town people are so often afraid of her. But she can be a terror to her sister-cow, if she takes it into her head to object to her. Few people realise this. A mix-up of herds, owing to some careless person leaving an intervening gate open, may lead to several funerals in the farm-yard!

"I've realised one thing this morning," said Mrs. Author. "We Londoners may be quite smart at the three R's, but there's a lot we don't know, especially about producing the absolute necessities of life, and making bricks without imported and carefully prepared straw. The countryman seems so well equipped for the business of keeping alive. Each time I asked a question, I

realised how ignorant I was of essentials.”

The quaintness of Londoners' questions has become a by-word in most villages. A lady of intellectual eminence, who was visiting us, studied a Wellingtonia tree, which is about fifty feet high, very broad at the base and tapering to a point. At last she asked the gardener—

“How do you get up to cut it that shape?”

Politely surprised, the man replied—

“In these parts, we just leaves 'em to grow, ma'am; it seems the easiest way.”

And there was another celebrity who said she had a passion for digging potatoes. So we gave her a basket and a gardening fork, and left her to it. She didn't bring in many, considering the time she spent over the job.

Next day the gardener applied to me—

“I s'pose I'm to leave them old potato haulms a-sticking in the ground, as the lady planted 'em again so carefully after digging up the potatoes? They aren't exactly ornamental or healthy-looking now they're withered. But if you want 'em stuck there, of course——,” etc.

The much-degreed celebrity said she thought we grew the next year's crop that way!

“By the way,” said Mrs. Author later on, “we found two most lovable little children as we were going through that coppice. They had evidently been on an errand. But when we came upon them, they were standing silently, hand in hand, watching a robin, and they looked just like the Babes in the Wood. There was something unnaturally wistful about them, though they smiled when we spoke to them. I wondered if they belonged to either of the families we were bound for, so I said to them: ‘Where does your mother live?’ It gave me quite a shock when the little boy looked up at me with big grey eyes and said quite simply, ‘In Heaven.’ I declare I could have cried over them, they looked such a pathetic little pair.”

I related the orphans' history, and this enabled me to introduce the subject of the Christmas tea-party, which I hadn't mentioned so far. I said I hoped it would not bore them.

But Mrs. Author was most enthusiastic. Went upstairs and hunted among their belongings for suitable gifts. In addition to a string of beads for the little girl, she brought down a handful of *bébé* ribbon and some fancy

handkerchiefs. Out of these, with some scraps I unearthed, she made quite an extensive wardrobe for the doll I had got for the child. Mr. Author produced a pencil which could be made to write in four different colours for the boy, and a pocket-knife which concealed a variety of fascinating implements on its person.

Evidently I need not worry on the score of the children.

The Party

Christmas morning brought our guests a pretty little greeting. The wind having dropped and the weather become milder, they had not closed the French windows which open from the bedroom on to an upper veranda.

The many family pensioners having arrived early for their breakfast—which is usually placed overnight on the veranda—naturally came inside the room to make inquiries, when they found the table bare. It is a serious thing if the Dispenser of Provisions forgets them when the ground is covered with snow.

Thus it came about that before the church bells rang on Christmas morning, before anybody had wished any one else a Merry Christmas, a robin perched on the back of a bedroom chair, and sang a sweet little carol at the top of his voice, till he succeeded in waking the two sleepers. Of course they sat up in surprise. But he didn't mind that. He preferred that people should wake up, and get him something to eat, when he was hungry and it was winter outside. Only they didn't know all that.

Hearing other noises, they discovered a cheeky little blue-tit who was clinging to a pincushion which hangs at the side of the mirror, and with his tiny beak was pulling out the pins one by one, and dropping them on to the dressing-table. What his object can be in doing this I've never been able to make out, but it is his favourite occupation if he can find that pincushion. If he can't, he looks about for some other form of mischief. Anything like a bit of cotton or wool hanging out of a work-basket attracts him; he will tug at it till he gets it out.

In addition to the robin and the tit, Mrs. Chaffinch had also come in search of the rolled oats. She knew where they were kept, and was patiently standing beside the covered bowl which contains a goodly supply.

Mr. and Mrs. Author remained motionless, for fear of disturbing their unexpected visitors. But they need not have worried; those birds had no intention of leaving until they had got what they wanted.

When Abigail arrived with tea, she said, "Out you go!" But they merely dodged around her till she picked up the bowl and put their rations out on the bird-table. Then they followed her, and a crowd soon joined them. And in between each mouthful they twittered energetically, evidently discussing the atrocity of being kept waiting till that hour for a meal.

“Well! I never before had a bird come into the bedroom and sing me awake!” said Mrs. Author. “I wonder what he was really saying?”

“Abusing you, I expect,” said matter-of-fact Abigail.

There were a number of taps at the back door before breakfast, and Abigail frequently went along to the study, where the presents were arranged; but it wouldn't have been “becoming” of me to make inquiries as to the why and wherefore, it being agreed that no one was to mention the word “presents” till the afternoon, when they would be distributed at the party.

At four o'clock the first contingent arrived—Kenneth and Effie, the little orphans, with their aunt. Followed secret whisperings with Abigail, who received sundry packages from them, and promised faithfully not to look inside as she added them to the heavily loaded “present” table in the study.

Several other children were due, but I wanted to see the effect of the tree on Kenneth and Effie before the others arrived. So, although the tree was not supposed to be seen before tea, we took the two children in for a private view. Never shall I forget the look on their faces as they stood, hand in hand as usual, transfixed before the gleaming wonder.

All they said was, “*Oh!*” But the boy looked up at me with wide-opened eyes and smiled such an understanding smile, while the girl simply squeezed my hand in ecstasy.

They were very shy, old-fashioned children, due partly to the fact that they had never been with European children. The boy had a sweet, refined face, but was serious beyond his years. It was pathetic to see the anxious look he had worn on his arrival at his aunt's—uncertain what was in store for them, and wondering if they would be wanted. That look was wearing off now—his aunt had done her best to banish it. But he knew that his future was still undecided, and he seemed to be waiting patiently, but very unchildlike, for whatever trouble Fate should next send him. Effie was more light-hearted. She relied on her brother for everything. His mother, when dying, had put Effie in his charge. He couldn't do much for her, but he invariably held her hand, feeling his mother would wish him to do so.

Poor little lambs! As they stood there gazing at the tree, Mrs. Author stooped down and kissed them.

“You dear little Babes in the Wood,” she said.

The boy smiled back at her, though he didn't know what she meant.

The other children having arrived, tea was the next important event. Here,

again, Kenneth and Effie stood speechless with wonder, while the other children exclaimed loudly, and chattered excitedly, on seeing the coloured lights and the gay decorations.

Abigail and I had taken considerable pains over the table. When they had all taken their appointed places, it was found that what looked like a log with some robins standing on it was placed in front of Kenneth, who, later, was amazed to discover that it was made of cake covered with chocolate. In front of Effie was a cottage made of gingerbread, with Father Christmas balancing himself on the chimney. And in front of Mr. Author was a copy of his latest book—only it was made of marzipan covered with white sugar icing, and the title of the book in pink sugar.

Of course there were heaps of other things—piles of nice sticky buns, a large pink-and-white cake with “A Merry Christmas” on it, which was placed in front of Mrs. Author; and another big cake covered with almonds and a gorgeous red frill all round it, and a piece of holly on top in front of the aunt. There were china birds among the flowers all down the centre of the long table, with little rabbits and lambs and cows and tiny dolls, and things like that, wandering about among the cakes and the crackers. But public interest centred on the cottage, the log, and the book, and the pleasure they gave more than repaid me for my trouble in getting them executed by a West End firm.

As the tea progressed, the chirpy voices of the other children never ceased. They compared everything with other parties and other teas they had known, deciding mainly in favour of mine! But the little orphans could hardly speak for joy, and when we called on “Miss Effie” to “open the cottage door,” the child trembled and the tears came into her eyes from sheer emotional excitement. Whereupon Mrs. Author put her arm round her, and helped her hold the knife and make the first grand cut in the gingerbread, and pass the pieces round.

Then Kenneth was called upon to saw his log, which he did with an eager, flushed face. Next, Mr. Author was requested to cut his book—but that he flatly refused to do. Said he was going to take it back to London with him and show it to everybody. Cut it, indeed!

So, as there was plenty more to get on with, he was let off, on the understanding that he helped Mrs. Author cut her big pink-and-white erection, and the aunt to cut the almond-topped cake with the gorgeous frill.

When the crackers had been pulled, and everybody had reached the “No-thank-you” stage, we adjourned to the study, Abigail joining us.

No need to describe the shrieks of joy which greeted each item as it was

handed down to the youngsters from the tree. Every one knows the delicious pleasure which comes from seeing children absolutely happy; and I never saw children happier than Kenneth and Effie were, with a look of marvel and joy as each fresh book or toy was handed to them. And their delight when Patch was called up to receive a chocolate cat, or the beautifully scrubbed beef bone which Abigail had decorated with a blue ribbon (blue being his colour!) and hung on the tree.

Presently we adults were able to examine our own packages—and what a lovely collection fell to my lot! There were two separate dozens of eggs, big brown ones (and new-laid eggs at Christmas-time are precious); a basket of walnuts; several baskets of big rosy apples; a beautiful old pink lustre jug, which I had known for many a year hanging on the dresser in a certain farmhouse; a pot of flowering geranium; home-made sausages, a fowl and some cream (these last had all been put in the larder!); an old cookery book (as I collect them)—all these were from surrounding farms and cottages.

The gardener had made a most beautiful birch-broom for the master—quite a work of art in the ornamental way he had bound it all together. In addition he had made a new sawing-horse, a specially tall one, as we are not short persons and hate having to stoop over sawing. It would have been still taller, he said, only, unfortunately, after making it indoors at his home he found it was too big to be got through the door! So he had to cut a few inches off its legs! But it was—and still is—a fine article, and so constructed that it has one place for small logs, and another for big logs. This being too large to come in the study, we all trooped outside to inspect it.

There is something genuinely beautiful in people giving of their best when at no time have they a superfluity—and all with a desire to be generous and give pleasure.

Looking round to make sure that the children were enjoying themselves, I found Effie sitting on the floor nursing the dog as well as the doll, and saying over and over again, as she swayed to and fro: “Dear doggie, I’m so happy! Dear doggie, I’m so happy!” Patch rolled his eyes ecstatically and wagged his tail placidly in response. He can stand a lot of that sort of attention!

Kenneth had slipped into a corner and was reading one of his books. The other children were chattering together all the time, just like a bevy of blue-tits in the larches.

Presently, when all the gifts had been distributed, Abigail slipped out. I was talking to the aunt. Mrs. Author gathered up her presents from the general turmoil of paper and ribbons and took them upstairs.

A little while later, I went out to help Abigail clear away the tea things, which we had left standing. To my surprise, there was Mrs. Author, clad in one of my aprons, helping Abigail in a most business-like way.

“Now you go and sit down,” she said to me, “and let some one else take a turn. We’ll be finished in five minutes.”

We had a few games; but, strange as it may seem, these fell flat, on the whole, simply because those two little orphans didn’t know how to play. They had never been with European children in their lives before, and had no idea how to romp and riot over “Musical Chairs” or “Blind Man’s Buff.” It was a strange new world to them.

But when all gathered round the piano, and sang “Once in Royal David’s City” and “There’s a Friend for little children,” they seemed happier and quite at home. And how sweet the little voices sounded!

Finally came the collecting of the presents—everybody afraid they were leaving some of their own behind! Then the muffling up and the good-byes. Kenneth and Effie seemed unable to find many words, but they looked their gratitude. The other children were ordinary healthy little mortals, with no emotions worth mentioning, and they said good-bye quite heartily, without giving it a second thought.

It was a considerable business lighting all their lanterns. Mr. Author was quite fascinated with this part of the programme. He had never seen a party set off by lantern-light before. The Head of Affairs was seeing the whole contingent safely to their various homes. Mr. and Mrs. Author and I accompanied them as far as the top of the wood, where we could see them descend into the valley.

We had just said our final farewells, and were watching them starting on the descent, when Kenneth suddenly left the others and ran back. Taking hold of my hand and looking at me with his large serious eyes, he said: “We haven’t *half* thanked you for all the lovely things. But, oh, I do hope you’ll be very, very happy, *always*.” And he ran down to catch up with the others.

Dear little lad! He had so little to give, yet he gave so much. There was something so touchingly lovely in the whole-hearted, unfeigned gratitude of the child.

“Isn’t it beautiful,” said Mr. Author, standing beside me, “when one, at least, returns to give thanks!”

We watched the group going carefully down the rock-hewn steps and

narrow woodland path in single file. Above—a lattice work of bare, glistening, frosty branches, with intensely brilliant stars shining through. Below—the lanterns twinkling among the trees as the little party went winding down the hillside.

Mr. Author watched them with the greatest interest. At last he said: “I never thought to see the Canterbury Pilgrims in real life. But there they are!”

The Wind-up

Next morning I surveyed the piles of cake, buns, sweets, etc., the motley collection of “left-overs” which invariably haunt the domestic tea-table for a week after a party.

I wished aloud that it was the custom here, as in China, for guests to take home the remains of the feast with them, for no one wants to finish the remainders next day. I was sorry I hadn’t packed up the cakes and given them to the aunt.

“I’ve heard,” said Mr. Author, “that where the Chinese guest is of exalted rank, he isn’t bothered to take the eatables with him, but, instead, the remnants of the feast are sent to his house by a trusty retainer who can be depended upon not to eat the whole of it *en route*, and to deliver at least a portion of the good things at the guest’s door! Now, why can’t I be the trusty retainer?”

Happy thought! I made up a basket-load, and, ever so pleased at the idea of once more playing Father Christmas for the benefit of the little orphans, Mr. and Mrs. Author went to call on the aunt, and inquire after the well-being of every one.

They seemed to enjoy the visit. So much so that they booked up the children for next day, when—weather permitting—they proposed to take them by car to the nearest pantomime.

Each day they planned some little pleasure for the children, when they weren’t planning a big one. And Mrs. Author even got so far as to be scheming pretty frocks for Effie, and wondering whether Kenneth’s vests were really thick enough for so frail-looking a child.

There was no need for me to worry any longer lest Mrs. Author was being bored with our simple life, for she asked me if I could possibly do with them till the New Year? Of course, if I had other plans, I mustn’t hesitate to say so, etc. But they were so enjoying everything.

After I had assured her that we were grateful for their company, she asked a further favour. Would I mind, or be *very* shocked, if she washed a pair of stockings and hung them out on the veranda?

I said: “Of course not!” But Abigail would gladly do it for her. And if she was running short, I could lend her all she needed.

But she explained that she wasn’t short. Had heaps. And on no account

would it serve the same purpose if Abigail did it. The fact was, she simply longed for once to have something that had dried in the sweet, pure, open air. There was the veranda with the sun shining full upon it, and it had set her absolutely longing to wash something—she didn't mind what—for the sheer pleasure of hanging it out there in the sun to dry. After years of garments dried indoors by a commercial laundry, it would be a real treat to have the fresh air blow on something. Was I *very* scandalised?

I told her: "If you open the corner cupboard in your bedroom, you'll find a clothes-line-*de-luxe* and some super-clothes-pegs. My friend Virginia is afflicted with the same mania for hanging washing on that veranda. She presented the clothes-line and pegs for this purpose, with her blessing on whoever wanted to use them. You'll find hot water in the bathroom, and no one can see what you hang on the line, save the man on the top of that hill twenty miles away."

When Mr. Author returned from a tramp an hour or so later, I heard roars of laughter upstairs. Then he came to me. "Do look at what that wife of mine has been up to! She's got a laundry establishment on your premises!"

Sure enough, she had quite a collection of small items fluttering cheerfully in the sun and wind; and she looked positively radiant as she surveyed her efforts.

The Head of Affairs was away that day. He had gone as my deputy to take the chair at a big function in Cardiff. I had been asked to do this, but I am decidedly retiring by inclination, and always hate being on a platform or conspicuously in a front row.

Unlike an acquaintance of ours who arrived at St. Paul's Cathedral for some great choral festival, and found the place packed to the doors. Trailing up the centre aisle with great dignity, she was met by an objecting verger when she reached the open space in front of the choir.

Waving her hand with calm composure, she merely said—

"Put some chairs here in front for me, please."

The verger, noting the discreet length of her skirt, and the blameless contour of her toque, concluded she must be one of the Highly Placed—especially as a lady and gentleman were standing obsequiously behind her, obviously "in waiting." And he promptly obeyed her order, and brought forward three chairs, placing them right in the very front.

The dignified lady then seated herself in the centre; and, noticing the two

people who had merely followed in her footsteps, hoping that seats might turn up somewhere, she graciously indicated the other vacant chairs!

Afterwards, everybody was asking everybody else who she was?

I'm not strong-minded like that! Therefore, when people kindly ask me to open bazaars or make speeches (and such requests come to me most days in the week), the Head of Affairs occasionally goes instead of me. In any case there are only twenty-four hours in each day, and most of mine are booked up with other duties.

The snow had been melting rapidly in the strong sunshine. Towards evening a gale came up from the south-west, bringing torrential rain. So terrific was the weather, that my husband 'phoned me, saying he was staying the night, as it was doubtful whether the car could do the journey back in the hurricane.

As it was the last day of the Old Year, my visitors and I sat up talking, to see the New Year in. After I had said good-night, and was going to my own room, I heard a sudden roar—quite distinct from the noise of wind or rain; I knew it was the unmistakable roar of rushing water. And it was outside our back door!

I guessed what had happened. Owing to the rapid thaw, the melted snow and the terrific rain had filled a stream higher up the hill till it had burst its banks, and got out of its proper channel. Something had to be done—and done quickly—to prevent it filling up the “service yard” outside the back door, and coming into the house.

Hastily telling my visitors that I was going out to divert the water, if possible, I flung on mackintosh and top-boots and lit lanterns. They said they would follow immediately.

What a scene it was outside! The hill rises up behind the house very steeply. One begins the ascent with a flight of steps; then comes a steep, but wide, drive up to the main gateway. All this was now a roaring torrent of water, which was tearing down the drive and leaping over the steps like a big waterfall. After which, part of it ran on down the garden slopes, while part was trying to rise over the steps leading into the house.

I knew I must rely on myself alone, and must act quickly if my carpets were to be saved. The gardener was out of reach, half a mile away, and would be sound asleep by now. My idea was to get up to the lane outside the top gate, and try to divert the water by making channels through the stone walls bounding the lane, and so get the water to take another course through the

fields, instead of down our drive and through our house!

But unless you have ever tried to walk *up* hill in the midst of a fast-flowing river which is tearing *down* hill, you cannot realise what hard work it was, or how slippery, especially as my boots were soon full, and proportionately heavy.

I got to the top lane at last, to find it converted into a river, with nothing to be seen but water, and the walls on either side. There was no moon, and the wind was still high. I held the lantern with one hand, while I tried with a crowbar to make openings between the stones to channel off the water. But, before I knew what had happened, I found myself lying on my back in the water, my lantern floating off to some unknown destination—gone out, of course—and the night pitch black. A pleasant situation at one o'clock in the morning!

Evidently I had slipped down. I gathered myself up, and felt for the wall. It was useless to look for the lantern in the dark. And then, to my relief, some one called "Halloa!" It was the gardener. He was coming down to see if the cattle were safe, and everything else all right, and had seen my lantern suddenly disappear. He was surprised when he found it was I who had to be rescued.

I got back to the house with the aid of his light, and found Mr. and Mrs. Author vainly trying to discover in which direction I had gone. We women went indoors, while Mr. Author worked like a navvy with the gardener, hauling the gratings off the drains to let the water run away quicker, and digging fresh channels, to carry the water in other directions.

After I had changed my dripping clothes—and I was wet to the skin—we got hot coffee ready for the men, when their labours were over. Abigail, of course, had gone to bed some hours before.

At last the waters ceased to roar down the steps, and the men returned to report that they had diverted it elsewhere.

The gardener, however, instead of waiting to be asked in, as is his polite custom, said: "Excuse me, sir," and came in first, stepping right in front of Mr. Author, and then adding, by way of explanation: "You see, you're *fair*, sir!"

Mr. Author looked mystified. But I remembered. We had actually reached the New Year, and, according to local tradition, it is essential that the first man to cross the threshold in the New Year must be a dark man—to ensure good fortune during the year. The gardener is dark, and consequently is in great demand on New Year's morning!

“Don’t say you never have any excitements here!” said Mr. Author. “This is the brightest New Year’s morning I’ve spent for many a day.”

It was two o’clock by the time we finished our “conversations” and clattered up to bed, having wished each other, and the gardener, all the Happy New Years necessary to the occasion.

When Abigail brought the early tea, I said: “I’m afraid we woke you up with all the noise last night?”

“I did hear something once,” she said, “but I concluded you or the other lady were just talking in your sleep!”

Next morning we found the garden smiling peacefully in sunshine. The snow had disappeared—the south wind had seen to that; the flowers were a trifle draggled with the rain and wind, but as unconcerned as though they had not been buried under snow for several days.

The watercourse had left its mark all down the paths, with heaps of stones and twigs and cones and fir-needles which had been swept down by the torrent. Otherwise, there was little else to indicate the havoc of the previous night.

Before we had finished breakfast, another local New Year custom was carried out—the presentation of “Gifts,” but not to be confused with Christmas presents.

It is usual in our village to make little trophies (I don’t know what else to call them), and carry them round on New Year’s Day to friends, or to any whom one may wish to honour. These “gifts” vary in detail, though they are all made on similar lines.

A very large rosy apple, or an equally large orange is chosen, and three wooden sticks are fixed to it, like legs of a tripod, so that the erection stands on these three legs. Then the apple, or orange, is decorated. Gold and silver paper is draped around its sides; branches of box or bay are fixed, like waving plumes, to the top; more gold and silver is added to these, nuts are sometimes hung on, tinsel is draped over the leaves, and perhaps a toy bird, or some other bright object, is fastened to the top. The whole thing looks most archaic. The maker, after having exercised all the individuality he or she possesses on the embellishment of the erection, brings it round in person. And, naturally, on presentation, the recipient is supposed to cross the maker’s hand with silver!

Some of these “gifts” are extremely pretty and ingeniously made. If your window happens to be in a lane where passers-by can see it, and you have

received several “gifts” from admiring relatives and friends, you put them all in the window, so that every one may note how popular you are.

This old custom probably owes its origin to the presentation of gifts by the Magi. But so far I have not been able to trace its history.

When the “gifts” which were brought to us by kindly neighbours were placed on the breakfast-table, they were interesting not only to us but to our visitors.

The New Year had arrived. And our guests had said nothing, as yet, about leaving. Not that I wanted to part with them. I didn't. But my office needed me in town.

They had been out all the afternoon, and returned, looking so well and gay and utterly unlike the pale-faces which had arrived from London.

“We're bursting to tell you some news,” Mrs. Author began. “But *you* had better tell it, dear”—to her husband.

Whereupon, of course, they both talked at once.

“We've decided to try and get a house here——”

“We're determined not to go on living in that flat——”

“We feel that this air——”

“And then, I know you'll be surprised, but we're going to adopt——”

I was trying to disentangle their excited over-lapping remarks, when Kenneth and Effie came running in—they were quite at home in the house by now. Gone was Kenneth's shyness. Rushing up to me he said—

“We've come to wish you a very, *very* happy New Year. And to say ‘Thank you very much indeed’ for having found us such a lovely new sort of mother and father!” And he looked over at Mr. and Mrs. Author, all smiles.

I didn't take it in for the moment, but seeing the way Mrs. Author's arm had gone round Effie, it suddenly dawned on me that it was the children whom they were going to adopt!

“Why! What's all this about?” I inquired.

“Well, you see, Effie needs a mother to look after her,” said Mrs. Author.

“And Kenneth needs a father to whack him,” said Mr. Author, with a twinkle that meant anything but whacks.

“And if we live down here, then they will be able to see Auntie every day,”

they explained.

“This is so sudden!” was all I could say.

“Now didn’t I tell you, before they came, that there wasn’t the *slightest* need to worry?” said the Head of Affairs later. “I knew they would enjoy it. And see how well it has all turned out, precisely according to programme!”

The Squirrels' Highway

Of all our Flower-Patch neighbours, big and little, none equals the squirrel for sheer grace. Whatever he does, he does beautifully. Most of his movements are curves. No matter how swiftly he runs up and down the trees, or leaps from bough to bough, or skims along the grass, he is never angular or clumsy, but always suggests a bit of happy lightness going gaily through its little life.

Even when he is angry, and stamps his small hind feet to emphasise his august displeasure at being discovered in the nut-box, he does it so charmingly, and waves his angry tail so prettily, that one longs to pick him up and hug him.

But I've never got so far as that, yet!

On one side of my cottage, a long belt of trees protects the house and garden, and the home fields, from the north winds. There are many different conifers—magnificent larches, towering spruces, Scots firs, Douglas firs—their tall, straight trunks looking like colonnades, with long vistas down the hill. In the foreground, on the southern side, are great oaks, Spanish chestnut, birch, ash, walnut, lime and hazel, with a sprinkling of mountain ash and hawthorn.

This belt of trees unites our lower and upper woods; and to and fro, up and down it daily, there is a scampering of tiny feet, and a waving of reddy-brown tails, as the squirrels travel from one set of woods to the other. They go down so regularly every morning, returning about noon by the same route, that we call it The Squirrels' Highway.

One day a small boy knocked at our door and asked anxiously: "Please can you tell me if those little brown monkeys in the trees by the gate are safe? Will they hurt me if I go past them?"

He had only just come into the district, and had never seen a squirrel before.

On one big Scots fir, outside my study window, the nut-boxes hang—quite humble as to origin, for they are only the ordinary wooden soap-boxes, intended for use over the kitchen sink. Abigail got me half-a-dozen in some small back-street shop in town.

I began with one; and it was regarded with great suspicion at first, by the rightful owners of the Scots fir. The white wood of the box was so staringly

light, as it hung on the dark green and crimson-ribbed tree trunk. But nature soon toned it down, and the rains weathered it to a soft grey.

At last, Mr. Bushey-tail—who had been carefully avoiding it, by shifting his route to the other side of the tree—approached cautiously one day, sniffed at it, tried it with his teeth (his wife anxiously watching him, from a safe distance above); and then, discovering that one of the nuts was beguilingly stuffed full of cheese, he started on that straight away, without so much as a “Come hither” to the lady!

And when she ventured down the tree, to find out what he was so much enjoying, he merely shoo’d her off!

He’s like that!

However, here was a start. And it didn’t take long for all his relations and other enemies to arrive and sample the nuts for themselves.

At first I put only the one box, because I did not want them to think I had laid a series of traps. But when I saw the head of the clan sitting firmly on the edge of the box and fiercely refusing to allow any one else to get hold of a single nut, I decided to enlarge their larder by adding two more boxes, at safe distances one from the other.

Then began a series of lovely “motion pictures.” Mrs. Bushey-tail was rather nervous at first. While her husband was gorging away in one box, she would slip down to another one, seize a nut, and then run up the tree to a convenient branch aloft. She always sat with her back against the main trunk, her tail, twined round the branch, doing duty for a pair of hands, and holding her firmly on her perch. Then, keeping a wary eye on the world at large, she could eat in peace, without her lord and master bullying her, as I regret to say he sometimes did if she tried to stop down below.

How daintily these little creatures feed! To begin with, they know unerringly whether the nut is good or bad. I conclude they tell by the weight; but whatever it is that supplies the information, the fact remains that the moment they pick up a nut, they know its contents, and instantly fling it to the ground if it is bad or empty. You will find nuts below the tree looking perfectly good; crack them, and never once will you find a good kernel.

Sitting up on their hind feet, and taking the approved nut in their front paws, they bite off the top with their powerful teeth—most of the shells in the heap, which is always at the bottom of the tree, are cut after the same pattern. Having secured the contents, they then carefully remove every bit of the outer brown skin, before settling down to enjoy the kernel.

The amount they will eat is astonishing, considering how small the little body really is. Most that one sees is only thick fur! Nut after nut vanishes, till at last they seem so replete one would fancy they could hardly move. But up they go, as agile as ever, and, finding a comfortable seat on a high-up bough, they next proceed to do their toilet—quite a fascinating process to watch.

They stroke their fur all over, right down to the tip of the tail, apparently getting every single hair into its rightful place. They clean their whiskers and wash their face something like a cat does. And then I have seen them switch up the tail and give themselves a final brush-down, on one side, with the end of the tail; and next, switching it round to the other side, giving that a brush-down also! A most engaging business!

As time went on, I noticed that Mrs. Bushey-tail had ceased to accompany her husband. Instead, he came again and again to the nut-boxes, and, after taking only a scanty meal himself, he would stow away a surprising number of nuts inside his cheeks, till they bulged out in a most ludicrous manner—like a schoolboy trying to hide an apple from the master’s eye! Then off he would go, back to a nest in the top of a tall tree in the upper woods, where his wife was in attendance on the family.

At this season he becomes quite a nice, useful, considerate sort of a husband. With the utmost discrimination he selects tit-bits to take to her. Peanuts he will throw out—evidently she doesn’t care for them. Biscuits he doesn’t favour much. But walnuts, chestnuts, and barcelonas he pounces upon; and after filling his mouth as far as it can be induced to stretch, with nuts, he will then collect a few tender green larch cones to take to her—by way of a little salading, I conclude. But as there is no room left for them in his mouth, he wisely bites off a bit of the stem bearing the cone, and manages to hold these twigs between his teeth. The final effect is most comical, as he goes leaping homewards, his bulging cheeks trimmed around outside with several cones projecting from the twigs he holds firmly with his teeth.

It was an exceedingly pretty sight, when father and mother brought a youngster to introduce him to the nut-box. I chanced to be looking for them, and saw them arrive.

Father proceeded at once to his favourite nut-box—the first we put up; sat on the edge, with his tail hanging down (as is their usual custom), and made a hearty meal, oblivious of the rest of his household.

Mother, however, took the baby, as big as herself, to another box, and showed it the nuts. Baby didn’t need showing twice! He promptly got inside

the box, sitting on top of the nuts, and ate and ate and ate, just as his father had done before him.

Virginia, who was watching the performance along with me, said:

“That child will be ill! We really ought to stop it eating so much!”

But, of course, we did nothing of the kind.

The mother sat on a bough just above, keeping watch on the youngster, and doing her toilet the while. Father, having eaten till he hadn't space for another crumb, floated off to the lower woods, in search of something more diverting than mere domesticities, I expect.

At last the baby could not manage another morsel, and it simply curled up and went to sleep in the box. Every now and then the mother came down and looked at it, but left it asleep, returning upstairs and doing her toilet all over again. In this way she let the little one sleep for about a quarter of an hour.

Eventually, she seemed to consider it had slept long enough. Moreover, the sun was moving away from that side of the tree, and baby would be in shadow. So down she came, and woke him up. At first he wanted to continue with the nuts; but she peremptorily ousted him out of the box, and took him up the tree with her, and on towards their wood.

All this while, she never had a bite herself.

The amount of nuts which disappear from the nut-boxes is ruinous, when one has to buy them at the stores, not always having time or opportunity to collect the wild ones from the hazels. Sometimes as much as two pounds of nuts have been cleared up in one morning.

At last I felt convinced the squirrels were not eating all of them, despite their buxom appetites.

We watched specially, one day, to see what actually did become of them all. And soon found that many others of our little neighbours were sharing in the feast.

Birds were constant visitors to the boxes—jays, nuthatches and various tits being the most frequent visitors. I had often heard tap, tap, tap, reiterated all day long, while I was working in my study, but had subconsciously attributed it to the woodpeckers.

Now, I discovered it was nuthatches, with my nuts wedged in some crevice, the more conveniently to attack them; and great tits hammering away on hard shells which took some opening, excepting when they were fortunate

enough to find some softer-shelled nuts, such as pea-nuts. Blue tits seemed to live in the boxes, when they chanced to find them untenanted, and they gratefully cleared up the fragments of the brown outer covering of the nuts, discarded by the more fastidious squirrels.

Nevertheless, all this didn't seem to account for the amount which disappeared; for though the squirrels ate fairly quickly, birds made slow progress; it took the smaller birds a good while to get through the shell of a single nut.

But one morning, early, I discovered another visitor who was getting his breakfast at my expense. At first I thought it was a grey squirrel in the box, and I felt sorry, because I love the red ones, and don't want them driven off by their more pugnacious grey relatives. Soon I saw it was a stoat who had climbed the tree, and evidently appreciated the fare; for, while I watched, he made over thirty journeys up the tree, each time taking one nut and descending with it to a sheltered spot in the bushes at the base of the tree. In a few seconds, he was up the tree again and helping himself to another nut.

No wonder the boxes were always empty, no matter how often they were filled. Yet I don't know why I should so gladly provide for the squirrels, and grudge a few nuts to a stoat. I know his career isn't blameless. Still, he was a painstaking little animal. He worked hard, climbing up and down, for that meal. I hadn't the heart to interfere with his enjoyment.

On thinking it over afterwards, I decided that though the same Creator had made them both, I, personally, owed more to the squirrel than to the stoat—who had never done me a kind turn in his life, but, on the contrary, had robbed me of chickens. Whereas, I was indebted to the squirrels for more than I can ever translate into words.

On one occasion I lay ill in bed, at that low ebb when nothing seems to matter, and one has no inclination even to try to get stronger.

The spring sunshine was on a big spruce, which nearly brushed the jasmine around the open bedroom window.

Suddenly, two lovely little sprites (they seemed something more than mere animals) came tilting over the trees—I can think of no other word which better describes their graceful, light, curving leaps—and for reasons known only to themselves, they decided to remain for a while in the spruce tree.

There they played at hide-and-peek, one lying flat along a half-hidden bough, waiting to pounce on the other, who was looking for him. They chased each other high and low, their coats glinting a really brilliant red in the

sunshine.

Then one of them came to the extreme end of the branch nearest my window. Sitting on his hind legs, he took a spray in his front paws, and nibbled it for a few minutes, looking all the while such a lovable morsel as he sat there, where I could watch every movement, every glance of his eyes.

The sight of these fearless, happy little creatures, simply content to enjoy the things provided for them by an unknown Friend, seemed to put new life into me. I knew then that I had been pining for such a sight as this in London, which had been stifling me with its sordid money-worship and its unlovely gloom. Their grace and beauty was something for which to be truly thankful. The very fact that their world was so far above me, as they drifted among the tree-tops, was in itself mysteriously fascinating.

Those gay, frolicsome little elves did more to help me take hold once more of daily living, than all the good advice and bottles of medicine in the world could ever have done.

“I suppose their nibbling injures the trees a little?” I said to the Head of Affairs, when he came up later on to see how I was.

“Perhaps it does. But, don’t forget, they’ve been doing it for many years now,” he replied wisely. “And it doesn’t seem to discourage the trees from spreading all over the place and blocking the views. I think you said you wanted that spruce cut down, now it has grown so huge?”

“No! Not now!” I said. “Leave it there. Let them eat it all if they like. And when that is gone (if it ever is) we’ll plant another. Anything, so long as we can induce those dear little creatures to come and play outside our windows.”

A Bouquet of Herbs

When first I thought of a herb garden, my interest was mainly sentimental. I had no practical or concrete notion as to what it would be like, or how it would fit into my wild and extremely unorthodox gardening schemes.

When you come to think of it, quite a lot of our gardening interest, in the first place, is allied to sentiment. Certain words possess a glamour, give us a “gardeny” feeling the moment we hear them; and we long there and then for the outdoors, and a homely spade and packet of seeds.

Most of us enjoy hearing about may trees, foxgloves, and snapdragons, for instance; we can become quite enthusiastic on these subjects. But if some one starts talking about *cratægus oxyacantha*, *digitalis purpurea*, and (worst word of all!) *scrophulariaceæ*, it leaves us quite cold! Yet the two sets of words stand for the same flowers.

Herb gardens suggested Shakespeare, beautifully dressed Elizabethan ladies, moving gracefully between clipped box borders, and along pleached alleys; housewifely Georgians distilling bergamot and making tansy pudding; placid Victorians gathering lavender for their linen, and borage for the claret cup.

Also, having a not too aged digestion, and not being very blasé over meals as yet, there were dim but pleasant associations with roast fowl, roast duck and the Xmas festive bird.

And anything relating to that brand of the open air, which is sufficiently far removed from the dirt of city pavements, the noise of city streets, and the abominable odours of city atmosphere, to bear no sort of resemblance to the metropolis—always appeals to me.

So I used to say, “We really ought to have a herb garden.” And there the matter was left in peace for several years, while I encouraged my Flower-Patch to develop mainly in other directions.

But sooner or later there “Cometh the lure of green things growing.”

Even to the most ardent flower-lover, green is such a blessed colour for tired eyes and weary brain. And there are so many different greens. I’ve tried to count them, but they are uncountable. Besides, can any one say exactly, when looking at the foliage of daffodils and pinks, where green ends and blue begins? or, when looking at rose branches, where green ends and crimson

begins? or, when looking at wood-spurge, where green ends and yellow begins?

However, it was neither of these colourings which first started me in the pursuit of herbs—it was a grey sage bush.

I've spoken of that bush before; it was a bush worth mentioning. At any rate, it wasn't easily overlooked. At the time of which I am writing, it measured 30 feet by 15 feet, with every indication that it meant to double these dimensions, given a year or two longer to go its own unhindered way!

To make the landscape intelligible to the reader, I must explain that the whole estate—garden beds, orchards, fields, woods, with the cottage itself—all are on the side of a very steep hill, with no level ground anywhere, save where a path has been cut into the side of the hill.

At the bottom of the garden—or at least somewhere about the bottom, though the garden goes on rambling down still lower, in bits and corners and odd little terraces—a path has been levelled for some distance along the side of the hill. It is bounded on the upper side by a stone wall, three feet high, which banks up the garden soil, and keeps it from slipping downhill. The garden beds slope upwards for about 40 or 50 feet, intersected with tiny walks, till another levelled and paved path runs along the hillside higher up. And so it goes on, *da capo*, up the steep, levelled paths, with walls banking up sloping beds which rise higher and higher.

To return to the bottom wall: on the top of this, some well-meaning person once planted a cutting of flowering currant, a monthly rose, a small lilac, a bit of sage, a root of horse-radish, and a few oddments like that. Nature generously added a good deal more, in the shape of ferns to fill up the crevices in the stones, herb-robert, evening primroses, foxgloves, wallflowers, honesty, columbines, and the blue wild geranium, all of which seed themselves, and continue to feel quite at home there.

Then began a race as to which could get the biggest share of the earth. The flowering currant and the lilac tried to elbow each other out of the way; but finding this impossible, chose the wiser course and shot upwards. To-day, they are huge pyramids of colour in the spring, first the rose-coloured currant, followed by the pale mauve lilac.

The monthly rose at first seemed likely to be swamped by its companions; but now it is doing great things, because I took its part and dealt with its neighbours, so that it shan't be smothered. In return it gives me blossoms for the major portion of the year.

Meanwhile, the sage was quietly but steadily forging ahead. No one troubled about it at first. A sage bush seemed of no account. The foxgloves and other biennials soon found themselves ousted from the top of the wall; but, nothing daunted, they dropped their seeds among the stones of the wall, and on to the path below. Now, the wall and the path are fast becoming a flower border!

Still the sage went on. Not only did it travel along the top of the wall, it hung down over the stones, a soft grey curtain; it crept up the garden bed, rooting itself afresh wherever it could. And when I was not there, no one felt called upon to do anything to check it. Till at last it became a natural curiosity. Everybody paid a visit of inspection to the sage bush, as a matter of course. And, so far as I was concerned, it seemed to have become too big a problem to handle.

If I spoke about demolishing it, visitors would chorus:

“Oh! but you couldn’t cut it down! It would be utter vandalism! Think how long it would take to grow another one.” (As though any one *wanted* to grow another that size!)

The Head of Affairs was the only person with pronounced anti-sage views.

“If you’re proposing to make your fortune on penny packets—and I daresay it’s a good line of business—then get busy, and sell a few! Otherwise, I’d cut the whole thing down, lock, stock and barrel, and put a few decent potatoes in the ground.”

These were *his* sentiments.

For myself, I hovered between the two extremes. I hate to deprive anything of life, so long as it is healthy and harmless. It actually pains me to see the throw-outs lying pathetically on the bonfire. It is foolish, no doubt, but—that is one of my many failings, I can’t bear to root things out.

So I just dismissed the sage bush each time it came up on the domestic agenda, with the useful remark that something would have to be done!

And the sage went on doing it!

But at long last, after I had suffered many things by reason of handy men who were not handy, and gardeners who couldn’t garden, a kind and obliging fate sent me a gardener who not only knew his job, but was also anxious to do what I wanted done, and did his utmost to carry out my instructions. A most unusual combination. But I’ve always maintained that if we want a thing badly enough, we get it, in time.

I chanced to say to him casually one day, “It would be interesting if we could have a herb garden.”

He agreed promptly.

And it was left at that.

Later, I was gazing, with my usual perplexity at the ever-increasing sage, when the gardener approached and said:

“I suppose you weren’t thinking of having that cut back?”

His suggestions are usually made tentatively, in this negative form.

“What could be done with that bed if we did cut it back?” I asked. “Wouldn’t it be a ragged wilderness?”

I didn’t feel drawn to potatoes in that spot—decent or otherwise!

“I could get something else there,” he replied cheerfully, noticing signs of wavering in me. “You did want a herb garden, didn’t you? Though, I wouldn’t say that was the best place for it. But if you wanted it there, it could be done.”

“What would *you* suggest in place of the sage?” I inquired.

“Oh, *I* should put some roses along there, with pinks at the edge—as you’re so fond of pinks. And (his enthusiasm increasing) in the shade of the lilac and flowering currant trees I should put lilies of the valley and London pride. And you could have a frame for specially choice violets this end of the wall. And——”

I need hardly add that the sage bush was cut down to six feet by three feet. Roses now bloom lavishly where once was the grey-green carpet. And every winter the frame is full of violets, large crimson-purple singles, and pale neapolitans. Though truth compels me to add that those which grew all about the place, and unprotected by a frame, are in bloom quite as early as those we coddle and cosset with care!

But the gardener didn’t end there.

“I suppose you weren’t thinking of having a herb garden just yet?” he inquired, after he had received permission to limit the range of the sage, and carry out his programme *re* roses, pinks, and lilies.

“Where would be the best place?” I asked.

“That bed right at the top of the vegetable garden would be just the thing—slopes to the south-west, and is protected by the wall and hedge from the north

and east.”

I climbed up steep grass paths and steps to inspect the plot. Here, again, a path had been levelled in the side of the hill, and another low wall banked up the soil of the large bed which was at a fairly acute angle.

As I looked upwards, I beheld a jungle of lustily growing material that would positively have shocked most people.

“Is this supposed to be vegetables, or what?” I inquired.

“Well—that’s as it may be,” he replied cautiously. His predecessor had been responsible for the “landscape gardening” in that bed, and he had not had time, as yet, to deal with it.

The bed itself is about the size of the average suburban back garden. It contained at that moment—gooseberry bushes, a Cox’s pippin, hearty vegetable marrows roaming in all directions, small forests of rhubarb, clumps of primroses, wallflowers, mint, thousand-headed kale, ferns in the wall, wild strawberries by the hundred, weeds by the thousand, impenetrable masses of climbing nasturtiums, which were living up to the character given them on the outside of the seed packet, and had even surmounted the gooseberry bushes and trailed over the rhubarb. I remembered that Virginia had planted them the previous Easter in response to some urge of industry.

And as though that were not enough, a hedge of loganberries had wandered where it pleased—and if there is anything calculated to put one against the gentle art of gardening it is to have long, fearsome loganberry stems clutching at one’s garments, and stockings, and hat, and waving themselves in one’s face, and then defying one to touch them or do anything with them because of their thorns.

Finally, there was a swaying expanse of that beautiful but exceedingly exasperating interloper, the tall willow herb, known in America as the fireweed, because it is the first plant to take possession of the burnt earth after a forest fire. Also, it is called Blooming Sally in the States. And once Sally comes on a visit, she does her best to remain with you, and turns a deaf ear to all intimations that she is a nuisance. Not only does she increase her roots about as rapidly as does my other enemy the bind weed, but while one is still admiring (grudgingly) her gay spikes of rosy-magenta flowers, and deciding not to root it out till it has done blooming, seeds are already being let loose lower down the stems, and the fluffy bits of silver sail off and settle all over the place, much preferring one’s choicest borders.

“That will take some cleaning!” I said doubtfully. “And it’s larger than we

need for a herb garden. I shouldn't be able to find enough herbs to fill it."

"There's lots when you start," he said—as I found out later on, when my mania for collecting had extended to herbs! "But if you're not wanting it all, I suppose you wouldn't like to have a broad band of herbs all round, and then let me use the centre as a nursery for cuttings? You did say you wanted a nice show of rose cuttings."

When next I saw that bed, at the end of the autumn, it was a reformed character, and yet, not too reformed. The true gardener knows what to leave in, as much as what to take out.

Ferns, blue veronica, and sweet-williams were still outcropping the walls; a bank of wild strawberries had been left at the very top, in the shelter of the hawthorn hedge which surmounts another wall; a wild rose which had been doing its best to pretend it was a loganberry, had been removed and incorporated with the hedge. The primroses had been transplanted to a grass bank near by.

The rhubarb was left, of course; also the row of gooseberry bushes, which looked quite staid and respectable now they were no longer clasped by the flaunting nasturtiums; and being in the hinterland, so to speak, they would not interfere with my herbs.

The loganberries had been cleared away by my special orders. I hate to garden in the vicinity of anything that is liable suddenly to clutch at my hair!

But though the ground had been thoroughly cleared of all unrequired data, it wasn't entirely bare.

Along the top of the lower wall several sorts of thyme had been planted. These have since grown luxuriantly, and are now hanging over the stones.

Down one side of the bed, where it adjoins an orchard, a dozen little lavender bushes had been put in a row.

"They can easily go somewhere else," he explained apologetically, "as perhaps you won't fancy 'em just there?"

But I did!

"And I put some parsley seed along here, in case you might like some; but it's a bit shy."

Did you ever meet with parsley seed that wasn't a bit shy? There is a saying in some parts of the country that you must make ten different sowings of parsley, because the devil always takes nine of them. While he isn't quite so

active in my parsley bed—possibly because there is fine scope on my premises for a succession of wicked catch-crops, consisting of brambles, docks, nettles, and thistles, and these could easily keep him busy—we only raise about one sowing of parsley out of every three. I wonder what becomes of all the lost seed?

Maybe some one will presently invent a bold, brazen sort. But I'm sure the flavour won't be as refined as the shy kind.

In the centre of the plot were several orderly regiments of cuttings, all leaning the same way, and some rows of young shrubs.

With the enthusiasm of a good worker who is also a real artist, he described them to me in detail.

“Those are rose cuttings, fifty of them. Some will take, and some won't, I reckon. But they don't cost us anything to risk. The rest are yellow pussy willow (you did say you liked that?); these are silver poplar, from a branch that blew down in a gale. Those are flowering currant, guelder rose, and forsythia.

“This row is cuttings from those old white currant bushes, and some from the red.

“The plants are young wild cherries, from the Windflower Wood (you said you wanted some of these), and hawthorns and mountain ash from the Tangle, and suckers from lilacs and spireas.

“And these cuttings of lavender cotton will make a nice little grey border, which can be clipped to form a neat edging—if you should happen to fancy it.”

Neat edgings had never been a strong point with us. On the contrary, everything I plant at the edges—be they pinks or candytuft, violas or aubrietia, promptly stroll out across the path. Neatness is unknown at the Flower Patch, save that Nature's own handiwork is often marvellously neat—witness the growth of the mosses, the lichens, the cushions of saxifraga, and such close embroidery as the *arenarice balearica* with its minute white flowers, and the tiny compact leafage of the *selaginella apoda* which grows very happily on our shady walls, though it is usually classed as a greenhouse plant.

However, there was no reason why we should not aspire to neatness in our better moments, at any rate in one corner of the place, and as a special offering to the Head of Affairs, who likes things rolled and clipped and trimmed in an orderly manner, and who mourns at intervals over my preference for irregularities.

Moreover, the soft grey would help to lighten what in my ignorance I

imagined was going to be a sombre series of greens. The lavender cotton was therefore left as an edging, down one side, as an experiment.

Altogether, it seemed a good beginning. And immediately I saw, in imagination, vistas of cherry trees and hawthorns and mountain ash, all white in the spring, and even more scent than we have at present—though I don't know how the air will hold any more!

But there was a considerable expanse of vacant space—tidy, well-weeded and dug over—for me to fill. Fortunately, it never takes long to cover any empty piece of ground on our hills; everything grows so rapidly and wholeheartedly.

I started there and then upon an extensive and intensive study of herbs, taking stock, first of all, of what I already had in this line about the place.

Rosemary there always is in abundance. The old rosemary bush has been slipped and slipped, till now I could set up a Rosemary Shop. It grows so rapidly, and spreads almost as cheerfully as the sage, therefore I decided to leave it where it is, until such time as I should find it difficult to fill up the allotted herb space. Also the many lavenders which have become hoary patriarchs, and are smothered with bloom and butterflies each summer, were left undisturbed. Besides, there was the new hedge already planted by the gardener.

The bed devoted to spearmint lies *en route* to the herb garden. I decided to leave that where it was. Mint spreads so rapidly. I didn't want it to oust the other plants. And being sufficiently near the other sweet-smelling things, it can readily be added to one's bouquet of herbs, or plucked at pleasure, when one craves its perfume. And in the spring, when the early shoots first push their heads through the earth, few people can resist their delicious hope-inspiring odour. They seem to hold the very essence of all the delights of spring and summer to which one looks forward so eagerly, once the March sun crosses the line.

The sweet bay trees had also to be left where they were. Great green masses, useful summer and winter, they grew to such a size that we have to put them out of bounds, and use them as evergreen shrubs to fill up gaps! Even as it is, they have to be cut back annually, to keep them within reasonable limits. And what an aromatic business it is when they are being clipped!

When I had made my inventory, and found how many herbs I already had, dotted about the place, I began to wonder if there were any left wherewith to

stock my special plot. Plant catalogues soon enlightened me. And after reading many wise words in books and growers' lists, on the advantages of growing every herb which the compilers could think up and name, I proceeded to order them all! And my garden space was soon overcrowded.

Although the gardener looked surprised sometimes, and almost pained at others, he dutifully tended them. But I realise now that it must have cost him a pang to find himself nurturing sorrel, horehound, marsh mint, tansy, and other wildlings which were growing rampantly in our fields and woods; while at other times he was laboriously weeding them out of the rest of the garden, and struggling to eradicate them from those portions of the Flower-Patch which were supposed to have been cultivated by his predecessor, but were not!

No need to recount my disappointments. Let them be buried on the bonfire. Enough to say that one season was sufficient to teach me the need for reconstructing my ideas, entirely, on the subject of "herb-growing for the well-meaning person who doesn't know anything!"

I realised, that for any one like myself, who doesn't want to make a living out of commercialised packets, but who merely grows for pleasure (and occasional domestic stuffing), there is no need to cultivate a host of horrid-smelling, uninteresting looking plants, merely because they are catalogued as "herbs." Any more than it was economical to give garden space, and gardener's time, to things which grow wild in the fields and hedges and brooks all around.

So I reduced my collection (as most zestful collectors do, when the first wild orgy of acquisition has spent itself a little), and I specialised exclusively on those plants which had a perfume likely to appeal to ordinary noses, taking pains to have enough of each to enable any one who feels inclined, to pick and rub, and sniff, just where they please. A few leaves and shoots, more or less, make no difference to the masses. And in most cases, it is necessary to rub the leaves in order to bring out their scent.

When I am wandering among the herbs, picking a spray here and there for my own delectation, I am reminded of an incident which happened some years ago.

An acquaintance of ours was much given to setting the stage in private, in order to show off her only child in public. One morning she had called the boy's attention to a plant of lemon verbena, which had been brought from the greenhouse into the garden, for the summer. Demonstrating how its leaves only gave out their scent when bruised, and but for this adverse treatment

would not have yielded their best to the world, she then compared the plant with our earthly life, explaining that we often need adversity to develop strength of character and bring out the highest spiritual beauty.

The small boy, who was surfeited with this type of instruction, merely looked bored.

His mother was giving a garden party in the afternoon. At a suitable moment, when a number of visitors were grouped around tables which had been placed in the vicinity of the lemon verbena, she made for that part of the garden, reluctant small boy in hand. Then, after a few remarks on horticulture in general, it was easy to steer conversation in the direction of lemon verbenas, and their delightful perfume.

Rubbing a leaf with an absent-minded air, she said:

“Cyril and I were talking about it only this morning. You remember, don’t you, darling?”

But darling merely shuffled his feet, and glowered in the way most small boys do, when all eyes of the company are fixed upon them and there is no way of escape.

“Come, dear, what was it mother told you?”

A pause. Then “Dunno!”

“Oh, you surely can’t have forgotten?”

“Dunno!” with more scuffling of feet.

By this time the visitors were looking bored.

“Think hard, my precious; don’t you recollect how we bruised the leaves, and it reminded us of something?”

“Oh, yes,” brightening at last; “I know! you pinch the Christian and he smells.” [Hasty dispersal of visitors.]

One of my surprises was to find that a herb garden can be almost as bright with colour as an orthodox flower border, if one makes a careful selection. Here are some of the plants which have been gay companions and universal favourites—for every visitor wanders up to the herbs.

The top of the border is monopolised by borage, chiefly for the sake of its heavenly-blue flowers. I know of nothing else quite like borage, it is such a perfect blue. Yet it can be quite disappointing in some garden beds, because, to be seen at its best, it needs to be high up. Its blooms hang downwards, and the

glorious colour is lost when it is growing below the eye-line, in a low garden border.

But, when planted at the top of a steeply rising bed, and looked at from down below, the blue cloud is wonderful. And its stems and foliage seem a mist of blue-green and green-purple, when seen from the distance.

It blooms unceasingly right through the summer. And though it dies with the frost, its seeds come up unfailingly the following spring. Once you get borage in your garden, it grows like a weed, and is willing to remain a permanent occupier.

Bergamot must be mentioned next. What a colour splash it makes, when its gorgeous heads of crimson-scarlet flowers are held aloft! It likes moisture if it can get it, though it isn't faddy; and given plenty of room, it spreads rapidly, while the scent of its leaves is a constant delight.

I had some in the other borders, but I did not give it enough room, and I had no idea how noble it could really look, till I had it in a bed where ample allowance was made for spreading. Given space, it forged ahead.

It is a member of the wonderful Mint family, which provides us with so many useful, as well as delightful, plants.

Those who have never grown any, and who only know the dried, unidentified dark powder, which goes to the manufacture of mint sauce in town, can form no idea of the refreshing, invigorating odours belonging to the many different members of this praiseworthy community.

Even the ordinary spearmint, of roast lamb and green pea fame, is a joy to gather in the spring, when the shoots come pushing through the ground, and holding in every leaf-cell some of the marvellous store of perfume, which Nature secrets somewhere, somehow, down in the earth! Where does it come from, how is it manufactured—all this scent which is brought, in endless variety by the plants from an unknown source, and flung abroad in the air?

I have been trying to make a collection of Mints, and have a number of different kinds—all of them good; though some need to be used more sparingly than others, on account of their strength. I don't know all their correct names as yet, but most of them have mauve-blue flowers.

One favourite is the Hairy Mint, which has large, rounded leaves, and makes a fair-sized plant, even in its early stages. Its flower is the unobtrusive mauve flower that one finds in various forms throughout the Mints, but its scent is quite distinctive. I always add a spray to a bunch of sweet herbs—not

for cooking purposes, but when I am gathering a literal “nosegay,” simply for the pleasure of sniffing it! And the hairy mint gives a new note to the whole.

Of course, peppermint, with its dark purple shoots and stems, and its powerful scent, has a place in the herb garden. Pennyroyal is another of the same family; though one does not want too much of it at a time. Mine has wandered into the orchard, and when one unexpectedly treads it under foot, the fragrance is very pleasant.

If you are trying to make a herb garden for pleasure, I advise you to buy every sort of mint you can lay hands on. Most of them will prove a gain.

The Mint family as a whole is a remarkably useful community, and so generous, for it provides scents as well as flavours. It is true, the members of this order have not the actual food values of the grains, and the Cabbage family; but they aid digestion by giving us such palatable herbs as thyme, marjoram, sage, winter and summer savoury, sweet basil, as well as mint itself. While, for the making of perfumes, it supplies balm, peppermint (and several other mints which are not used in cooking), bergamot, lavender, hyssop, etc., and still further contributes to our well-being, in the shape of a number of herbs which possess medicinal value.

Sage I have already mentioned, as being well represented in another part of the garden. But I added a couple of bushes to the herb garden, for the sake of the grey foliage and blue flowers. And I also imported some Red Sage, which has a beautiful foliage, with a purply-crimson tone, something like the “bloom” on a plum. This can be got from firms specialising on herbs.

Another plant which I grow on account of its flowers is hyssop. It has aromatic leaves, but its tall spikes of royal-blue are its chief attraction for me; they make a rich mass of colour in the summer.

Sweet Cicely is a great favourite with most of my visitors, though a few do not care for the scent of its leaves. It resembles aniseed; and in small quantities is pleasant. But if too much be gathered, it overpowers the rest of one’s herb bouquet. In any case, it is a desirable plant, on account of its fern-like leaves. Its large umbels of white flowers are something like the blossoms of the cow parsley; it belongs to the same family, but its leaves are more finely cut.

Sweet Basil is popular, but this is more trouble to grow, as it is an annual, and therefore must be raised afresh each year; and like parsley, it is often “shy”!

One plant which is beloved of every one is balm. Is there anything quite

like it? The sweet, lemony scent is so refreshing; and it seems willing to grow anywhere! No garden—herb or otherwise—should be without a clump.

With me, it grows on a wall; it grows in the shade; it grows out in the path, and from the first green shoots in the spring, to the last dry leafless stalks of late autumn, it gives out its scent unstintingly, asking for very little in return—for no plant could be less faddy with regard to its growing quarters!

Certain herbs have what one may call an appetising odour. Some suggest all sorts of delightful roasts in the oven; others whispering of sausages, ragouts and rissoles.

Summer Savoury and Winter Savoury come under this heading. The first is an annual, which disappears with the frost, but its flowers are pretty, and it is well worth growing. Winter Savoury is a hardy perennial, which keeps green all the year round, and is particularly welcome when so many other plants have retired, during the winter, from active service. These two plants have a flavour quite distinct from the other culinary herbs.

Marjoram most of us know—but there are various sorts, some much nicer, to my mind, than others. The Knotted Marjoram is my favourite. But they are all pleasant.

While onions seem more properly to belong to the vegetable garden, chives ought to be included with the herbs on account of its pretty blossoms, which suggest mauve thrift at a distance, and are most decorative, quite apart from the usefulness of the plant. If you have never had a few of the leaves of chives chopped fine, and sprinkled over cucumber, or over beetroot—try it. Many people who find onions far too violent in character, can eat and enjoy the thread-like leaves of the chives.

Tarragon always has a romantic sound to me—I don't know why! Unless it is because one of my first purchases, when I started housekeeping on my very own, was a bottle of Tarragon vinegar! At any rate, no self-respecting herb plot could be without it—and once it has been introduced you certainly will never be without it, for it does spread rapidly! Its flowers are insignificant; but its flavour is useful in the kitchen.

Of Thyme one cannot speak too lovingly. Every species of thyme that I have ever seen is worth growing. The blossoms, even of the small wild thyme, are very charming; while some of the newer varieties are really gorgeous when in bloom, and clothe rocks and stones with carmine and purple.

There are so many different varieties: silver thyme, variegated thyme,

woolly thyme, with its soft, velvet-like surface of grey-green; and any number whose names I don't know. But the scented thymes are the best, even though their flowers are not quite as vivid as some of their scentless cousins. The scents vary considerably; the black thyme, the wild thyme, and the lemon thyme are all different.

We cut bunches of the various sorts, and hang them in the trellis of the summer-house, and on the verandah; so that any one who touches the wiry stems can get a delightful waft of perfume.

I have one species which I have never been able to identify. It came to me from an old cottage garden (what wonderful and rare treasures some of the ancient, out-of-the-way little gardens still hold!). This particular thyme is sweeter than lemon thyme, and more "lemony." I always consider it the greatest treasure in my herb garden.

I don't want this list to become tedious; therefore I will only mention a few more of the plants I am growing.

Wormwood, which has a pretty yellow flower, is worth including for its foliage, which is uncommon. Alecost can be used in place of mint in the winter. Angelica is a handsome plant, if you have plenty of room, but it is large beside the lower-growing mints and thyme. Tansy I retain, although it grows wild around us. I like its hot-August scent. And Lad's Love is essential—sentimentally.

A plant which will add a bright pink to the garden is the centuary, which I always consider one of the loveliest of our August wild flowers. I haven't encouraged it in my own herb plot, because my fields are pink with it in the summer, and I want space for other and rarer plants. But it has established itself in the wall; and if it were not so plentiful all around, I should cultivate it eagerly, and I recommend it to any one who wants to grow herbs. It has no perfume, but its blossom is so neatly pretty, and such a clear bright pink, it deserves one's affection.

It used to be much in demand among country people for certain ailments—though I forget which ones. Nowadays, of course, no one troubles about such remedies—when the doctor is only three miles away, and every one is on his panel!

My visitors sometimes say, "The doctor must have a very easy time in a healthy neighbourhood like this. People never ought to be ill here!"

Perhaps not! But you should see the doctor's surgery any and every morning in the week, with from thirty to forty people waiting at 9 a.m., and

continuing till 1.30 mid-day, if he will allow them.

In olden times, market-day was the great time for meetings and the exchange of personal news. Nowadays, the doctor's surgery is the social centre for the working classes. And what we know about our insides would give points to a Harley Street specialist, who, I am sure, has never heard of half of the diseases from which we are suffering!

Since the introduction of the panel system, some people, as a matter of course, go to the doctor on his surgery days and get a bottle of medicine, not because they really need it, but in order to meet their friends and acquaintances, and have a rest while they have a pleasant chat. Some of them walk three miles there, and three miles back, which shows how well and strong they are!

I heard of one woman who had been in the habit of going to the surgery twice a week for medicine for her husband. When he died, she still made the journey, arriving there about 9 a.m., and remaining till the last patient left. And having a most interesting and enjoyable morning.

Of course there are plenty of cases of genuine illness—minor accidents are frequent; and sick people are to be found in every district. On our hills, the distances are great, and the villages far apart, with many scattered outlying farms and cottages. Our doctor looks after about six villages—and has surgeries in three of them—not all in the same county either. And he never knows what is going to turn up.

On one occasion, having a friend visiting him from London, he tried to arrange a free evening. But about eleven o'clock at night, a call came on the 'phone. He set off in his car, his friend going with him. They had to travel about eight miles, over steep hills, to a distant part of the Forest, where some one was to meet the doctor.

At the appointed place, they found a gipsy waiting. As the car could go no farther, the man led the way, up and down, and in between the trees—rain pouring hard; the winter's night dark and cold; the ground sodden and slippery. For nearly two miles they trudged in this way till they reached a caravan.

Here they found a sick child. The experienced eye of the doctor saw that he must be operated upon at once, or he would be dead before they could possibly get him to a hospital.

There and then—in the dingy caravan, his friend holding the electric torches they had brought with them—the doctor operated on the boy. (And it is good to be able to record that the little life was saved.)

When the doctor had done all that was possible, there was the two-mile trudge, in the wet, back to the car, the gipsy guiding them as before.

As the doctor reached to put his bag of instruments safely inside the car, he was surprised at touching something warm in the dark interior. Flashing his torch, he found a tramp comfortably snoring inside, wrapped up snugly in his rug!

When, in the deep silence of the night, we hear the hum of a car, running swiftly along the famous road which winds through the valley of the Wye, at the foot of its towering hills, we know that the doctor is on his way to relieve somebody's suffering. How different from the old days, when the doctor's horse took hours to do what the motor-car can now do in minutes!

Another modern improvement is the substitution of the doctor's medicine for all sorts of weird herbal concoctions, which people compiled and drank a couple of generations ago! How their stomachs ever survived some of the home-brewed remedies that were favoured in early Victorian days, is a mystery. Their digestions must have been wonderful!

And yet—there is always a certain fascination about the cult of herbs, apart from the fact of their undoubted value medicinally. The old-time herb-gatherers seemed to possess such a wealth of interesting lore. They were hardy and healthy, as a rule, probably owing to their outdoor pursuits. I used to feel, when I was young, that it must be an ideal occupation—only I could never get my elders to see it in the same light!

To-day, I am as keen on herbs as any “gatherer of simples.” But I'm afraid I grow them mainly for pleasure. At any rate, I don't turn them into bitter or pungent drinks, wherewith to harrow my own, or any one else's interior!

I like to look at them, and I enjoy their perfume. Also, I find there are a great many people with similar likings, for all my visitors wander up the hill, sooner or later, and spend time sampling the scents, or gathering flowers and leaves.

It is easy to keep the herb plot bright with vivid colour, and in our somewhat sad and uncertain climate one needs all the colour one can get, out of doors.

Marigolds are quite eligible for the herb garden, and they make a brilliant show. The newer varieties are so magnificent, that it doesn't much matter what the excuse for including them, they should be somewhere in the garden. The different sorts are all worth growing, singles and doubles, those with dark centres, and those with light ones. The “Orange King” and “Lemon Queen” are

great favourites with us; and they bloom luxuriantly till frost comes; and then, if they have any sort of shelter from the direct track of the north wind, such as a wall or a bush, they don't die down entirely, but often survive the winter, and start blooming in the spring. A wonderful colour are marigolds, especially if you can get them near blue flowers.

And yet another bit of gaiety which is not out of place in the herb garden is the nasturtium. Plant mixed dwarfs near the edge, or against a grey background of sage, lavender, and santolina, also called cotton lavender, and you will say they look better there than in the ordinary border.

Two very charming favourites, which must be included in every well-brought-up herb garden, are foxgloves and mulleins. Both were considered important by the old herbalists, and are still used in medicines.

In my garden, however, they are grown solely for their beauty. The foliage of the mullein is unique. The unusual silvery-green, the silky texture, the individual method of growing, combine to make it one of the handsomest plants in the garden, even if it had no blooms. But when the spikes of yellow flowers appear—and some of them are scented like violets—it is a lovely picture.

Planted side by side with foxgloves, the two make a pretty background for lower-growing herbs.

Many more plants than I have named will be found in herb catalogues. But this selection makes a fair-sized beginning for any one who is intending to grow them for pleasure, rather than for marketing, and who has no special yearning for plants which are malodorous, or for those without perfume, and with only inconspicuous flowers. Certain herbs which are of value as drugs have nothing to boast of in the way of appearance; hence I decided I could well spare them from my own domain.

“But what do you actually do with these herbs?” I was asked recently. “You can't use them all in cooking!”

Of course I can't; and I don't want to. A certain few are gathered for stuffing and mint sauce, soup and savouries, but only a very small fraction of the amount I grow. I have a far more important use for the majority of the plants.

When I hear of a friend who is unwell, or over-worked, or simply tired out, and who is unable to leave town, I cut a bunch of all sorts—rosemary, lemon

thyme, bergamot, balm, marjoram, both winter and summer savoury, mints of various kinds, and especially the hairy mint, southern wood, myrtle, and sweet bay. I lay them at the bottom of a tin box, all sweet and dewy and green; some flowers are put on top—anything that is in bloom—and the whole covered with fern and more rosemary.

Summer or winter, I can always find something in my herb garden to carry a message of cheer, even if there are but few flowers in bloom at the time.

And no matter what else I send, whether it be moss-rosebuds of summer, or the snowdrops of winter, it is always the herbs which come in for the larger amount of praise when the box is unpacked. There is something so clean and vitalising in the aromatic scent of these, when fresh gathered. And whether they be of the sub-bitter variety, like hyssop and camomile, or of the savoury order, like marjoram and thyme, or sweet, like balm and lavender, they all have an invigorating quality, which is especially noticeable when one opens a box of them in the spent and stifling air of town.

No wonder the old herbalists attached all sorts of virtues to them, and guaranteed that their use would “banish melancholy, induce great cheerfulness of heart and gladness of countenance.”

I can endorse their views—for once!

Wild Roses

It was Ursula who first put the wild-rose idea into my head.

She was surveying some big pots of sickly-looking *Agapanthus*, which resented the fact that they had been ignored in an attic all the previous winter. As she cut off some withered leaves, she said:

“I wonder why one spends so much energy on trying to make disgruntled non-British plants feel at home in a garden where they only intend to sulk, or propose to die of home-sickness, when there are so many lovely natives only too willing to spread themselves gaily all over the place?”

“Because properly-minded persons would be horrified if we gave garden-room to ‘mere weeds,’ ” Virginia replied.

I looked at the *Agapanthus* plants. They were no credit to the establishment. Certainly, at intervals, they would send up tufts of blue; though in the intervening years they only sent up leaves, which presently looked bilious, and they decayed and produced an ugly smell!

Sometimes they varied the programme by growing an inordinate amount of huge roots, which presently broke the big flower-pots—and big flower-pots don’t grow wild on our hilltop; we can ill afford to spare one, when haulage is so expensive.

These plants have yet another drawback—they are so thirsty in summer, when one has no time to water them, and there may be no rain. Yet the poor things aren’t to blame for their inability to get on with us. Coming from a warm country like South Africa, they need plenty of moisture as well as sun in the summer, and dry atmosphere in the winter, whereas England doesn’t specialise on either of these conditions. And unless one can provide them artificially in a greenhouse, it isn’t much use trying to cultivate these big, only half-hardy strangers.

I have heard that some people manage to do wonders with them, merely by storing them in a cellar during the winter; but my plants weren’t so obliging. They were evidently warped in their nature, or blighted in their youth.

I told Ursula she need not waste any more tenderness on them, as they were going on the bonfire that very day.

Which they did.

We've used the big pots for fuchsias—long, white, drooping blossoms with pink petticoats. Trained on a fan-like wooden trellis, which is at the back of the pot, they give a lovely show of blossoms which light up a shady corner of a north porch, in company with musk and ferns.

Fuchsias are such graceful, fascinating flowers——

But I mustn't stop to talk about them now, because I want to get to the wild roses.

“Just think of the time and trouble we take to get foreign plants to bloom,” Ursula continued; “and all the while we chop down flowers which are far more lovely, and are really most anxious to live with us. Look at that hedge! Isn't it a wicked waste of good flowers?”—and Ursula pointed her scissors in the direction of one of my hedges, which had just had a thorough, all-over haircut, in the way all well-brought-up hedges are supposed to be trimmed. It was as perfectly flat at the top, and squared at the sides, as the gardener could make it, considering the mixed nature of its composition.

The man was just finishing the job as we arrived to inspect it; and having taken great pains with it, he naturally looked to me for some word of approbation.

Of course I praised his work; I hadn't the heart to do anything else, considering how he had perspired over it. But, as I noted the long strands of honeysuckle and wild rose which were lying on the ground with the rest of the trimmings, waiting to be transferred to the bonfire, I made a mental memo to have all this altered another season.

Later on, I took the gardener into my confidence, and explained to him my great craving for all the wild roses and honeysuckle I could possibly get hold of. He listened respectfully, even interestedly; if he thought me mad, he never revealed it, but asked me to show him which plants I wanted left uncut.

We went over a couple of long hedges, and marked the finest rose and honeysuckle plants, and these were left, when later the hedges were cut, and allowed to do as they pleased.

To trim a hedge on these lines was no easy job! But the man made no trouble of it.

Also, we had marked any tall and particularly erect new shoots of hawthorn—some were nearly three feet high above the original hedge level, showing what an amount of rampant growth this lovely plant will make in a season. These were left, at wide intervals, to be encouraged to grow still higher and form hawthorn trees. One cannot possibly have too much may blossom, no

matter how many trees one may possess. When “Spring goeth all in white,” nothing is lovelier than the scented snow of the may.

The following summer we were rewarded with festoons and arching sprays of roses, that were as lovely as anything cultivated in the garden itself. Indeed, nothing which we ourselves had trained to sticks or arches was nearly so graceful. Nature is such a wonderful “arranger.” No human hands can place foliage or flowers as satisfyingly as Nature places them. We put plants into crevices, and beds, and lean them against props—and then, if we are wise, we wait for Nature to do the most important part, and arrange them beautifully. We can’t do that.

Owing to the official regulations, which now require hedges to be kept cut and at a low level, in order that motorists may have unobstructed views, we are fast losing lovely flowering hedgerows, which once were such a charming characteristic of old England. While one quite agrees that it is necessary for the motorist to be able to see over the hedges, at corners, and get glimpses at cross-roads of far-away traffic, as well as the near-at-hand, it is sad, nevertheless, to see how much we are losing by the march of civilisation.

Not only are we sacrificing the hedgerow blossoms, but also the hedgerow scents. As the smell of petrol penetrates farther and farther into the remote side lanes, so the perfume of wild rose and honeysuckle recedes, with the cutting down of the hedges. Here and there, some pink-smothered hedge will be seen in a field, away from the road; but as a rule, the cattle do the trimming on these! And the sight of wreaths of wild roses is becoming rarer every year.

In our district, hedges are the exception; walls are the prevailing boundary lines. Owing to the rocky nature of the hills, great quantities of stone had to be excavated by the forefathers of the hamlet (I object to their being called “rude” forefathers; those I knew were always extremely polite!) before they could start on any sort of agriculture. And, as this stone had to be put somewhere, they used as much as they could in the building of their houses and barns, putting walls three feet thick, and adding buttresses to the barns which look strong enough to keep a cathedral in a steady frame of mind. Yet these devices only used a portion of the blocks of granite and “pudding stone,” which had to be cleared off the ground before so much as a cow could stroll over it. So they piled it up, and made massive walls around the land they reclaimed from the wilds of the forest—walls which are nothing short of wonderful in their solid construction, and so built that though they are often on the steepest incline, a section could be taken anywhere from a wall, and yet the remaining portion would stand firm and unmoved; whereas you would imagine that the wall

would promptly tumble downhill, once a portion was detached.

Owing to this superabundance of rock, there was no need to plant hedges. But, fortunately, it happens that on my premises there are several hedges in different fields, and as they do not border a public road, I am not obliged to keep them cut low.

I am now encouraging these hedges to be as wild and wayward as they please—and they have responded with such alacrity that it looks as though they would soon overrun the fields if I don't keep them in check. The growth of everything here is so rampant.

And it is such a varied collection! In one hedge alone the following mixture is to be found, and all in a most delightful tangle—hawthorn, beech, maple, lime, dogwood, holly, oak, wayfaring tree, sloe or blackthorn, and osier.

Here and there, at wide intervals, are crab-apple trees and perry pears, also growing in the hedge. Of course, these are never cut; and each spring they are smothered with bloom, first the pears, all snowy white, and then the apple trees, a flush of rosy-pink and white. Later, they strew the lane beneath them with apples, yellowy-green and crimson, and pears a hard rugged brown, which send up a fruity aroma as they are trodden upon by passers by.

All these trees and bushes form the solid core of the hedge, so to speak. But in among them, and over and all round about them, are wild roses sending up long arching sprays and starred with pink, or white, blossoms; ivy creeps up the bank and climbs up the stems and around the trees; bryony adds scarlet berries in the autumn; honeysuckle fills the summer evenings with its scent, its flowers often lasting right on till the frost, while its grey-green leaf-buds are among the first to show in the early weeks of the year. Blackberries are everywhere, there isn't a more determined wildling than the bramble—unless it be the bindweed, and their exquisitely-shaped white blossoms surmount even the brambles.

Down below, at the bottom of the hedge, is another, and different, world of flowers and plants. Ferns are thick all along the banks; celandine gleams there like sunshine in the early spring, with wild daffodils and cuckoo pints pushing through the ground ivy; wood sorrel shakes out its dainty little bells with the coming of spring; wind-flowers and bluebells are in bloom along with the primroses and violets, and here and there a pink or purple orchis.

As these begin to wane, the red campion, white stitchwort, and blue alkanet come into flower; forget-me-nots are blooming, and the variegated dead nettle

displays new leaves with a delicate tracery of silver on the green. Buttercups creep along from the field, hoping to be less crowded outside the hedge than they were inside. Moon daisies quickly join them. The sweet little wild pansies hold up their faces like tiny innocent children, and the small pink-tipped daisies nestle down beside them. Soon the foxgloves glow in the background, and send their spikes of bloom in among the branches of the hedge. The blue succory, or chicory, is another lovely resident, while melilot and vetches also contrive to get a foothold—though the bank is so crowded; it’s a wonder how they all manage to find a living.

And then there are the grasses—I counted fifty-eight different sorts of grasses in our fields one day! It is difficult to say which are the loveliest; but my own special favourites are the fine bent grass (sometimes called summer cloud grass), the quaking grass, and the silvery hair grass. The hedgebanks are waving with the soft mist of flowering grasses in June, giving a delicate ethereal look to the leaves and flowers around them.

Here, again, I have put a stop to the trimming, which is considered the correct treatment for hedgebanks in all rural districts.

It is the custom to have a man with a bill-hook, or a slasher, attack the hedgebanks about July, and cut down all the greenstuff he can hack at, leaving the bank—“tidy.” In reality, it is a clearing away of unlimited beauty; and the bare, maimed stalks which remain are pathetic objects of pity.

I know it is necessary to keep the vegetation within bounds, otherwise the roads would soon become impassable. But the usual method of slashing down everything before many of the seeds have had a chance to ripen and sow themselves, means a wholesale wiping out of certain annuals and biennials—foxgloves, for instance. Also it prevents the increase of ferns.

There is another disadvantage in this process. Nature, when left to her own wise devices, does much to preserve life and assist it to increase. The ferns have their next year’s leaves curled up, and waiting in readiness, the previous autumn. These need protection. If the winter is mild, the green fronds remain above the next year’s contingent. If a spell of cold sets in, the green fronds wither and fall in a tent-like protection over the curled-up fronds below, keeping them warm and sheltered, without pressing too heavily upon them. This protective method of the ferns is really very remarkable, when one looks into it. And the old brown fronds often screen other young things as well as their own kind. Many a seedling primrose owes its life to the kindly shelter of the soft brown and gold ferns, which kept the bitter winter winds from its tender little rosette of soft green leaves.

But the tidying mania of to-day does away with all this much-needed winter covering. Nothing is left to come between frost and cold, and the frail buds and soft shoots which will bring next year's leaves and flowers. The hardiest plants manage to survive; but the young seedlings perish. And in this way, our ferns and choicest wild flowers are vanishing from the hedgebanks. Yet, if only the slashing could be regulated a little, so as to spare the fern fronds and smaller vegetation (and it is quite possible to do this, and yet keep the brambles and coarser growths under control), it would be a gain to the beauty of the countryside. Some day—when it is too late—we shall give attention to these important matters!

As I, personally, prefer foxgloves and ferns, and the other lovely little hedgelings, to all the tidiness one can mention, and as I want them to increase and have a happy life while they live, I stopped the wholesale demolition, which had conscientiously endeavoured to make my hedges and banks "tidy" in the orthodox way. Nothing is cut till the end of the autumn, and then, only such things are trimmed as need to be kept in suppression. This means that we never have hideous bare banks in the autumn, as though a reaping-machine had gone over them. Instead, everything turns to its autumn colouring in a beautiful fashion, while the ferns and a host of other plants remain green right through the winter, unless there is a severe spell of cold.

In this way the ferns increase rapidly, and the flowering plants have a chance to reproduce their kind.

Of course, it takes more time and trouble to cut back only certain items, and leave others, when trimming the hedges. But the fairy-like beauty of the wild roses has more than repaid for the trouble. And since, as time goes on, our hedges will become less and less the beautiful features in the landscape, which they once were, I think those who have hedges which are off the public road, might well give a little thought to their welfare.

Unless we guard against it, a time will come when we shall long to find the wild flowers, which once were so plentiful in our lanes; but instead we shall only see mutilated stumps, and in place of the waving wild rose sprays, there will be the petrol pumps.

If wild roses were as expensive to rear as choice orchids, people would be clamouring to get them. But because they ask for nothing but fresh air, and a little space in which to wave their festoons of blossoms, we hack them down, and seldom give a thought to the loveliness which we are thus destroying.

Yet—where can you find a scent more delicate than the wild rose perfume?

Where is there a colour more exquisite than the wild rose pink? And where is there anything more beautiful, either in art or in Nature, than a half-opened wild rose bud?

On Seeing Red

One hesitates to disparage any flowers. And certainly the expanding poppy bud is a marvel of beauty, no less than a wonderful study in packing. The way it unfolds its crinkly silk dress, and shakes it out in the sun, and then presents it to the world perfectly smooth and uncreased, is little short of a miracle.

But scarlet is a most disturbing colour, unless it is kept severely under; and nowhere does it need more judicious suppression than in the garden.

One is not likely to overdo that colour in one's house furnishings; yet many people who would be horrified at the thought of scarlet curtains, or bedspread, or even a scarlet cushion, will allow scarlet geraniums, geums, lychnis, and poppies to be so insistent in the garden border, as to turn the pink roses to a purplish hue, and take the colour out of everything else.

One small touch of scarlet may be the making of the colour scheme; but two touches, especially if they are large ones, can completely ruin the whole.

The flower-gardener needs to be an artist as well as a horticulturist. He, or she, needs to have a colour sense, if the garden is to give the best return for the labour and money spent upon it.

Yet, because scarlet is an easily procurable colour, and also a showy colour, it gets imported into garden after garden, in such quantities as to do away with most things which a garden ought to stand for.

I've seen red salvias flatten out every other plant in their vicinity, till one saw nothing in the whole garden but red salvias. And I've seen a scarlet geranium, placed judiciously near some white asters, enhance all the blues and yellows and pinks in the border.

Like an artist, one must know just where to put the touch of red, that it may accent the whole picture. But if one isn't sure, better leave it out altogether, rather than overdo it and kill the rest of the flowers.

A garden should appear to be a restful place. I say "appear to be," for, as every conscientious gardener knows, there is no rest for the maker of the garden. The general effect, however—when visitors call—should be a suggestion of calm peacefulness and "fair quiet," as Andrew Marvel so exactly expressed it.

Scarlet is the very last thing to produce this effect. It is the most restless, vehement, aggressive and irritating colour known to humanity; and it will

often produce an erratic restlessness in the beholder, though he, or she, may not realise the reason for this unreposefulness.

I was some time before I discovered what was the discordant note in my own small gardening efforts. But I ran it to earth at last, when I unexpectedly came upon a clump of oriental poppies beside a Russian almond. By rights, the Russian ought to have been red, of course! But, instead, the bush was covered right down to the ground with tiny, frail-looking, pale pink flowers. And when the huge poppy heads burst into bloom, they fairly bellowed at their dainty little neighbours.

There comes another consideration, when one has grown to know one's garden intimately. While certain plants are very beautiful when in bloom, their flowering period is so brief, that it becomes a question as to how far it is worth while to give up space to them for the rest of the year?

I found that many of the garden inmates were not blooming when I happened to be at the Flower-Patch in late summer; while some had the further disadvantage of becoming a real disfigurement once their blossoms were over.

The oriental poppies are a case in point. They are a refreshing green when first they throw up their prettily-cut leaves in the spring. And a little later, when the big flower heads appear, the bursting buds are gorgeous. But in a very few days, the scarlet loses its rich tone, and begins to fade to a brick-dust red. The blooms, unless well staked, begin to flop over; and it is seldom worth while to stake them (at any rate if you have to do the job yourself), as the flowers are so short-lived.

Next, the leaves, which by May have grown large and coarse, begin to sprawl over the bed, and smother everything near them. A strong wind, or a heavy shower, will finish their beauty; and immediately they start on the down grade—so far as appearances go. When I arrive on the scene in July, I find them a veritable rag-bag—brown and withered and altogether derelict, each clump taking up a large portion of the bed, because the leaves lie down flat, when they can find no better occupation, and there is nothing to show for all the space thus sacrificed, but some seed pods. These are very shapely, I admit, and classic in their association. But they aren't worth the amount of garden border the prostrate plant occupies.

At last I asked myself: is it worth while giving them room all the year round, for one week of brilliancy, and fifty-one weeks of being more or less of a nuisance?

After a little meditation—out they all came!

At least, to be exact, Ursula and I dug and dug one hot August day, hoping to get them out.

August is often the least attractive time in the garden, unless one is always on the spot, to see that newcomers are put in, to fill up the gaps when the spring flowers die down.

That particular August, we happened to find an expanse of seed pods and disreputable-looking done-withs, when we arrived, where we had hoped to find flowers. The handyman of that era had been away ill.

As the oriental poppies looked the most untidy of the lot, we started on them forthwith. And as we piled the wheelbarrow high with tough, and still tougher, roots (and oh! what a job they were to get up!), and added raspy brown stalks and leaves and seed pods, Ursula said: “We’ll give them a handsome funeral, since it’s the last we shall see of them.” And she set the bonfire going.

Yet, next spring, behold the fresh green leaves pushed up through the soil again! Small plants quickly developed into big ones. And still oriental poppies blaze out and flourish amain, for a week of gaudy days. Then they try to take possession of the whole place, just as their ancestors did before them.

But there is an energetic gardener in command now. He knows and respects my views on the poppy question. And if I arrive when the flowers are over, I find he has cleared up the remains, and removed all trace of them, optimistically hoping that this time he has eradicated them. Yet, they still flourish!

I am convinced that these poppies should be planted a long way off, and against a green background. At the far edge of a field they would look handsome, only they would be good neither for the cattle, nor for the hay. The scarlet should have nothing but green near it—or green and white. That is part of the great charm of the East Coast Poppyland—the scarlet against the green fields and the white chalk cliffs.

Whereas in the average garden, when surrounded with spring flowers, the colour simply kills every other colour within sight, unless it be blue irises. And even these look better apart from the poppies, for there is some crimson in many blue irises, giving them a purple tint, which the scarlet deadens.

The geranium, another of the scarlet fraternity, has achieved popularity and fame through real merit. It has several most desirable characteristics, either of

which is sufficient to endear it to the heart of any gardener who longs to get the most for his money.

Firstly: It blooms for a long season, and can be relied on, if given reasonable treatment, to continue to send up bosses of flower, right up to the frost. And even then, if taken indoors, it will do its best to keep a bright spot of colour in the window, right on till Christmas.

Secondly: It will give the maximum of bloom for the minimum of space, if required to keep within small dimensions. On the other hand, it will form a hedge, or smother the front of a house (climate permitting) with the utmost generosity.

You may have heard of the lady who, before starting on a tour round the world, entrusted a cherished geranium, with many instructions, to the care of her dearest friend. From California, however, she sent a postcard. All she said on it was, "You can put that old geranium on the bonfire!"

Thirdly: For window-boxes there is nothing so all-round useful as the geranium. And, again, for filling in blanks, and allowing itself to be moved from pillar to post—now decorating the greenhouse, later brightening the garden border—it is worthy of the highest praise and every sort of commendation.

And lastly: Its flowers wear well. They don't ask much attention, if only they can get out into the sunlight. Drought doesn't worry them. They don't harbour blight. Their foliage is often very beautiful; and though they have not the sweet perfume of the rose and the lily, they have a definite scent—warm and almost aromatic—which has pleasant summery association for many people.

But, having said all this—which is not nearly enough, nor as much as it deserves—in favour of the geranium, I will add that I cannot understand why so many people ignore the varieties which show exquisite shades of pink, rose-colour and salmon, while they perpetually exhibit nothing but scarlets, and often the crude yellow-scarlets at that.

And the inexperienced amateur isn't the only sinner in this respect. One sometimes sees beds of the harshest scarlets, unrelieved by anything else, dotted about the parks—for the edification of the public, and at the public's expense, of course.

Yet, what a totally different effect can be obtained by combining the full rose-pink with white geraniums. The white varieties are lovely, and when mixed with any of the pinks are most delightful.

In Victorian days, when “carpet bedding” was going out, and what we now call the herbaceous border was coming in, the professional gardener still clung to massed-colour effects, and did his very best to avoid having his garden beds sink so low as to look natural! Hence he developed, and gloried in, that atrocious mixture which remained in the suburbs even in my young days—the scarlet geranium, yellow calceolaria, and blue lobelia combination.

One laughs at it now, and realises how glaring, and staring, and flaring a colour scream it was! And how the flowers ruined each other collectively, while individually they are so beautiful, and, when placed in congenial company, are absolutely satisfying to the eye.

Nevertheless, our colour combinations to-day are often nearly as bad. And though it is a step in the right direction, to add white marguerites to the scarlet, it is only a very small step; we have a good deal yet to learn regarding the scarlet geranium itself—when “to,” and when “not to”!

There is this much to be said for the Victorian gardener, he had not as many varieties of geraniums at his disposal as are now procurable. Also, the gardens of that era were far larger than the average gardens are now. He could better afford to fling about plenty of green to balance it, than can the gardener of to-day, who, alas, has so little in the way of grass and trees, and practically no background for his colour.

The moral of my discourse is this: If you have not tried pink and white geraniums, let me urge you to do so. I’m very keen on this combination—it is so restful, so delicately beautiful. I mean the rose-pink rather than the salmon-pink varieties. The latter are handsome, and very rich-looking, but they are best kept to themselves; they do not always combine satisfactorily with other colours.

Whereas the rose-pinks are happy almost anywhere; and they seem made to go with the pure white. If you are trying them in a window-box, they are exactly right when associated with those lovely relations of theirs—the trailing ivy-leaved geraniums.

I agree that the scarlets make a bolder show as seen from outside; but—I think if you give the pinks (various shades) and the whites a trial, you will say that they are the most beautiful part of the room, as seen from the inside.

In the garden beds they need to be grouped, several together. Lacking the fierce insistence of the scarlets—where one at a time is usually enough—the pink varieties are more effective in small companies. Pink can be somewhat of a retiring colour in flowers, unless it is emphasised by numbers, or in some

other way given special prominence. And though it may sound contradictory to say so, after all I have written about scarlet, I will add that one scarlet geranium will sometimes do wonders in emphasising a large clump of pink blossoms!

I don't pretend to explain how, or why, it is so. I only know what I have seen with my own eyes. And because it can, and does, make a difference, I have often added one scarlet to a window-box of pink and white, and the whole group has gained thereby.

The old-time monks knew something of this colour secret: witness how they would introduce both scarlet and pink into the same page of illuminated manuscript.

One can't always go by rules—in garden-planning, not by any means. Often one has just to trust to one's eyes, and the effect certain colours and scents and flowers have on one's brain. Half the time one cannot really say, without stopping to do a deal of thinking, why it is that one thing irritates and another thing soothes. But, generally speaking, one's instincts, or intuitions, are fairly right. And, failing better advice, they may as well be followed.

Obliging a Neighbour

When Mrs. Wellborn received the letter, telling of her son's illness, from Maude, her daughter-in-law, we were all very sympathetic. We knew most that was to be known about Henry, because he was Mrs. Wellborn's one and only topic of conversation. We had heard every detail of his career, from infancy upwards, and could repeat his clever sayings backwards—we knew them so thoroughly. But such maternal concentration was excusable, we admitted, in a widow who had no other child.

We knew he had a very good post with a big commercial firm in the City. That he had sailed, immediately after his marriage, to take up an appointment in the firm's South African branch.

We had heard that the bride had made herself very pleasant to her mother-in-law, in the short space of time available for this purpose; their one regret being the fact that Henry had omitted to mention that he had a mother, or that he had a fiancée, till the day before the wedding. Naturally, it was a little surprise to both ladies!

But since Mrs. Wellborn could see no defect in her boy, she made the very best of it. And the bride, anxious to lose no chance of a wedding present, and knowing that a few thousand miles would soon intervene between her and her mother-in-law, laid herself out to be charming and daughterly to this unforeseen relation.

These, and similar details, were so familiar to us, after frequent repetition, that we almost regarded Henry as our own. Therefore, when Mrs. Wellborn rushed round hysterically with the news that her son was down with fever, and she must go out to him at once, with one voice everybody in the neighbourhood said, "*Do* let me know if I can do anything, won't you?"—though we knew we could do nothing to relieve her anxiety.

Her house is about a quarter of a mile from my cottage, still higher up the hill—a very pretty place, solid and comfortable-looking from the outside, and smothered with flowery green-stuff; while inside it is furnished delightfully and with indications of a refined taste on all sides.

I was just wondering what she would do about the house—when she called on me to ask if I would mind having the key? She was putting the place in the hands of an agent, to let it furnished, or sell it if he got a suitable offer, as she would probably remain in South Africa and make her home permanently with

Henry and Maude. She knew that her daughter-in-law—such a sweet girl—would be more than glad of her company. But there was the question of the keys of the house; she didn't feel like leaving them with the agent a dozen miles away, and letting people come and go as they pleased. Why, any one could empty the house before returning the keys to the agent! Would it be troubling me . . . ? Was I quite sure I didn't mind . . . ? People would have to pass my house on the way up to hers; it would be such a relief to her to know that the keys were in reliable hands. . . . She did hope it wouldn't be a nuisance . . . ? I wasn't to hesitate about saying No! if . . . etc.

Of course I said, Certainly, and by all means. And assured her we were only too pleased if we could do *anything*; and this was such a trifle. We would soon let the house for her; and, probably, before she was out of sight of land, her new tenants would be moving in. She wasn't to give it another thought.

She left, expressing an absurdly large amount of gratitude; and I went to bed that night with the satisfied feeling one has after having done one's good deed for the day.

“What's she rushing off to Africa for?” inquired the Head of Affairs later, in the privacy of the domestic hearth.

“To help nurse her son who is down with some sort of fever,” I explained patiently, for the second time.

“But he'll be better, or buried, by the time she gets out there. It must be a month since the letter was posted; and it will be three weeks or more till she reaches him.”

“Perhaps it will be a very long illness,” I said hopefully. “But at any rate, she says her daughter-in-law will simply be longing to see her——”

“Did she ask her to come out?”

“No; she evidently didn't like actually to ask her to come all that way—Mrs. Wellborn says; but she knows Maude will be so thankful to have her mother-in-law on the spot to advise her, and take the burden of everything off her shoulders, and be company for her.”

“Ah!” was his only further comment. But then, of course, he hasn't the feelings of a mother—nor of a daughter-in-law either, if it comes to that! So I didn't argue.

The first applicants arrived one morning at half-past ten. I told Abigail to go along with them, and remain there till they left. I felt responsible for Mrs.

Wellborn's goods, and didn't intend to trust solely to the honest appearance of the callers.

Abigail didn't return till one o'clock. She was considerably disgruntled; but then—so were those of us who had been obliged to cook the dinner in her absence!

I didn't blame her. I knew she couldn't help it. But I decided I must go myself in future, as I could probably dismiss the people more quickly than she could.

It appeared that the two inquirers had not only gone over every item of furniture, and questioned Abigail about the life history of every one on the hillside—including ourselves; but they had failed to give Abigail any tip, and had finally gone off, saying they were not going to pay more than £2 per week for a house. Whereas Mrs. Wellborn required £4 per week for hers—and the wretches knew that before they came!

I took the next inquirer in tow myself. Expatiated on the beauty of the scenery, the virtues of Mrs. Wellborn as a landlady, and the desirability of her house—as we mounted the quarter-mile which stands nearly on end, instead of lying down flat as is usual with properly-conducted miles.

But the woman said never a word.

Making a valiant effort, with what little breath remained at my disposal by the time we reached the house, I pointed out the charm of the terraced lawns, the gorgeous colouring of the rock garden, the weedless perfection of the vegetable garden (so unlike my own, alas!), and the water-lily basin surrounded with irises.

Still no response.

I became still more eloquent over the sundial, the crazy paving and the bird bath, and inquired if she took an interest in birds? Then at last she opened her mouth.

“Yes, I do; and that's why I want to know where I'm to put my poultry farm among all this flummery?”

I said I was afraid she couldn't put it anywhere! Hadn't the agent told her that fowls were taboo?

“Yes, I believe he did say something about no fowls. But that is absurd, of course. Having a poultry farm means fowls—naturally. And if I don't have a poultry farm, how am I to pay the rent?”

Her parting words were: “I think you ought to have told me the place wasn’t fit for poultry, before you dragged me up this awful hill!”

After one or two other obviously impossibles, there arrived a retired military officer. I heaved a sigh of relief. A man would hardly be likely to inflict his autobiography on me, or to spend twenty minutes in each room trying to decide whether the wall-paper suited his complexion—as previous people had done.

He was even briefer than I had anticipated, greeting me with a leaf out of his pocket-book, on which he had jotted down a few things he wanted done—which included the enlargement of the garage, to hold another car; the cutting down of all trees anywhere near the house; a new rain-water cistern for the garden; the building of a square bay window to the room he proposed to use as his study; and central heating.

“But you haven’t seen the house yet!” I said in surprise. “I’ll get the key, and——”

“Don’t trouble,” he interrupted me. “I’ve already been up there, and walked around the garden, and looked in at the rooms through the windows. It will suit me nicely. I’ll agree to take it, if you will have these little items attended to.”

“But you haven’t been upstairs,” I continued. “And in any case, I suppose some lady will have to see the place; and she will want to look at the upper rooms, if they don’t interest you!”

“I’m a bachelor,” he explained. “My man and his wife do all that is needed. It’s sure to be all right upstairs. Only there will be his car to be housed as well as mine; so that garage won’t do; otherwise——”

And he dismissed all the rest of the house with a gesture of unconcern. His only anxiety was for the comfort of the cars, his books, and the garden. I referred him to the agent, explaining that my only part in the business was the custody of the key—to oblige a neighbour.

I conclude the agent said No to his scrap of paper. We never saw him again.

And now there was a curious development. People began to arrive in bunches, soon after breakfast, and continuing at intervals till sunset. Many of them were young people, apparently on holiday, not at all like careworn heads of families, or responsible citizens who would be purchasing or renting a house. Yet they all seemed so extremely pleased to see me! You would have

thought I was a long-lost friend, judging by the kind way they gazed upon me.

When I asked for the agent's order to view, they merely smiled pleasantly at me, and said they hoped I would excuse their coming without one, but it was a long way to go to Monmouth for it.

I then inquired if they lived in the district? No; they always gave the address of some boarding-house, or hotel, or private apartments. And, being August, the whole valley was, as usual, packed with holiday makers, all of whom seemed anxious to inspect Mrs. Wellborn's premises.

I was worn out with toiling up the hill. But when I got the Head of Affairs to do duty, while I regained my breath, he spent so much time in being amiable to them, and they all seemed so charmed with him, that there was no getting him back home again, even for meals. And, further detachments arriving before he returned, I would have to escort them myself as heretofore.

"I don't believe half these people really want a house!" I said to Abigail, who by this time was heartily sick of the door bell.

"Of course they don't," she snorted.

"Then why do they climb up here? Mrs. Wellborn's house isn't worth such a long journey; it isn't as though it were a famous mansion or castle."

"It isn't *her* house they're after," said the handmaid. "It's this one! Haven't you written about this place, and haven't people haunted us ever since, till we've had to chain up all the gates, and put those 'no admittance' notices on them? Now that there's a chance to get inside of us, *of course* they'll come! I knew they would, as soon as they got wind of it." And she looked at me pityingly, to think I was so slow in the uptake.

"The gardener must show round the next party," I told my husband. "We cannot devote the whole of our holiday to these personally conducted tours."

I wished, with all my heart, that the tiresome house would let.

Every now and again our hopes rose high. There was a woman who came four times in a sumptuous car, each time bringing a few friends with her. She came from the far side of Glamorganshire. After her first visit, we let her have the key, and didn't accompany her—she seemed above suspicion. Besides, my shoes were wearing out!

Each time, she said she would probably be about an hour, as she wanted to take measurements. The fourth time, it was considerably more than an hour, and she had not reappeared; so we went up to see if she had decamped with the key. There on the lawn, under the trees, was a bright and joyous picnic party.

Not only were Mrs. Wellborn's chairs in use, but also her china and cutlery. They had lighted her oil-stove and boiled water in her kettle, and altogether had evidently found it a very pleasant spot to steer for, when out on an excursion. The hamper containing their refreshments had been brought in from the car, and altogether it must have made a delightful interlude. The woman had the grace to look a trifle confused when I walked in upon it all; and she gave some lame excuse. Needless to say, *she* never turned up again.

Yet another stylish person came several times, and seemed to mean business. She didn't want to rent the house, but was anxious to buy it, she said. She arranged for a very capable local builder to meet her there, and go over some alterations she proposed to make.

She began with the entrance hall, which had to be turned into a lounge. She threw out bay windows (in imagination, of course), and built up others. She decided that the attics would make a good billiard-room; and shifted the bathroom to the other side of the house. She cut off a piece of one bedroom, and added it to another. She had paper scraped from the walls and replaced with distemper.

But she came to a standstill when she couldn't decide which room the lady's maid could use for her sewing-room. While she pondered this important point, the builder began to add up figures in his notebook, working sums therein with a stubby bit of pencil. When she finally settled the lady's maid in a small room which she decided to build as an annex, the builder, who, so far, had scribbled much but said little, now spoke.

"Excuse my asking you, ma'am; but do you know what all this is going to cost?"

"I haven't reckoned it up yet," she said with dignity, "but of course one must make the house *habitable*." (You would have thought it was a hovel, to hear her!)

"Well, ma'am, you've got a habitable house here already; a very nice, well-built house too! Why in the world you want to pull the whole place to bits, and then build it up like crazy patchwork, beats me, though it's your business, of course, and not for me to criticise. But at any rate I had better tell you that the alterations you have mentioned so far, will cost you well over a thousand pounds. And you say you haven't finished yet. Now, ma'am, why don't you just take the house as it stands, and live in it?"

The builder was a sensible man. He saw she hadn't the faintest idea of the labour and cost involved in her haphazard schemes. He had all the work he

could do, and doubtless wondered if he would ever get paid for so wild a job.

The lady looked amazed at his estimate of cost, and said faintly, “Perhaps I had better think it over. I wasn’t reckoning to spend more than about a hundred pounds.”

I thought as much! The person who is most glib over structural alterations, is invariably the one who is the least prepared to pay the bill.

This particular woman finally decided that, as there wasn’t adequate accommodation for the lady’s maid, she could not consider the house.

We felt quite glad to be quit of that lady’s maid at last. We were beginning to find her rather trying to live with!

In the early stages of this house-letting affair, we offered refreshments to our callers. It is a long distance to the village, and no means of getting anything any nearer, and on a hot day if people had not come by car, they often looked tired.

Moreover, like most other men, the Head of Affairs loves to wave an expansive hand towards the door of his tent, and say to all and sundry, “Pray come in—and—shall I ring for another plate and knife and fork, my dear?”

Of course it may be awkward sometimes, *e.g.* if there happen to be only enough cutlets numerically for the family. But the lady of the house is supposed to be prepared for all such emergencies (only, alas, she isn’t always!)—though the store-cupboard is usually sufficiently well equipped to cope with a few extra meals.

Naturally, Abigail has to reduce *her* feelings to mere looks on such occasions. But she is fairly successful in this direction.

It is so easy to quote Biblical precedence for this form of hospitality. Only most masculines forget that domestic assistants are not now as numerous as they were in the days of the patriarch; also that Abraham himself dressed and cooked the veal, whereas cooking the joint is quite outside the purview of the average twentieth-century husband. Not that any twentieth-century wife would want her life partner in the kitchen, tinkering with the oven, when she was getting a meal ready for company! But that is neither here nor there!

And another thing. There are not many instances in the Bible of the strangers proving angels; though a fair number turned out just the reverse.

All the same, I myself like the pleasant feeling of being hospitable, when it can be done without disorganising the temperaments of the kitchen staff. And

on the days when the lemonade and cake was cleared up by inspecting parties, we resorted to tea and potted-meat sandwiches. That went on for several weeks.

But after two men, whom we regaled with coffee and then left alone for a few minutes, slipped out of the house quietly and into their waiting car, taking our silver candlesticks with them—we closed down our refreshment department!

And the Head of Affairs walked softly for a few days. They were valuable candlesticks.

Yet, in spite of my resolve to “Never again” where tea was concerned, I did break through the rule. One of the many applicants was a lady who said she had come from Chelsea that day on purpose to see the house. The gardener took her up. She didn’t spend much time on the premises, however (the gardener reported later that she barely glanced at the rooms), but returned almost immediately, and asked to see me, with a view to taking the house.

I wasn’t the agent, as I told her, but I was pleased to give any information I could. Tea was still on the table out of doors, and it was natural to offer her a meal, as she had come straight from the station to the house. She settled down cheerfully in a wicker chair, and proceeded to talk on generalities, but didn’t ask much about the house, I noticed. Explained that she and a friend lived together, so of course she couldn’t decide finally till the friend had seen the place; but she felt that Mrs. Wellborn’s house was exactly, and in every particular, the very one they were seeking. And then she turned the conversation in the direction of literature.

But I wasn’t keen on literature at that moment. I was trying to get a holiday away from literature—as far away from it, indeed, as ever I could get! I wanted above everything else to proceed with my gardening.

Still she sat on, making a very comprehensive tea. I didn’t grudge it to her, neither did I like to oust her. It is a long, very long, couple of miles to walk from the station, and all uphill. She was probably tired. And if she were really intending to purchase the house and its contents, as she had implied, it was certainly desirable to establish pleasant relations, seeing that she would be one of our nearest neighbours.

So I sat on, trying to appear interested in her talk; though my mind insisted on wandering around the gladiolus, which I had intended to stake that evening.

Presently I found I was listening to the plot of a novel. Gradually the fact dawned on me that she had written that novel. In due course it transpired that

she was anxious to find an editor or publisher willing to purchase it. In verification whereof, she produced the MS. from an attaché case she had with her, pressing it into my unwilling hands!

Though it is part of my daily life to sit at the receipt of MSS., novels included, I must confess it does not predispose me to kindly thought when some one insinuates herself (and it is usually a "her") into my private dwelling-place, and wastes an unnecessary amount of my time, in order to present her MS. to me personally. Inexperienced authors often try to do this; yet nothing is gained thereby, apart from a certain amount of irritation and delay, because of work going out of its proper business course.

In any case, the MS. has to be duly checked and entered up by those responsible for this work. When it is deposited on my private doorstep, it only gives me the trouble of dispatching it straight away to my office, to go through the recognised routine.

Hence, it did not make me over-keen to read the novel, when I found I had been detained for over a couple of hours, obviously with nothing other than the novel in view. When the caller also added that her friend with whom she lived wanted to illustrate it, as she was a struggling artist who found it very difficult to get into touch with editors (unlike the writer of the novel, evidently!), I realised that they had not the remotest intention of buying a house. The whole visit was undoubtedly a planned ruse on behalf of the MS.

"But how did you know I was here, and that I had charge of this key?" I asked her.

For, after all, neither the London press, nor the wireless, had informed the world concerning these important matters! I wondered how the people in Chelsea happened to know that by coming and making inquiries about an out-of-the-way house-to-let, they could waylay any editor and bestow a MS. upon that unfortunate person?

"A friend of ours was staying at a boarding-house the other side of the river. The proprietress told her boarders that a house was to let near the Flower-Patch, and that by coming for the key they could gain admission. So they made up a party and came over. She was ever so pleased, and wrote and told me about it."

She never so much as blushed at her own duplicity.

"Then you are not really wanting a house?" I said, trying not to show the annoyance I felt at having my time wasted. I rose from the table, however, as I didn't intend to press the lady to stay to supper. "You have no intention of

taking Mrs. Wellborn's place?"

"Well, that depends," she said archly. "If you accept my novel, and my friend illustrates it—there's no knowing how we may be able to launch out, and perhaps have a country house into the bargain."

Just then the Head of Affairs sent a message that he wanted to speak to me.

"Can't you put her up for the night?" he said, indicating the figure still reclining gracefully in the low chair under the fir tree. "It's a good walk down to the village; and if she's going to buy the house——"

"She isn't," I snapped. "And there are still two hours of daylight ahead of her, and she can easily get a bed at the inn."

I hadn't a bit of the Abraham spirit in me just then!

So she left the MS., and I suggested she should make her way down to the village, in case it were dark before she found sleeping accommodation. I never saw her again.

Next afternoon, a local resident—a lady of considerable means, who lives in an especially charming house—called on me, and hoped that my friend had found my house quite easily that morning; she had given her careful directions.

But as no friend had arrived that day, I was mystified. By degrees it came out. The novelist, after leaving us the evening before, when on her way to the village, chanced to see this lady in her garden. She stopped and inquired if she could get a bed for the night in the neighbourhood, explaining that she was a friend of mine, who had just arrived by train. But as it was getting late, she wouldn't go up to my house on the chance of finding me there, but wanted to sleep somewhere just for the night, and then call on me in the morning.

The resident (who, of course, had no idea that the novelist had already spent half the day at my house) didn't wish to see any friend of ours stranded for the night on a lonely hillside; she very kindly said:

"I happen to have a room all ready, waiting for my daughter who is coming to-morrow. You are quite welcome to sleep here to-night."

Which she did, plus supper and breakfast.

Next morning, the local resident directed her how to get to us. The novelist thanked her, but said she must first go to the station to get her bag, which she had left there.

In reality, she took the next train back to London, having secured her tea, a night's lodging, supper and breakfast for nothing!

At last, however, the agent wrote to say the house was really let, and would I please hand over the keys to the new tenant—a Miss Gurgle, who would be calling for them immediately.

I had seen a Mrs. Gurgle; so I concluded he must mean Mrs. Gurgle. She had come with her husband, a Major Gurgle; and there was her dearest friend with her, a Mrs. Shingle, with a Mr. Shingle in the background. They had only been once; and had declared straight away that it was the house of their dreams, so restful and secluded, and just the place they longed for, where they could be simply wrapped in the quiet and possess their souls in peace. Thus Mrs. Shingle.

Judging merely by their garters, it occurred to me that they could do with a trifle more wrapping, no matter what the material used; and they certainly needed to possess something more in the way of clothing for their bodies, quite irrespective of their souls. I didn't grudge them the peace, if they wanted it; but their outward appearance suggested the type of women more likely to mar other people's peace, rather than bask in any such commodity themselves.

What really surprised me most of all, was the fact of the agent letting the house to two couples. The wives had told me that, being dearest friends, they wanted to share a house between them. Whereas, Mrs. Wellborn had emphatically stated that there was to be no sub-letting.

Still—this was the agent's business, not mine. I handed over the keys, only too thankful to be rid of them.

And in order to stop the stream of people who still continued to ring our bell, ostensibly to make inquiries about the house to let, we put violent notices on all the gates, calculated to discourage further callers. I then settled down to enjoy the remainder of my holiday, and possess—if not my soul in peace, at any rate, my front door in private.

It was only a few days later that Mrs. Shingle called. She didn't seem as wrapped in quiet and at peace with all the world as one would have expected.

Before I had even finished my preliminary polite hopes that everything was comfortable and to her liking, and that they were settling down nicely, she began:

“Of course I don't want to seem disagreeable, and I don't expect to have the whole house to ourselves, as we're only paying half the rent; but I do think we are entitled to a half, and ought to have it.”

I sighed! But I've known dearest friends share houses before! Therefore, I

wasn't surprised to hear that Mrs. Gurgle had annexed the large airy kitchen, and allocated the smaller scullery-like apartment to Mrs. Shingle. That she had also decided on the dining-room, with its southern aspect (and the wireless set) as her own living-room, giving Mrs. Shingle no option but to make the best of the north-facing drawing-room and no wireless.

Then there was a slight grievance re coals. Mrs. Gurgle had pointed out to Mrs. Shingle how convenient it was that she wouldn't have to go more than a few hundred yards, to an outhouse uphill, to get her coals; and in any case, of course, Mr. Shingle would see to all that. Yet only this morning the Shingles had made the discovery that Mrs. Gurgle's coals were housed in the proper coal cellar, which opened out of the kitchen.

Mrs. Shingle was anxious I should realise that she wouldn't say a word against Mrs. Gurgle. It was only that she felt, as they were paying half the rent, they were surely entitled, etc.—

I endeavoured to be as impartially soothing as was possible under the circumstances.

Mrs. Gurgle called next day. She likewise had her crosses! And though she, too, didn't wish to say a single word against Mrs. Shingle, she managed, nevertheless, to get in quite a large portion of the dictionary before she left.

It appeared that Mrs. Shingle was much heavier on her feet than Mrs. Gurgle; and when she walked about in her bedroom, which was above Mrs. Gurgle's living-room (yes, she had let her have that lovely bedroom, with a southern aspect), it fairly shook the whole room beneath.

Nor was that all. (I was sure it wouldn't be, even before she said so!) Mrs. Shingle invariably used all the hot water, just when Mrs. Gurgle wanted a bath. And she cut the best roses for her own rooms.

But, of course, Mrs. Gurgle said all this in strict confidence. She and Mrs. Shingle were such great friends: it was only that Mrs. Shingle was inclined to be thoughtless and self-centred.

That was the first instalment of what soon developed into a serial story!

Mrs. Gurgle liked "plenty of fresh air." Mrs. Shingle objected to draughts, and to being blown off the premises.

When the Gurgles lunched off fried fish, Mrs. Shingle had to go out; she so objected to fried fish, and didn't see why her portion of the house should be permeated with the odour.

When the Shingles used bath salts, Mrs. Gurgle noisily opened more windows than ever, and engineered a through current of air from the bathroom to the open front door.

And so on.

The two men, not being dearest friends, appeared to get on quite cheerfully together, going off on fishing expeditions several days a week, and leaving their wives to discover more grievances, and then come and pour them over me.

Fortunately, most of our problems will solve themselves, if we only have the patience to wait their convenience. In this case, my office called me; and I felt thankful that in London I should at least be out of reach of the dearest friends, when they were anxious to bestow confidences.

On the way to town, I chanced to meet the estate agent who had charge of Mrs. Wellborn's property. Naturally, her new tenants were mentioned, I inquired the length of their lease.

"She has taken the place for three years," he told me.

"Well—I shall be surprised if the two families are on speaking terms at the end of three months!" I said.

"Two families?" he repeated. "I haven't let it to one family, let alone two. The house was taken by a single, elderly lady, a Miss Gurgle, who was proposing to live there with her maid. She said she might have a nephew and his wife—a major I think she said—visiting her at Christmas, and hoped that would not be considered a breach of the agreement. Of course I assured her that brief visits from relatives would not be considered as sub-letting. But . . . two sets of people . . . young married couples, you say, with each paying half the rent? . . . and in addition to the elderly lady . . . I can't understand it!"

Neither could I. Especially as there had been no sign of any elderly lady so far. It seemed curiouser and curiouser! But as my train came in at that moment, we left the mystery to its own devices. And I soon forgot the very existence of the dearest friends.

My memory received a jog, however, a few weeks later, when the gardener wrote:

"The new people at Mrs. Wellborn's have been in your upper woods, cutting timber. I've heard chopping several times lately, about dusk, but couldn't track it, because it always stopped directly I got near the wood. Yesterday I crept along very quietly indeed, and came upon Major Gurgle and

Mr. Shingle cutting down some young oaks, while the ladies carried the lighter branches back to their house. I made so bold as to speak very plainly; and told them they had lost you a lot of money by cutting the oaks. Of course they said they thought it was all the free woods, and had no idea it belonged to any one. Shucks, I say, for why did they try to hide when they saw me coming if they thought it was all free? Besides, I'd already showed the gentlemen which was the free woods and which wasn't. They've cut down a good bit of stuff already, and, from what I know of them, they will cut down a plenty more, unless I sit up all night to watch them."

The Head of Affairs made light of the affair. Of course they had mistaken it for the free woods, etc. No need to take any notice of it, beyond commending the gardener for his care and watchfulness over our property.

I didn't say that I, also, had shown them most explicitly where the free woods were to be found; and had warned them that all enclosed woods were private property, and in many cases special plantations and nurseries for young trees. They had broken the padlock on our gate in order to get easy transport for the tree trunks and branches!

Then came other rumours. Miss Jarvis at the village shop wrote to ask me, in strict confidence, whether I knew if the new people were financially sound? They had run up huge bills, and had never yet paid her a single penny. When she asked for something on account, they always put her off with some plausible excuse; she was very uneasy, because they owed her so much.

Followed a similar letter from the butcher.

And Abigail heard from the farmer's wife, who supplied them with milk and butter and eggs, that she, too, had presented her bills in vain.

Another note from the gardener:

"Mrs. Gurgle and Mrs. Shingle have gathered bushels and bushels of your apples. They say you gave them permission. Please say if this is O.K."

Things certainly looked fishy! And the neighbourhood was growing more and more suspicious of the newcomers. Yet so fickle is public opinion, that—with hardly a breath between abuse and praise—the villagers with one accord canonised Mrs. Gurgle and Mrs. Shingle, when they announced that they wished to give a tea and entertainment to all the schoolchildren. Every mother with offspring attending the council school immediately decided that they must be real ladies, who could well afford to owe money right and left and might reasonably be permitted to do so. (The tradespeople alone remained silent!) And their praises were sung even by grandparents and aunts and uncles, as

well as by the parents themselves.

The tea came off in grand style; the refreshments being placed in the hands of a caterer in Monmouth. Whether he has ever been paid, I don't know. It is certain he spent a considerable amount of time on the Gurgle-Shingle doorstep asking for his money, after the event. But the kudos gained by this act of public philanthropy—which occupied a whole column in the local paper—enabled them to get a little more credit in a neighbouring village, to which they graciously extended their patronage. Every mother's child in that village lived in hopes of a similar tea and entertainment coming its way.

But it never did. For, like a bomb dropped from a clear blue sky—news came that Mrs. Wellborn's tenants had suddenly vanished. No one seemed to know exactly when or how they went. But the house was shut up, and they had considerably posted the keys to the agent, and told him they had no further need of them! As they owed two quarters' rent, he was a trifle perturbed—naturally.

Eventually it came to light that the two men were undischarged bankrupts, who apparently supported themselves, and their wives, by flitting from house to house, and living on the local tradespeople. As they could not legally take a house in their own names, an aunt (bogus or otherwise) was produced, who signed the agreement, and then she, too, vanished. They seemed to be expert at the game! I don't think they have ever been caught.

As it happened, Mrs. Wellborn returned from South Africa the very same week that her tenants disappeared. We were surprised to see her back, as she had taken a final farewell of us all, and said a permanent adieu to the mother country.

It leaked out, bit by bit, that her visit had not been an unqualified success. Henry? Oh, yes, Henry was quite well, thank you, by the time she reached him. But her daughter-in-law had proved most unsatisfactory. Indeed, any one less cordial had never before crossed Mrs. Wellborn's path. Far from being grateful for her mother-in-law's self-sacrifice in taking the long journey, and coming all that way to advise her, she intimated quite plainly that she preferred to have her house and her husband to herself, and almost requested the older lady to mind her own business!

Poor dear Henry! What a trial to be tied to such a woman! But what could a mother do, under such heartbreaking circumstances, but remove herself from beneath their roof? It was a satisfaction to her to remember that she had done it with dignity.

Probably the world would have heard still more, on her immediate return, about the delinquencies of Maude, had it not been for the discovery of the havoc left behind by the Gurgles and Shingles. Mrs. Wellborn nearly collapsed when she saw the condition of her once lovely home. And all the district held up hands of horror when invited in to inspect the dirt and the damage.

Of course, no one in our village ever repeats anything he, or she, hears. Neither do I. We may have our faults, but at least we don't "fetch and carry." So it wasn't gossip, merely a statement of facts, when a number of people kindly let me know Mrs. Wellborn's private opinion of *me*, in connection with the havoc. And that she said she couldn't think what I was about, ever to have let her house to two sets of people, and *such* people into the bargain. Also, that she did think I might have obliged a neighbour by keeping an eye on her place, in her absence. And other comments to the same effect.

She didn't say any of this to me personally, for the excellent reason that she has never spoken to me since she came back.

But at least she has now three topics of conversation, instead of only one, as formerly. To-day, in addition to recounting the perennial virtues of Henry, she enlarges on the base ingratitude of daughters-in-law; together with the callous indifference, the lack of discretion and the utter disobligingness of other people, when you ask them to take care of a key!

The Days of the Gleaming Lights

February usually brings us the days of the gleaming lights—when, suddenly, it seems as though the whole earth is scintillating and brilliantly new-washed for spring-time decorations.

Look to the north: the sky is an intense blue, so blue that if one put it on a canvas, the town-dweller, who is compelled to look at most things through a smoke screen, would say, “But, of course, we never see such a sky in England!”

But we do! Only it must be looked for in the right place.

And the blue is intensified by the white of the great cumulus clouds, which billow and race across the sky in the strong wind. It is a world of blue and white up there, with rich, dark green spruce tops swaying against it lower down; and there will probably be a pair of magpies, black and snowy white, balancing themselves on some topmost branch, or chasing each other, and wheeling around, their long tails and outspread wings wonderfully suggestive of aeroplanes.

Looking south, down into the valley, and across to the opposite hills, every leaf—and there are more leaves in February than one is apt to imagine—glints and twinkles and throws back the sunbeams, as though they were glistening with water.

The evergreen ivy, which clings and climbs up all the tree-trunks and smothers the cool sides of the walls, gleams in every leaf. The hollies and laurels show such highly polished surfaces, one might think they were all freshly washed. The hart’s-tongue ferns, which remain green with us all the winter, unless in a particularly bleak and exposed position, are radiantly green and not a bit weary-looking as one might suppose them to be after a year of active service! The box trees and even the narrow leaves of the old yews all catch at the sunlight, hold it for a moment, and then fling it back at any one who may be looking that way.

Even the bare twigs shine and become individual gleams of brightness instead of a dark, confused mass, as some people imagine bare trees to be in winter.

Across the wooded hillsides, sometimes a wide expanse will be actually

silvery—a shining tract of real silver—when the sunlight falls at a certain angle. I have had people ask me, “What’s the matter with that wood over there? Is it smoke, or mist, or are those some uncommon trees with silver-grey branches?” Light can do some remarkable transfigurations!

In the shadows there will be warm purple, or in another light, a misty blue—it depends partly on the trees and also on the reflected light.

The finer branches of the airy-looking birches are a rich purply-brown—the waving “maiden-hair” of the woods, since the birch is the lady of the woods. Their main stems and bigger branches, where they are light, are a true silver-white, with black markings. And they, too, shine as though the surface had been polished. Others tend to a pinkish-brown; while the papery surface shows all sorts of delicate colours intermingling—yellows, browns, cream, grey, dark red, and pinkish-fawn; so difficult to paint accurately.

Birches abound on these hills. From my bedroom windows I look down on to an old orchard, just above one of my woods which is mostly oak and birch. There is no more lovely sight about the place than the fruit trees literally hoary, with a smother of delicate lichens over their branches, and standing out a clear blue-green in winter against the purple tone of the birches beneath them; while on most of the fruit trees huge bunches of mistletoe, covered with berries, dangle from upper branches like yellow-green cloudlets, and sprout from joints and crevices in the ancient trees, and giving quite a gay aspect to the staid and dignified old orchard. Who says that age hasn’t its allotted work in life? Some one must provide a little solid support for the young and frivolous!

Those who can only see the woods in their summer or autumn leafage miss so much beauty. By the time the summer comes, the trees are beginning to get tired, and in any case the wonderful outlines of the branches are lost. Often, too, the wood is too airless for exploration. It is in the early months of the year that the trees are seen to the best advantage; when the sap is rising and giving unsuspected colour to twigs, and to buds all ready to burst. And then, when the soft grey and brown mist of the wood takes on one sunny day a faint flush of green—when the hawthorn buds turn from tiny pearls to little green fans, when the blackthorn bursts into bloom, and the tiny crimson flowers can be found on the hazel bushes, when the elder opens its leaves, and the honeysuckle hurries forward its softly green shoots—the woods are miracles of loveliness. Their beauty is the nearest we can ever get here on earth to the beauty of the Tree which grows by the river in our Heavenly Father’s Home.

With the days of the gleaming lights come the early flowers. The wild

snowdrops are out, and are thick down the side of more than one field, all their little white heads nodding and dancing perpetually in the wind.

This is a sight we wait for through every winter—the long white drifts, sheets of white in fact, which suddenly appear, as though by magic, above the ragged, tussocky grass. And one of the marvels of this flower is the fact that it does grow actually under the snow. I have proved this myself.

One year, when I looked, as I always do, for the first signs of the milky-green spearpoints among the grass, they were not more than an inch above ground. That night a blizzard swept over the county, and we woke next morning to find the snow eighteen inches deep at its shallowest, and six feet in many of the drifts. It took a considerable amount of sun, even after a south wind set in, to melt it.

And then I noticed that though the snow had gone from the rest of the place, it seemed to linger in the snowdrop fields. I wondered why? But when I went across to investigate, I found the grass was white with flowers! Yet, before the snow fell, not a bloom had been visible.

Until one has seen these courageous little things, fluttering by the thousand in a February wind, it is impossible to visualise their charm. They look so frail and delicate, so baby-like, one marvels how they ever brave the risks of cold winds, frosts, snow, and the uncertainties of sunshine. Yet they do.

No matter how tall the grass, the blossoms get to the top, and often we gather them on stems six or seven or eight inches long, where they have determined to surmount surrounding obstacles.

And just as one man once saw a host of golden daffodils which flowered for him (and for many others besides) through every subsequent springtide, so the glistening multitude of snowdrops, which clothes the side of one steep field belonging to the Flower-Patch, has cheered many a dreary after-day for town-dwellers who have once seen it.

They chanced to be in bloom on one occasion, when a famous personage came my way. He found them out himself, when strolling about the place. I discovered him standing beside them in real amazement.

“I didn’t know that snowdrops could ever look like *that!*” he said to me in awestruck tones; and he stooped and touched them almost reverently. Yet he had traversed a great part of the earth’s surface.

“Don’t you miss them when they go?” he asked.

I told him we should do so but for the daffodils which follow on—so thick

and sturdy—you wonder how the snowdrops found room to grow in such closely packed formation.

And when these die down, bluebells carpet the ground. By this time, the grass has started to grow tall; and the bulbs then rest through the hottest days, beneath the shade of vetches, cow-parsley, red champions, and the loveliest of summer's seeding grasses.

Yet I can truly say we never forget the little white Messengers of Hope. For though that field is never without flowers of some sort—for even in December there will be a few daisies and tufts of primroses—yet we always speak of it as the Snowdrop Field.

Another conspicuous feature, about the end of February, is the lovely yellow of the hazel catkins. Up the hills, down in the valleys, one sees the swinging tassels, making gleams of colour in the woods and coppices, in the corners of fields, and where hedges have replaced the old stone walls.

They show up at their best in the days of gleaming lights. The sun suits them, the wind keeps them swaying—all the same way—and shakes out their pollen. Literally, they light up a wood, for their colour, when they are at their prime, seems like sunshine among the dark boles of the forest trees.

And there are so many of them! Nature is so lavish with some of her loveliest creations, and few things are more beautiful than a large hazel tree, smothered with the ever-swaying, ever-swinging catkins.

They need to be seen growing to be appreciated, and seen at the right moment and in the right light. For, curiously enough, it is not possible to gather that beauty and take it indoors. Whether it is that the pollen is scattered, or that the catkin loses its vitality once its twig is severed from the tree, I do not know; but one thing is certain, the catkin quickly becomes a dull-looking fawn when gathered, and entirely loses the vivid canary yellow, which is so wonderful when seen on the tree.

Of course, they still suggest the wild wood, and can carry a message to any one who knows and loves catkins. But they are no longer the colourful tassels that kept up a rhythmic dance in the breeze. The colour is primarily due to the pollen; and is at its best when the pollen is ripe. So soon as that is dispersed, the catkin becomes brown, and then it is not long before the little “lamb's tails,” as some country people call them, are forgotten in the rush of green that clothes the woods.

But while they last, they are a perpetual joy, and among the many delightful splashes of colour which brighten the English Spring. And even

before they are over, one is watching the silvery down on the willow, waiting to welcome the bursting of its golden trophies—and its sister catkins of the pale bluish-green.

The willows deserve a chapter to themselves—and even then, I know I should never be able to convey anything like a true impression of their beauty. We Londoners are so apt to think of the willow solely as the stunted, pollarded grey trunk, with long, pendulous branches overhanging the water, as we see them on the banks higher up the Thames.

And the day before Palm Sunday we see the golden catkins offered for sale.

“Buy some palm, lidy?” says the flower-seller. Could anything be less like a palm branch! Yet I have met town dwellers who actually thought the yellow tufts were sprays of the real palm.

The osier, or willow, family has more to its credit than the narrow-leaved pollard, and its members merit special commendation, because they are among the earliest of the bare trees to shake out their spring dresses. Before the almond trees burst into pale pink clouds, before the daffodils gladden the orchard with yellow—the osiers in the coppice below the cottage, and a little farther down the hill, are suddenly clothed in a soft pea-green haze, of a tint unlike any other green in the woods.

At a little distance, the large trees seem to be bursting into leaf; but in reality these opening buds are the seed-bearing catkins of the willow, and they smother the branches with a most delightful shade of green. Evidently they provide some of the earliest sweets of the year, for the bees crowd to them, and the cattle eagerly eat every bit they can get hold of. In close company with the green catkins, are the trees bearing the golden, pollen-bearing catkin. Even before they open, the silvery buds are beautiful, and when those trees are in their glory, they are like sunshine itself.

Such a lovely world! And so packed with beauty for the seeking.

And then some people ask if we don't find February terribly dull in the country!

When the Flower-Patch Changed its Plans

When I first acquired a garden all my very own—as distinct from the “family garden” which we had always possessed at home—there seemed so much space, also unlimited liberty to do as I pleased, that I immediately longed to grow every flowering plant I had ever heard of, or seen eulogised in books.

All really intelligent amateurs start on these lines.

And most of them discover, before very long, that it can't be done!

I had read and read about other people's gardens, with lovely pictures of long herbaceous borders; broad sweeps of lawn, and wide grass walks, all looking like smooth, green velvet; stone vases brimming over with flowers that trailed along stone balustrades; nice white garden chairs and tables, placed invitingly under spreading cedars; rose gardens; sunk gardens; orthodox rock gardens; and exceedingly civilised and tame “wild” gardens; it was most beguiling! Especially as the owners seemed able to achieve success in every direction, no matter whether they grew bulbs, or tropical plants, or alpinists.

And though, here and there, some one admitted that a plant had not done well, it was invariably found to be due to a wrong aspect. When this was rectified, and the plant trotted over to the opposite side of the garden—next year it invariably bloomed as gloriously as everything else in those fortunate gardens.

It seemed so simple.

I was sure that all I needed was the will to do, and the soul to dare. And having both these priceless possessions, I started in gaily.

But nothing worked out according to schedule. Not a single thing!

I don't mean to imply that nothing grew in my garden. Plenty did. But it wasn't what I meant to grow there; and it wasn't the sort of vegetation that the great authorities were growing in the gardens which were most frequently photographed.

Quite early, I discovered one very important lack; I hadn't the experienced head gardener and innumerable under-gardeners, who appeared at intervals in the books I had been studying—always expert, and capable, and on the spot when wanted.

The handy-man who wielded the spade for me when I started my cottage among the hills, was neither expert nor particularly capable, and he was seldom to be found when wanted. Moreover, he knew nothing at all about growing flowers. Very few people in the district bothered much about them at that time; and he considered it almost an insult to be asked to attend to them.

Like many other cottagers, he relegated the flower-beds (as he did many other things) to his women folk.

On one occasion (and only one), I asked him if he could paper the kitchen and whiten the ceiling?

“No, Miss!” he said, with haughty dignity. “I’ve never potted about doing women’s work yet! But I’ll tell my missus to do it.”

And she did it extremely well!

In any case, it wouldn’t have been much good to give him packets of flower-seeds to set, as he couldn’t read. When I asked him how he knew what he was planting—for he usually had the vegetables properly placed—he said, “I tastes ’em.”

That partly explained why each row was so brief.

He died suddenly some years ago. I wondered what seeds he had been planting!

Times have changed. Flowers have become extremely fashionable in the district, and I am fortunate in now having a gardener who understands his business from A to Z, with several other useful accomplishments thrown in.

But it was as well that I was young when I embarked upon making a Flower-Patch, for it was hard work, and uphill work, though it was always happy work.

After many experiments of a grandiose nature, which invariably proved a snare and a delusion, and the expenditure of cash on plants recommended in books, which often proved costly, and reluctant to bloom, I sat down one day and reviewed the whole matter, in company with piles of books about gardens, which I had taken as my models. And then two or three useful ideas came to me.

I decided that gardens can be placed in two main divisions; those which are intended for show purposes and to be looked at, and those which are maintained as the habitation of friends—flower friends, plant friends, tree friends.

In the first division are the big gardens, where several gardeners are employed. In these it is the general effect which is of importance. Broad sweeps of green, brilliant masses of colour, long rainbow lengths of herbaceous borders, artistic groups of flowering shrubs, carefully paved crazy paths leading to tenderly nurtured lily ponds and gay rockeries; such items appear in every big garden, and very beautiful they are, as a rule. But the object of all is identical, viz. to get certain colour effects, and impress the eye as a whole. And even though special flowers may come in for comment, when particularly rare or costly, it is the massing which primarily counts, and the placement of colour.

In the other division come the gardens in which plants are grown and cherished for their own sakes; and regarded as individuals, instead of being treated merely as something to aid in the formation of colour schemes.

The majority of these gardens are not big, though I do know a few large gardens, with devoted owners, which would come under this heading. But in the main, the very fact that a garden is extensive prevents the owner—unless exceptionally keen—from knowing the plants individually. There are too many of them. Moreover, the head gardener probably has the arrangement of much of it—that is his business in life; and the owner naturally expects something that displays well, in return for the wages he is paying.

Most of the gardens illustrated and described in the books I had been studying, were on a large scale. Also—which was a very important point—they were on comparatively level ground, instead of lying at a steep angle on a rocky hillside.

Then it was that the realisation came to me of the absurdity of trying to copy a long, straight elaborate border, and broad stretches of velvety lawn, when there wasn't any place on the hillside which would consent to remain flat long enough for me to make a proper herbaceous border, in the usual meaning of the term.

Certainly, I did lay one out, and left it for the winter, hoping for the best. When I arrived the following spring, I found that one of our brooks (and there are nine separate streams running downhill at various parts of the Flower-Patch) had overflowed its banks during a very rainy season, and galloped down a field, through a hedge into the garden and over my herbaceous border, digging itself a new channel nearly two feet deep, down the very centre of the bed, and carrying half the garden soil downhill into an orchard below—while uprooted plants were strewn about in a quite pathetic manner.

Evidently a correct herbaceous border would never remain intact on that hill!

Yet another comforting thought occurred to me. I had been regretting that my garden didn't always look as immaculate, and as well stocked, as the ones I had seen illustrated. Then I remembered that those other gardens had only been in that state of absolute perfection for a few days or weeks; and it was then that the owners had wisely hurried up the photographer, before their glories began to fade.

When we see a picture of a beautiful garden, we are apt to think, "I wish I could keep my garden looking like that!"—forgetting that the other garden wasn't like that all the year round. The picture was probably made when the garden was at its prime, and as the culminating point arrived at after endless work and planning and forethought and care.

Of course such gardens are beautiful; but often it is the beauty of very expensive art, not the beauty of Nature. I am not decrying such beauty; only it is not within the reach of the majority.

Yet the garden-lover who is forced to work on a humbler scale, need not mourn because it is a hopeless task to try to compete with these super-gardens. There is need for both types. And the unsophisticated little garden has a charm all its own, and an appeal which is entirely absent from more pretentious estates.

One thing which had often impressed me, when studying other people's flowers, was the way certain plants would fail in big gardens, while they thrived apace outside a cottage door, seeming to revel in the fact that they were growing amid simple surroundings. I have seen cottage gardens overrun with flowers which positively refused to do anything at all in more exalted spheres.

I believe one reason for this is the fact that the cottager (usually a woman) gives personal attention to every plant she possesses—if she takes any sort of pride in her flower-bed, and most do. She knows each one individually, and just where it lives in the garden. And then—though it seems contradictory to say so—she leaves it alone!

So long as only one person touches a garden, the plants can rest in peace, for they are not likely to be murdered wholesale. But directly a second person appears on the scene, no matter how well-intentioned, there is every possibility that something will be dug up, and in this way destroyed.

When the garden is small enough for the owner to attend to it herself, she (or he) will know every item and its position in the borders, and will safeguard

each root and bulb.

In such a plot, the white lilies will come up sturdily, and bloom year after year; the daffodils will faithfully appear in their corner every spring; the everlasting peas will never be dug up by mistake, no matter how late they may be in showing above ground; the columbines will never be routed out in the winter, when the border is tidied up.

There is something more than sentiment in the saying that flowers bloom best for those who love them. It is true. For when the plants in our gardens are friends whom we love, and for whose return we watch anxiously each spring, we are careful for their well-being. They don't get chopped in half by a careless hoe, or ruthlessly brought to the surface and left there to freeze, by the fork of ignorance.

The very fact that they are watched and waited for, guarantees them a life of usefulness; and they bloom cheerfully because they have neither been maimed nor destroyed.

One of the greatest of garden foes is the spade of the under-gardener!

And just as I tried to make a herbaceous border which refused to "herbache," so I schemed wide reaches of rock garden, which—well, they have materialised, but not on the lines I originally planned!

I think Nature must have been secretly amused at my efforts in this direction—to see me laboriously moving great stones (which were as perfect in their original setting as any stone could be), with no other object but to put them somewhere else! To watch me removing plants which were flourishing lustily and producing a wealth of flowers, upon and around the ancient boulders, in order to replace them with others which often needed a lot of coaxing to get them to live at all, and which sometimes gave me no return for my money but Latin names of ponderous length, which most people hesitated to pronounce, lest they should betray their ignorance!

And probably the most ludicrous part of the business was the fact that I was once more trying to incorporate into my garden-beds the very stones which the original settlers on the land had been at such labour to excavate and remove!

No gardener learns everything at once. It takes most of us a considerable time to know our own mind, much less our own garden. But our horticultural failures have a certain charm of their own. At least we put a deal of affection into the majority of them; and we can look back upon them with interest, even though there is also a chastened regret over the amount of time and money we

spent on schemes which wouldn't work out properly, and the plants which wouldn't bloom.

Yet gardening is much like life itself in one respect! Each prefers to gain his own experience first hand. Other people may give us advice, but we want to do the actual growing of the flowers ourselves.

After a few years devoted mainly to wild experiments, I gained a little common sense. It was a fortunate day for me, when it dawned upon me that I was not necessarily called upon to copy the gardens belonging to palatial residences.

Also, I took one step in the right direction when I realised that a garden looks its best when it shares the characteristics of the landscape, instead of trying to look entirely different from, and startlingly unlike, everything else in its vicinity.

Once I had recognised this important truth—and I discovered it for myself, though most gardeners had known it before I was born!—I began to enjoy myself in earnest.

I no longer worried because I couldn't find a sufficiency of ground on the level, to allow of an elegant display of white-wood garden benches, chairs and tables. Instead, I had roomy, comfortable stone seats made in the thickness of the massive garden and field walls—seats which never deteriorate with the weather, never get shabby, never look garish, but harmonise with the landscape, and tone in with the great rocks which are strewn about on every side. And Nature, evidently approving, immediately lent a hand, trailing honeysuckle over the stones at the back, in one place; planting fern in the crevices of another.

Where seats were wanted in positions with no wall near enough to be utilised, large logs have been placed at the right height to form a convenient seat (and I'm a great advocate of resting-places at intervals!). These logs, again, are in harmony with the surroundings.

The rock gardens were then dealt with. Despite the combined efforts of Virginia, Ursula, and myself, the old beds which we had tried to modernise by introducing to them this particular phase of garden development, looked like nothing so much as a dogs' cemetery which had suffered from an earthquake!

I began to realise what was wrong.

Nature all around had arranged the most beautiful of wild rock gardens, and had furnished them with consummate artistry in a way no human gardener

could ever approach. Obviously, my wretched attempts at rockery arrangement were positively pathetic, when seen in company with Nature's masterpieces.

So I cleared away the stones which I had stuck higgledy-piggledy about the beds, putting most of the rock plants on the walls—where they lived happily for ever after. Then, seeing that there were acres and acres of rock gardens of Nature's own planning, already belonging to the Flower-Patch, I decided to enjoy these, and be thankful!

It was necessary to make slight alterations and additions here and there, merely to enable them to be seen. Paths had to be cut and steps added, in order to be able to get up, and down, and along, on the steep slopes. Thick undergrowth was cleared away which obscured the cascading streams, with stepping-stones, and rocky slabs as bridges, to enable one to get across the rushing water.

In some places we found the paths, which we were cutting with much labour, would be suddenly blocked with rocks so high that climbing over them would be risky. Besides, one's town visitors can't do that type of gymnastics. In such cases, new routes had to be laid out, or steps built up, to enable one to negotiate the rocks.

But in all this no sign of artificiality has been allowed. The natural rock is used, and it all becomes part and parcel of the scenery. You don't realise that a path is there, till you actually come upon it. And unless one keeps a vigilant eye on the path, it won't be there next time one wants it.

The walk we call the Bluebell Ledge is a case in point.

We wanted to get from one big open stretch of rock-strewn land to another open space farther along the hill, on the same level. But the way was blocked by a small but very thick wood which lay between; and there seemed no alternative but to descend a couple of hundred feet downhill, skirt the bottom of the wood, and climb up again on the other side.

"Why not cut a path clean through the wood?" said some bright brain.

"That's it!" said the Head of Affairs, who is never so happy as when he can attack something which calls for violent exercise and has plenty of "go" in it. "Just wait till I get my tools. Then we'll soon make a way to the far side."

We settled on the most convenient place to start—influenced chiefly by the fact that the trees didn't look too thick, and were mainly hazels just there; measured and staked out the width the path was to be; then set to work.

The Head of Affairs went first, of course, and with a saw and other

fearsome implements beloved of woodmen, he began on the first clump of tall nut-bushes. As he progressed, the rest of us followed, with milder tools, dealing with over-trailing brambles, and branches which had escaped the onslaught of the pioneer on in front.

Now, it may sound very easy merely to cut a path through trees that were not too sturdy to take down with an ordinary saw, but it wasn't as simple as it sounds—at any rate, not for the person in the rear. I happened to be that person!

It was like this: something had to be done with the stuff that was cut down. It couldn't be left lying in the path; there was too much of it, and it was too big. There was not room for it on either side, because we were shut in by thick walls of the trees through which we were cutting our way.

Then came word from the pioneer in front, who was valiantly forging ahead, through all and sundry: "Better carry back the stuff to the open. We can't burn it here. And the tree trunks will have to be taken to the wood-house."

So, as I was the "rearest" of the party, of course I was the one to carry it back. Everybody else seemed more keen to see what would turn up on in front. The fierce gleam of the dauntless explorer was in every eye; and in any case, as the path was only wide enough for one and we all had to walk in single file, no one else could get out to carry anything, till I moved back out of the way.

It didn't seem far at first; and I carted the stuff back cheerfully, followed by Virginia—and naturally we got in each other's way, and our respective trees got miserably entangled. But as the cutting got farther and farther into the thicket, of course each journey, as we returned with the cut stuff "to base," got farther and farther likewise.

It was August. And hot!

And the flies!

Still, I'm not complaining. Only it was a harder job than it sounds. And, of course, it wasn't exactly a flagged path either! It was on the slope, and paved by this time with the stumps of trees which the pioneer had demolished—not counting the hundreds of wicked snags which had been overlooked in the breathless zest for further conquests.

And as for brambles——! You should see our brambles, some with stems a couple of inches in circumference, and vicious spikes adorning them every quarter of an inch!

Before long, the path had to take a drop of a couple of feet, because of an obstructing rock which could only be circumnavigated a little lower down. Here we came upon yet another stream, which we had no idea we owned! It gushed out from under the rock, which revealed a cavern below, smothered with harts-tongue fern, with fronds eighteen inches in length—a miniature forest of them.

In this place the trees to be cut down were tall alders, with straight, speckled trunks—trees which love to stand with their feet in water. They have since been converted into useful rose arches.

All told, the path was probably not more than an eighth of a mile in length; but it amounted to several miles by the time we had traversed it back and forth a number of times, and each journey bearing a load of tree-stuff!

We came upon other unexpected things, in addition to the stream. There was a badger's home, for one thing. Also, there was a fox.

The dog was as surprised as we were when reynard suddenly appeared, and just for the moment he couldn't think what he ought to do. He was young, and had lived in London since his puppyhood; it was his first visit to the country. By the time he remembered what his mother had told him he ought to do under such circumstances, the fox had loped off; he could get through the thick undergrowth quicker than we could!

But the white West Highlander didn't forget him, and later in the day he returned to the spot on his own, and at last ran the fox to earth, and had a few words with him.

The fox got the better of the argument and nearly finished the dog—but not quite, though it was a forlorn and gory morsel who presently dragged his much-damaged little body home. For a fortnight he could neither sit nor lie down, so badly had he been mauled. He just stood, night and day.

Naturally, the news of the tussle got about; and kind-hearted people inquired after the patient.

It was not long before a swarthy gipsy arrived at the door with a dead fox dangling from a stick over his shoulder. He asked to see the master.

"I thought you'd like to see the fox I've caught, what's been eating your chickens, sir," said the man.

"Haven't any chickens!" said the Head of Affairs. "So it can't have eaten ours! Where did you kill it?"

“Just outside one o’ your woods, in the road,” he replied glibly. “I suppose that’s the little dog what he near killed?” he added ingratiatingly, as the dog growled violently when he saw the animal.

Of course my husband crossed his hand with silver. We were glad to think the dog would not be able to have any more bouts with the enemy. And we have no hunt near enough to keep down our foxes.

As the gipsy passed out of the gate with his dangling trophy, the gardener came in.

“Been here with his same old story, I suppose?” he said. “Caught it just outside your wood, did he? Yes; he’s been catching that same animal outside everybody’s wood in the county for years. It’s a stuffed skin, and he makes his living by carrying it round at intervals!”

Meanwhile, *our* fox is still roaming about our woods, and at times you can hear his family talking—though any one who didn’t know might be excused for thinking it was a baby crying!

We got to the other side of the plantation at last, and felt enormously elated at the grand trail we had cut at the expense of so much perspiration.

We didn’t visit the Flower-Patch again for over a year, and when we next went to look for our path, we couldn’t find it—so completely was it overgrown with fresh brambles and other quick-growing vegetation. Every hazel stool had courageously sent up fresh rods; and the tall trees which were on both sides of the path, rejoicing to find themselves with a little more breathing space, had promptly thrown their branches across the path, and done their best to close it in from above.

This time, we put the job in the gardener’s hands; and he cleared it properly—bridging the stream with stones; banking up the path where it was too sloping for foothold; adding a few steps where it dropped unexpectedly; and generally making it easy for me to get along what is really only a stony ledge on the hillside.

But though Nature had been defeated in her desire to grow hazels, and alders, birch and maple on that ledge, she didn’t give up. When next I saw it—the following April—I found it carpeted its whole length with bluebells and white anemones, the bluebells predominating. While between the trees, both above and below the ledge, the ground was blue, and the whole air was heavy as with the scent of hyacinths.

Hence its name—the Bluebell Ledge.

There was nothing to suggest devastation or destruction. The stones were being gradually covered with moss. And such beautiful stones many of them are, too, full of snow-white pebbles; “pudding-stone” some people call it. I confess it isn’t the best for building houses, as it is inclined to be porous. And that is one reason why the houses have walls from two to three feet thick! But as a decorative feature, it is often extremely lovely.

Here, in these natural rockeries, in the home of their own choosing, are literally thousands of rock plants, and others which have found, in niches between the boulders, shelter and comforting protection.

Ferns are thick in every shady corner, all the year round. In the depth of winter, they are as green as though they had just uncurled their fronds. And such a variety!—from the tiny English maidenhair, to magnificent fronds several feet high.

Wild snowdrops, daffodils, primroses, and violets grow here in something more than masses. Ground ivy, wood betony, woodruff, birds’-foot trefoil, and speedwell clamber about among the stones. Both the red campion and the white bladder campion are very prolific. Pink ragged robins and golden fleabane haunt the grass beside the streams. Herb Robert lays its exquisitely cut leaves against the grey rocks—such splashes of glowing crimson they were, during the summer.

Several members of the orchis family have spread themselves all over the place—the butterfly orchis, the pyramidal orchis, and the purple orchis are there. The last-named is such a rich colour, its only fault being its unfortunate odour, which debars it from ever coming indoors.

Foxgloves are very plentiful. They seem to like the crevices among the boulders. The lovely wood-spurge is plentiful in the spring.

One can’t name half the flowers which Nature has planted in her gorgeous rock-gardens; but, among the special treasures which I guard secretly, lest some conscienceless marauder should come and dig them up, I must mention a mauve-pink wood sorrel, which clothes some of the stones with delicate-looking bells.

Also the cyclamen grows wild in this same place. When I first came upon the pink blossoms almost hidden beneath some thick clumps of fern, I could hardly believe my own eyes. I thought the gardener must have put some there, as a surprise for me! But no; they were true wildlings; and year after year they send up, first their prettily marbled leaves, and then the tufts of little pink flowers. They are small, as compared with the handsome specimens grown

nowadays in the greenhouse; but they are none the less beautiful for being tiny. Indeed, so perfect are these little miniatures, that one wonders whether size is altogether a gain, when one starts to develop flowers on a larger scale.

The stones which edge the brooks show a lovely array of water plants and mosses; though but little of the actual boulders are visible, so thickly are they encrusted with moisture-loving plantlets, some which are really ferns, looking like mosses; and some which are really mosses, looking like fairy ferns.

Tiny-leaved vegetation lines every cavern and crevice where the water spills over the rocks. The only cultivation I have really undertaken in this part of the domain, is the watercress bed. One of the brooks is thick with watercress—but it is also thick with marsh mint, and wild yellow irises! So we have to weed out the mint, and keep the irises within bounds, to give the watercress all the room it wants.

And when you gather it yourself, picking the young bronzy-green shoots all crisp and fresh from the running water, it has a flavour all its own—at least, that is what people always declare, after they have been out and gathered some for tea.

In spring and early summer, you will find large white patches where the petals of the wild cherry blossom and pear bloom have fallen, or pink with “apple-blow”—for all sorts of gnarled old trees shelter the rocks; Nature is so lavish.

And if you wander about this gigantic rock garden in the autumn, you will find rosy-cheeked apples hiding among the ivy and moss; lemon-yellow apples lying thick among the woodruff and the almond scented “ladies tresses”; with nuts and acorns in the innumerable little store cupboards under bracken, between rocks, and in the hollows of trees. Wasn't I wise to cease my own feeble efforts at rock gardening?

Although I cleared away again all the stones I had so carefully dumped into the garden borders, in my earlier zeal for rockeries, they were not banished entirely from the garden-proper.

Where there is an odd corner which requires filling, or a bank which needs some sort of building up, there we make a rockery, and plant aubrietias, and saxifraga, and other hardy members of the stone-loving fraternity. And how they spread! It seems as though we only need to put a small root of one of these plants in the ground in the autumn or spring, to find it a large round cushion the next time we arrive.

The situation is one which rock plants love, and the nearest approach to Alpine conditions which one can get at our lower altitudes; and the plants respond, with lovely purples, and mauves, and crimsons. It would be difficult to find a richer array of colours than the aubrietias now supply.

We love our cultivated rock plants; and, if I could spend much time in gardening at the Flower-Patch—which I can't!—I should probably do a good deal with flowers of this class. But as it is, I am more than thankful to be able to leave the acres of wild rock plants to Nature's own tending, happy in the knowledge that, all unaided by me, they will be cared for, watered, and nourished, and in due season they will flower and fill the air with perfume, as gaily and generously as though they had been cossetted and fussed over, and moved from greenhouse to frame, and dug up, and root pruned, and divided and replanted, and then neatly ticketed with a little white label, in case they should forget their own names!

My efforts seem so childish beside the great output of Nature. And one is filled with awe at the sight of all she accomplishes by her calm, unhurried work!

And so, the garden beds returned to the simple life! I decided to keep them as a haven for garden friends.

In some of the books I had been reading, the plants seemed to be in a perpetual state of removal! I know one likes to have a continual display of bright colour throughout most of the year; but this can only be achieved by a constant succession of additions, planted out from greenhouse and frame. After a time, you can cease to remember what is actually growing in the garden, in this craving for colour irrespective of everything else.

No one loves colour more than I do, and especially in flowers. We need colour almost as much as we need fresh air at times, in our cloudy, grey climate. But I think we can lose more than we gain, by striving for nothing but colour, if we overdo the business.

A garden should be restful as well as bright. A constant change of occupants produces a restless atmosphere, and does away with the personal interest.

Temperaments differ, I know: what appeals to me may not necessarily be attractive to some one else. But, personally, I confess I get more pleasure out of old-established favourites, and well-tried friends, than I do out of a constantly changing succession of colour schemes.

Perhaps if I had plenty of time to give to the garden, I should try many rare

plants, and experiment with a host of novelties. But as it is, I have found it most enjoyable to grow the plants I have learnt to love; plants which are willing to flourish with the minimum of attention, giving scent as well as colour in many cases, and coming up year after year, in their own familiar places—such welcome faces, and so faithful for the most part.

I find myself watching eagerly for the columbines, the big purple mallows, the white madonna lilies, the pink crane's bill, and the lilies of the valley, to push through the soil in their own particular nooks. And they never fail one—season after season they appear.

The pinks, the lupins, the many varieties of *companula*, the *rudbeckias*, the delphiniums, and the monk's-hood—how welcome they all are! And how I miss a plant if, for any sad reason, it ceases to be!

The so-called old-fashioned plants seem to me still to hold their own against most of the new-comers; if for no other reason—they are so reliable. You know just where you are with sweet-williams, *nepeta*, London pride, fuchsias and peonies. There is nothing fastidious about blue flax or *montbreitia*.

And even with annuals and biennials, which have to be renewed from year to year, I have fallen into the habit of growing much the same thing over and over again. I do so like to see the old friends come smiling up time after time.

I try to have marigolds, love-in-a-mist, *eschscholtzia* and *convolvulus minor*, growing together in one bed.

In others, I have annual candytuft (the colours are so beautiful), rosy *clarkia*, pink and white *godetia*, annual larkspur in its various colours, with plenty of sweet alyssum and Virginia stock.

The big rose-coloured mallow is a handsome annual. And—naturally—there are sweet peas!

On one shady trellis, canary creeper flourishes, till it reaches an arch covered with Dorothy Perkins. And though it may sound garish, I assure you the yellow and the pink make a delightful combination, backed by the bright green leaves.

Yet another weakness of mine is for morning glories—the *convolvulus major*. Is there a purple anywhere to compare with the dark varieties?

And, of course, there are wallflowers, stocks, pansies, irises, violas, double daisies, snapdragons, *polyanthus*, auriculas, and masses and masses of blue forget-me-nots, with roses big and little, bushes and climbers—one can't have

too many roses, whether new sorts or well-tried favourites. Though even here, I cling affectionately to the old-world blush, damask, cabbage, and monthly roses. Moss roses also I cherish particularly, and the sweet little Scotch briars.

I know this description of the Flower-Patch sounds—and looks—very simple and unpretentious beside many of the gorgeous gardens of my acquaintances. But it is well for each to cultivate the type of garden he, or she, can best manage; and the plants which give the greatest amount of personal pleasure.

For myself, with so little time to give to their cultivation, the old-fashioned borders are the most advantageous. They make no exacting demands on me, but are willing to give me the maximum of blossom for the minimum of care and attention.

Best of all, the plants are friends and neighbours in a real sense. I watch for their coming. I know their idiosyncrasies. They seldom disappoint me, but invariably give me of their best.

In addition to delighting and satisfying the eye, they bring rest of mind, peace of soul, and certainly increase one's faith in the One Who made them so wonderfully beautiful.

Can any friend do more?

The Store Cupboard

Judging by questions I am often asked, many town dwellers have very hazy ideas about life in country places and the way people contrive to exist when unsupported by rows of suburban shops, or buses to take them to Kensington and Oxford Street.

We Londoners are so apt to consider a city—and especially our own city—as providing the quintessence of convenience, and the last word in public service for its residents.

Only, it doesn't!

We are also inclined to regard ourselves (some of us are, at any rate) as better informed and altogether better equipped than those unfortunate people who are compelled by circumstances, or their own choice, to live in some out-of-the-way spot—"benighted" is the adjective generally applied by the town person to any place he, or she, doesn't happen to know!

"How ever do you manage, when you are so out of the world?" I am sometimes asked, by women who have had no experience of country life, apart from motoring glimpses, and the conventional type of annual holiday.

To hear some of them, you would think they were referring to Robinson Crusoe's island!

When I tell them that we manage much more comfortably, and better in nearly every way, than we do in London—they simply don't believe me! And yet it is a fact. Very few villages are out of reach of motors in these days; and where the motor vehicle can come, tradesmen from the surrounding towns will gather up the village custom—if there is no local supply.

In our village, however, we can get practically everything locally, which we require in the way of food supplies, with a choice almost as varied as in a big London provision store.

As to public services—it is true there is only one policeman for three villages, each of which is several miles from either of the others. But then, we are virtuous! "We arn't like they Londoners," an old man said to me. "We don't need one at every corner, and in the middle of the road as well!"

But on special occasions, such as a political meeting, "the whole of the local police force" will assemble himself at the village hall, and he will regulate the parking of cars with the utmost dignity, combined with efficiency.

So there is no need to worry if you don't chance to meet our constabulary in the lane. He isn't needed on ordinary days. If you want to know the way to anywhere, every inhabitant is able and willing to direct you—with lots of other valuable information thrown in gratis.

But in regard to other forms of public service, let me instance the rural postal and telephone departments. Listen enviously, all ye who, like myself, have a telephone in the London area, and realise its full significance, when I state that never once, during the half a dozen years we have had the 'phone in our village, have I ever been given the wrong number! Nor have I once been rung up merely to be told, "I'm sorry you have been tr-r-r-r-roubled!"

Never shall I forget the years of irritation we endured when our London 'phone number had a similar sound to that of a big hospital. It was during the war, when every 'phone call made one start and anticipate bad news! And at all hours of the night as well as the day, we were being rung up, only to be asked—when dressing-gowns flew downstairs at 2 a.m. to answer the uproarious ringing: "Are you the Dash-Dash Hospital?"

And at that period of our national history it wasn't an easy matter to get one's number changed!

Our village postal and telegraph and telephone service is much better, and more reliable, than most of the London services. And if anything should go wrong (only it never does, except when the lightning struck a great iron telephone post, and crumpled it up like a bit of black cotton), we can always get into touch with a live human being, an individual with brains and common sense, who pays personal heed to our woes and endeavours to assuage them, instead of having to deal with nebulous officials whose intelligence seldom rises higher than a printed form, as in London.

And about dress: why will the town girl imagine that her country cousin wears a sun bonnet? The village girl of to-day gets her dance frocks, her sports clothes and her Sunday dresses from the big London or provincial shops, no matter whether she lives in a cottage or a castle. She sees the fashions and the advertisements in the daily papers; the big stores send their catalogues all over rural England; and the village girl knows as much about the current styles—and wears them too—as the town girl.

Rural life is not the long series of deprivations which some imagine. One can lack quite as much, if not more, in town as in the country.

I shall never forget the mixed emotions which harrowed my soul on one occasion in London, when an unexpected message came over the 'phone in the

afternoon, to the effect that a Very Important Personage would dine with us that evening, if agreeable to us.

Though I replied that we should be delighted as well as honoured, I could have shed tears, and not all of them tears of happiness either!

And then I flew down to the kitchen to learn the worst—though I knew it beforehand.

In the first place, as we had been going out that evening, no provision of any sort had been made for an evening meal.

Secondly (as it was, of course, one of my unlucky days), we had nothing in the house in the way of a joint, but some cold beef.

Thirdly, and worstly, it was early closing day, and by that time every shop was shut.

“And we’ve used the last of the cheese!” said the cook, tragically determined to get all the agony possible out of the occasion. “Well,” she continued, “we’ll just have to let him see how the poor live! that’s all!”

But she didn’t end there. “The gardener’s got some chickens,” she said; “he could run down home and kill a couple.” He was dispatched post haste.

“And there’s that piece of gammon; we can have baked ham American style, so’s no one will suspect that it’s only bacon,” she went on. “I’ve got a little stock, very good, it’s all a *stiff jelly*” (I never knew her have stock that she did not describe in these terms), “and with a tin of tomatoes, we’ll be right for soup. And it’s lucky we’ve still one Christmas pudding left. Then if you’ll hunt over the store cupboard and see what tins you have, we’ll make some *hors d’œuvres* . . . yes . . . we can have sardines on toast; and there’s a bottle of anchovies. It’s a pity we haven’t much in the way of vegetables, but we’ve potatoes. . . .” By this time I was beginning to feel a little better, though the chickens were not!

The Head of Affairs devoted himself to the subject of liquid refreshment. Our stock was modest—but we hoped it would suffice. All seemed well, till we looked for soda water; and then we discovered we had only half a syphon left!

A neighbour, however, rose nobly to the occasion, and not only supplied all the syphons the Important Personage could possibly require, but also contributed soles from their own dinner menu; milk—for we were very short; and some sausages which had been intended for their breakfast next day. These stuffed the chickens, and turned them into a really delectable dish.

In the end, we got together quite a respectable-looking meal; and the guest ate heartily, and seemed none the worse for it. But I suffered many things that day, though he didn't!

And when people enlarge on the mighty conveniences of town, and wonder how any one can exist out of their reach, I remember how impossible it was to purchase anything I needed, just when I happened to want it most!

It is true that in the country the shops close early on the appointed days. But one has such an abundance of vegetables of one sort or another in the garden; no matter what the season, there is sure to be something, and stores of potatoes and apples; fresh fruit or bottled; unlimited preserves; plenty of eggs, butter, milk, bacon; chickens always available; and a store cupboard which is never allowed to get at all low.

It was after this episode that I determined never to be without a fairly representative assortment of eatables on the premises, in case of further emergencies.

And this it was that set going my store-cupboard hobby!

I suppose it sounds a trifle far-fetched to describe the stocking of one's store cupboard as a hobby. Yet I think it is allowable in this case, because it is something more than the laying-in of ordinary domestic supplies; and the cupboards have developed into something more than merely the receptacles for surplus foodstuffs.

It was at my cottage that I let the hobby have its own way and go the pace! We really need more in the way of reserves at the Flower-Patch than we do in town, for one never knows who will turn up—and a country visitor isn't like a London caller, who stays only a few minutes, and then rushes off to favour some one else with another few moments. In the country, when uninvited visitors from a distance eventually reach us, they are invariably so exhausted with having scoured miles in search of us, and gone the wrong way several times over, that they need immediate sustenance before they can become coherent enough to explain half a dozen times over how they came to miss the right way.

Of course they don't leave till the last train (even if they go that day); and many manage to lose the last train!

When friends come by invitation, we expect them to develop good appetites in the fresh air. If they don't, we get anxious, and wonder what is wrong with the menu. But they usually respond to the hill-top ozone—especially young people! Hence the wisdom of an ample store cupboard.

On one occasion, a group of four workmen had to be imported from London to carry out a technical job. Huge, husky men they were; and they arrived a day sooner than I had expected, and before I had laid in a few extra legs of mutton to cope with their needs.

Being far from the inn, we provided their meals. And that first evening we set them down in the kitchen to all we had.

It reminded me of the specimen sermon the nervous student preached before the theological examiners—after they had just lunched. He took for his text St. Luke ix. 17. But he got the emphasis wrongly placed, and in his flurry he announced:

“And they *did* eat!”

So did our workmen!

After they had strolled around a bit, and taken their pipes for an evening walk, I happened to meet them. And the foreman said, by way of complimenting the scenery, “This ‘ere air makes you relish your vittels, don’t it ma’am!”

So I ordered them further relays of bread and cheese and coffee.

Yet, to be quite honest, I don’t think it was concern for our visitors’ appetites that first started me on this hobby; it was really Ursula’s experiments with gooseberry jam.

We happened to be at the cottage that year, just as the gooseberries were almost ripe. The thrushes and jays were keeping their eyes on them, and already had discovered the few that were ready for home consumption. Indeed, one big thrush, with splashed and brown-streaked breast, refused to go; he merely slipped round to the other side of the hedge when we appeared, and hid there till we went away, dodging us from bush to bush.

Virginia gathered the fruit—and it is not as peaceful a job as it sounds! our thorns are in prime condition!—and then we had a jam-making orgy.

There was plenty of it, and in case unlimited gooseberry jam might become monotonous, Ursula suggested experimenting with several flavourings—quite original ideas she had, too, on the subject.

Some of them eventually proved utterly uneatable, especially one batch, which she left to cool on some shelves which had just been treated with solignum! If there is anything liable to colour one’s menu for weeks and weeks, it’s solignum, if allowed near a kitchen!

Apart from this consignment, there were several other ventures in the gooseberry line that were impossible either to eat or describe. But, as she said, all geniuses must be allowed wide and untrammelled scope in various directions, before they can find their true *métier*.

Undoubtedly, in one experiment, the walnuts were too untrammelled, and in another the vanilla had been allowed too wide a scope. But it was finally agreed that the “spiced gooseberry” was an unqualified success, and might be classified as true *métier*.

We were so pleased with the regiment of jars, when they were finished and ranged in rows on the top shelf of the store cupboard (I had only one in those days), that we continually opened the door for the sheer joy of gazing at them.

It wasn't long before we had added a row of jars of rhubarb jam. As Ursula said, we owed it to ourselves to have an adequate stock of rhubarb preserve, since we had heaps of it in the garden (I like the American name for rhubarb—pie-plant). And when she pointed out that no shop ever seems to sell rhubarb jam, we fell upon the clumps of pie-plant, and worked as though our very existence depended upon an adequate supply of this preserved vegetable!

I like the word “adequate.” It covers so much ground and commits one to nothing definite. I learnt it in my young days from an Editor, who always avoided hurting authors' feelings when he declined a MS., by saying, “I like your article; it is well written, but I'm so sorry it isn't quite adequate.” That settled it, without paining people's susceptibilities.

It was only a matter of a few weeks, before we added black currant and red currant to the stately rows of gooseberry and rhubarb. Later, came an extensive influx of plum jam, always a favourite, because it is so easy to make, and one has so much more to show for one's labours than with the smaller fruits.

Once the jam-making craze has got a thorough hold on its victim, there is no turning back. Hence we proceeded to jam pears, apples, raspberries and vegetable-marrow; also to make apple jelly and blackberry jelly. And then some one turned up—of course!—who pointed out how lacking we were in every sort of jam that really mattered, because we had neither medlar, nor quince, nor rowanberry jelly! We got these another year!

Of course we made heaps of mistakes at first, but we learnt a great deal by our experiments. We discovered that apple preserve, when flavoured with lemon, would not keep; whereas when flavoured with cloves (which are really a wonderful preservative), it keeps quite well.

In America I chanced to see a clever apple peeler. This started us on an

“evaporating” campaign! The little machine peels the fruit and cuts it into rings. We dried these, and felt it our duty almost to live on apples that winter!

I don’t believe any woman can resist the lure of shelves stocked with home-made preserves. The various colours showing through the glass make such an attractive show—the crimson of plum, strawberry, red currant and raspberry; the rosy-purple of the blackberry; the rich depth of the black currant; the yellow of honey and lemon curd, and the full golden tone of the vegetable-marrow jam, all help to make a lovely colour scheme, in addition to other virtues!

By this time we were beginning to regard the cupboard as a personal member of the family. We remembered it on birthdays, and similar festivals.

“I’ve sent you a trifle for the store cupboard,” friends often wrote. Or they brought it with them when they came on a visit.

One day, in an antique shop, I chanced to see some pretty, uncommon china jars, for holding cereals and other “dry” foods, such as sugar, salt, etc., with names on each—in Dutch, strange to say. But that is not surprising when one remembers the neat, orderly ways of the Dutch housewife, how everything seems to be washed and scrubbed and tidied every morning early, and again at night! Probably these had come from the selling up of some Dutch home here, at the time of the war.

In my girlhood, we had a Dutch maid for a month—and one month only! She came to London straight from Holland, knowing very little English, and we equally limited with regard to her native tongue. However, with the aid of “conversation books,” we ascertained several of her views regarding us. Never, no *never* had she imagined that so much dirt existed anywhere as she saw in London; this was her constant refrain. And I sympathised with her even then, in my irresponsible youth; I sympathise with her even more, now that I know what a life-long war one has to wage, if one wishes to keep one’s premises even partially clean in town!

The first morning she was with us, we found her hauling the garden hose out to the front of the house. When (with the aid of the before-mentioned books) we asked her why? she explained (via the Dutch-English dictionary) that she was going to play the hose over the front of the house and also clean the front road. Never, no *never*, had she ever seen—etc.

Poor girl, she strove valiantly to get the outside of our London house to look like the white and green cottages of her native village. But at the end of a month she gave it up. We weren’t entirely sorry, for we knew that if she stayed

wrestling with London much longer, the grime would still survive, but she wouldn't!

The sight of the jars in the antique shop reminded me of that strenuous month! They were just the thing for my cupboard. With these, my tapioca, sago, rice and macaroni acquired an artistic importance; and the jars were tenderly ranged on a shelf to themselves.

They promptly turned up their noses at their neighbours—of course! Did any well-meaning woman ever buy anything for her happy home, I wonder, without immediately provoking discord somewhere? And finding that she had to buy half a dozen other things, because the newcomer had made its surroundings look shabby?

It was evident, so soon as the Dutch jars were installed, that the somewhat makeshift accommodation which had been allotted to dried fruits, was quite unworthy of their dignity. Henceforth, raisins, sultanas, prunes, and the like, were housed in special glass jars. As we explained to them, if they were not superfine china like their foreign neighbours, they could refer to themselves as crystal! I notice most glass calls itself that nowadays.

Incidentally, glass receptacles are a boon for foodstuffs; they are such time-savers, enabling one to see their contents at a glance.

From jam to bottled fruit was an easy and inevitable transition. Having used all the jars we could lay hands on for our preserves, and noting that the plum trees were apparently just as loaded with fruit as when we started, naturally the next bright idea which affected us focussed on bottling.

And bottling it was! Plums, raspberries, and blackberries—you might have thought we were an orphanage, to see the amount we prepared! Yet, it is surprising how soon it all disappears!

Damsons, we decided, were not worth doing, as we had a super-abundance of plums. Besides, they are better left till after the frost has toned down their "roughness"—and by that time we would be in town, and birds would have eaten the fruit.

The Damson tree is a favourite with the bullfinches. Early in March, and even at the end of February, one sees the brilliant crimson and black velvet of Mr. Bully—several of them, and also the ladies of the family in sober greys and browns. And those patches of crimson work steadily and conscientiously up and down the branches, you would think there could not be a bud left, after they have finished. Yet the tree is always loaded with fruit. It never seems to take a year off, occasionally, as the plum and greengage trees do. Each season

it is a sight with its lovely load of purple. I conclude the bullfinches (who never miss their annual spring visit) really do it good, by thinning out the blossom. And they are such beautiful birds. I don't grudge them the little they take.

We discovered a very simple, yet effectual method of bottling fruit; the bottles being placed in a bath of water, with hay at the bottom and between them. When they have boiled the correct length of time, hot mutton fat is poured on top, which seals the bottle and excludes all air. This saves the expense, and also the trouble, of the metal tops. The fruit keeps for over a year, and probably longer; only we usually clear up the previous year's output by the time the next is ready for use.

We were displaying our prowess to a neighbour, who said: "Have you ever tried to bottle young chickens?"

We hadn't. So she initiated us, only in this case we thought it wisest to use the metal-topped bottles, as the top has to be large.

Our stock of eatables began to look so inviting, that there didn't seem much need to do any marketing! We began to think there was nothing left to buy!

One day we were entertaining an acquaintance who had been invited to the Lord Mayor's Banquet. When we offered our humble ox-tail soup—made entirely from a local product which had grazed over our meadows—he declined, adding that the only soup he ever took was Turtle soup. We felt properly subdued. And while the rest of us hurriedly, and almost apologetically, consumed our modest portions, realising at the same time how plebian we were, he enlarged on the virtues of Turtle soup, and its superiority over all others.

"We'll see that he has some, next time he comes!" said Virginia acidly, after he had gone. And she promptly ordered a bottle, which was placed with full military honours in the store cupboard. And then it occurred to her—supposing the next visitor wouldn't look at turtle, but clamoured for mock instead? or for clam soup? For you never know who will appear without warning, or what native dishes they may affect!

She decided that the only course was to lay in a specimen of every soup known to high-class stomachs; and then—one could smile and be the perfect hostess, no matter who might call.

This was the beginning of our soup campaign. Virginia ordered a bottle of everything known as soup: mulligatawny, hare, celery, and the ordinary

varieties. But in addition, she produced mysterious items such as Toheroas. When I asked her who they were? she said she was told they were a favourite New Zealand dish. Hence, having New Zealand friends, we must be duly prepared.

By the time the soups had assembled themselves, and occupied the best part of a shelf, Ursula, having started in on vegetables (and taken the complaint in an acute form), had fitted another shelf with tins and bottles of asparagus, green peas, corn-on-the-cob, sweet potatoes, okra and other unfamiliar names. And she was constantly asking such questions as, “Is Chilli-con-carni a vegetable or a fruit?” “Is Gumbo a vegetable?” “What are Huckleberries like?”

Fortunately some American visitors were able to solve a number of her problems, and sort us out, so that Gumbo and Chilli and Co. were stationed in their right quarters, instead of consorting with vegetables.

We really had our work cut out to sample everything; for it was a fixed rule that nothing was to be admitted into that select company of comestibles that hadn't been tested and approved.

Taking it all round, it's a wonder we lived through that period!

Just about this time I bought another store cupboard, bigger than the first. We needed it!

This so enheartened Virginia, that she decided to overhaul the whole subject, and draw up a really comprehensive scheme for an ideal store cupboard.

Ursula, too, said she felt at last she could do something like justice to the matter. And what about *hors d'œuvres*? Hadn't we better specialise a little on these? Some people attached so much importance to them.

So the top shelf of the new cupboard bristled with fish sundries in glasses and tins. And really it is surprising what a lot one can do in this direction. There was laks (which is smoked salmon), king fish (a species of tuna), tunny fish, tinned prawns—I began to understand how a Danish hotel proprietor could assure me that at any moment he could produce a hundred different *hors d'œuvre* dishes for the *Smörgesbord*—the popular Scandinavian side-table.

I began to think I could too!

Naturally, we couldn't refrain from prating about our new hobby to our friends. Everybody wanted to see the cupboard, till it became quite a show place. Virginia suggested that we might dispense with the little drawing-room, and invite company straight out to the store cupboard, charging for admission.

Of course, like all properly constructed friends, those whom we permitted to gaze upon our Collection promptly pointed out its deficiencies. It is queer how people will ignore a hundred things which are worthy of a modicum of praise, and comment only on some trifle that is less admirable—when shown anything new.

“You don’t seem to have any guavas,” said one. “And I’m so fond of guavas!”

Ursula made a mental note, and we conferred afterwards *re* tinned fruits. Later, when some one from India was eulogising mangoes, we had the secret satisfaction of putting a bowl of mangoes on the table for the next meal. Just as, on another occasion, when an Australian visitor was pitying us for not knowing the joys of passion fruit, we opened a tin and placed it before our guest.

Strange how the mania for collecting grows on one, no matter how innocent one’s intentions at the outset! I started with a quite praiseworthy desire to be economical where jam was concerned, by using my own fruit, and making it ourselves. Also, there was the glad anticipation of a later stage, when we should sit around the tea-table, and bask in the ruby (or amber) light radiating from those same glass jars; while we assured ourselves how entirely superior our own jam was to any and every other jam on earth.

Looking back, it seemed a harmless, even a useful, recreation. I never imagined that it would engender in me a craving for catalogues, till at last I should bid fair to become a walking Price List!

So easy is it to tread the downward path!

Needless to say, we didn’t end with *hors d’œuvres*. Any one who happens to know Virginia and Ursula will be sure of that.

Virginia will tell you that she believes in “itemising”; and Ursula will add that *her* part is “particularisation.” They learnt these two words from a late President of the United States of America; and are rather pleased with them.

After they had itemised and particularised the occupants of my cupboard shelves for about the dozenth time, they discovered a yawning void, where things were not, which ought to have been. It was on this wise.

We are always on the look-out for tin boxes, in which to send flowers by post. Our appetite for the boxes is colossal, and only equalled by our craving for empty jam jars. And the need is especially acute when the first snowdrops and primroses and violets appear.

Knowing this, a friend sent me a box of *Petit Fours*, on some festal occasion—a birthday, I expect. Her note said: “I don’t suppose the contents are worth much, but at least I know you will value the tin!”

Next day, an unexpected caller found us low in confectionery. We only saved our face by hurriedly opening the tin of *Petit Fours*.

This incident revealed the lack of cakes in our reserves. It had to be remedied. We got together quite a creditable array, including shortbread, macaroons, afternoon tea fancies, chocolate biscuits; with sponge rusks for those people who are such a nuisance to their hostess, and such a joy to themselves, by reason of their “strict diet, my dear; my doctor *insists* on it.”

Although we were—and still are—constantly chasing after novelties, it must not be thought that we neglect the ordinary necessities of life.

Tea, for instance, we can supply to suit the most complex nerves, the most high-brow digestions, and the most refined palates, from choice China, to what is described in grocery columns as “a good household blend.”

The China tea is pale in colour; hence it is scorned by the itinerant wanderers who offer clothes-pegs for sale, and are occasionally regaled with a cup of tea when the climate is either “the hottest summer for fifty years,” or “the wettest summer within living memory.” And it is always one or the other. For these miscellaneous back-door visitors, the “good household blend” is the best, being of a powerfully dark mahogany colour, with plenty of “body” in it.

As one swarthy gipsy woman said to me, “Bless yer kind heart, me lady, but that drop o’ tea were worth calling tea! You could see *and* taste it. I likes it strong meself. Can’t abear slops what you can look through. And”—producing a tin can (which was, later, identified by its lawful owner living further along the lane)—“if you don’t mind, I’ll take the tea leaves home with me. I can get a squeeze more out of ’em. And”—as an afterthought—“you might put a bit o’ sugar with ’em.”

Then (a second afterthought, when I had bestowed a biscuit on the baby), “I suppose you don’t happen to have a mite o’ cake?”

The store cupboard serves a diversity of human types!

Sweets accumulate of their own accord, boxes being frequently presented by our guests. This section of our commissariat is well known to the youngsters in the vicinity of the cottage. We are a good distance from any shop selling sweets. A stick of chocolate means much more to a country child than it

does to a town child, who is always spending pennies at a corner shop.

I have often smiled to watch a certain polite small boy turn his head studiously in the opposite direction, when he sees me making for the big China pantry—where the store cupboards stand—keys in hand. He has been told, when sent with any message, that he must *not* look as though he expected to have anything given to him. So he doesn't! He examines the pattern of the wall-paper most carefully. And the dramatic look of surprise with which he always greets the sweets I produce, is quite affecting.

On one occasion a very little child had been sent with some eggs from a farm. He was only about six years old.

Outside the back door, on a table, was a basket of nuts, waiting for the gardener to put them into the squirrels' boxes. While I was in the kitchen, taking the eggs out of the child's basket, I saw him put his hand out to take a nut, and immediately draw it back, saying to himself, "No! I mustn't!" He didn't know I could see him through the window curtain.

When I went back to him with his basket, he said, "I s'pose those nuts are for your little dog?"

"No," I said, "they are for the squirrels' dinner."

"It must be nice to be squirrels!" he said, with a little sigh.

"Not so nice as being a little boy," I replied, "because boys often have a pocket they can fill with nuts, while the squirrel has only his mouth."

"I've *three* pockets," he announced eagerly. We proceeded to fill them.

Another time, a small lad who often comes on a visit, said to me: "I've been thinking—you really ought to have your motto carved at the top of the big store cupboard, just like some people have one carved above the fireplace. It would be so suitable."

"But what is my motto?" I asked.

"Why, you surely haven't forgotten the one Miss Virginia gave the house?"

'YOU NEVER KNOW.'

I do think it is just right for this lovely cupboard, because it is—well, it's always such a Feast of Mystery!"

Probably some people may think it would have been simpler—and certainly cheaper—if I merely read down Provision Lists issued by big firms, and left the matter at that, ordering what I needed just when I needed it, like all

sane housekeepers are in the habit of doing.

But it must not be forgotten that so long as the goods remain in a shop, they belong to the proprietor. Once they get into my cupboard they belong to me. A very different thing, as every collector knows!

Yet one can't really explain the collecting habit! Its just there, or it isn't!

Some one else said the store cupboard must be like having a shop on the premises.

Nothing of the sort! A shopkeeper has to stock all kinds of things which he doesn't want personally—may even dislike. Whereas I don't.

I should hate to have to hoard haricot beans, for instance, because I grew to loathe the very sight of them in the war. And I hope I may never have to taste one again so long as I live.

Margarine, also, would be my undoing. And dried eggs leave me cold. While as for very fat meat——But, let the subject be changed, please!

Meanwhile, I'm not a public benefactor, serving the world with kindness, as a shopkeeper is. I'm simply amusing myself with my store cupboard.

Once you embark on a collection of this description, you will find it has a unique charm, when you are able to open the door, and say (quite casually, of course), "This is my store cupboard"—*very* different from saying, "This is Mr. Harrod's or Mr. Selfridge's, or Mr. Army and Navy's Price List!"

I admit it would be a very selfish form of amusement were it not for the fact that I share all of it; and other people derive the greater part of the benefits accruing from my hobby.

Unlike most other "collections," this one is never stationary and never remains permanently in one's possession. As fast as one item is added to the shelves, another moves out.

Some things are much more active than others. Calves-feet jelly is particularly restive, I find. So often one hears of illness, and a bottle of the jelly is always acceptable when it arrives at the patient's door. Tamarinds will have a brisk season, if colds and sore throats are about.

As for tea, it is never still! Always moving in, and out again.

On the other hand, Toheroas are what the Stock Exchange would describe as "dull"—no reflection on the Toheroas' intellect, I hasten to add. So far as I know them, they appear to be a most cultured shellfish! Only there is no rush for them when I offer them round. They really are interesting acquaintances.

But no one is quite sure how to pronounce their name. And until the B.B.C. tell us, I expect we shall remain in ignorance, which means that we hesitate to ask for another helping, please!

In the main, however, the cupboard is in a state of perpetual motion. Hence it never becomes monotonous.

Also, I made another discovery: Nothing is really waste of time, nothing is really foolish, if it contributes something to the comfort and well-being and happiness of others.

If you have any doubts about my store cupboard in this connection, watch some visitor who has walked the nine miles from Chepstow to the Flower-Patch, having missed his lunch *en route*, as well as his way! Then see if the store cupboard isn't something more than a dull hobby of no value to any one except the owner!

Why, it can even supply cheese straws at a moment's notice!

There now!

Wayside Scents

As civilisation advances, the earth appears to lose something every decade from the beautiful things of life. It seems as though, with each man-made advantage that we gain, we lose a natural advantage that was originally bestowed on creation, free gratis for all.

I quite admit that we need all the advantages mankind can invent and make. With the ever-increasing struggle for existence, we want all the strength-savers and fatigue-reducers that man's ingenious brain can devise. But there is one question that arises rather frequently nowadays among thoughtful people, and it is this—

Is it really necessary to sacrifice so many natural advantages in order to gain man-made advantages? Why can't we have both?

This subject is a very large one, and affects many departments of life. It is impossible in one short chapter to do more than touch on one, and only one, of the natural advantages that we are fast losing, and see how far it is possible to check its vanishing tendency, or to replace that which we are rapidly losing. I am anxious now to call attention to the fact that civilisation is fast wiping out the perfumes of Nature, and unless something is done to counteract this, and done with this definite purpose in view, by every member of the world's large contingent of perfume-lovers, the scents of the country-side that delighted the more intelligent of our forefathers, and were accepted as a matter of course by others, will become lost to the world.

Think for a moment of the scents that are bound to be sacrificed to circumstances and civilisation.

There is wood-smoke, for instance. Most of us, fortunately, have met at one time or another in the country the sweet but indescribable odour of burning apple-wood. There is no other scent like it—though, for the matter of that, it is seldom that any two flower or woodland odours are at all alike. Nature is no more limited in the matter of scents than she is in the shape of leaves or her cloud designs. And the scent of burning applewood is different from the scent of burning pine-knots, though each is delightful; and the smoke from oak twigs, or old oak driftwood, is another species of incense never to be forgotten.

Yet, since wood is becoming so precious, each year finds fewer and fewer country fires able to indulge in the luxury of burning wood; while for the

town-dweller, the hearth-fire itself is fast being extinguished in favour of gas, electricity, hot-water pipes, or the anthracite stove. I know it can't be helped. Housework must be reduced somehow. But, oh! what we lose by the exchange!

Another sweet scent of the country-side that is really disappearing—though, perhaps, not as far gone at present as the scent of the wood-fire—is the odour (which is really a mixture of several odours) commonly described as new-mown hay. One needs to spend much time in the country to realise how this most delicious scent is vanishing, with the advance of civilisation in the matter of agriculture.

The almond-like perfume that has always been associated with hayfields is largely due to Sweet Vernal grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*). Many town-dwellers who do not see the fields in May and June, when they show their lovely variety of blossoms and seeds, think that grass is much the same everywhere. Grass will be merely a carpet of green blades to them, with nothing to distinguish one blade from another. Yet there are about fifty varieties of grass to be found in ordinary English meadows—I have found that number myself in the fields around my Flower-Patch, and probably there are more that I have not found.

And it is important to remember that all grasses do not produce the same scent when dried. In fact, the majority have very little in the way of a pronounced odour. It is the presence of *Anthoxanthum odoratum* which makes all the difference to the hayfield of the old-fashioned type. But in the modern up-to-date hayfield, this may be entirely absent.

The Sweet Vernal grass is not the only plant to send out a lovely greeting from the hayfield to the passer-by. There are several others that sometimes help. For instance, in one of my own fields I used to have, in addition to grass, a large amount of the white clover. And if there is white clover anywhere about, no one can forget it at blossoming time, for it fills the air with honey fragrance. Then I also had some melilot in that field—another honey-scented plant, that turns to almond essence when dried in the sun. There was woodruff at the lower shady end—no need for me to describe what woodruff is like when dried! The very name calls up a host of scented memories. A brook runs down one side of this field, and for a yard on either side marsh mint grows thickly—if you have ever stepped on growing mint you can form a slight idea of what it was like when the mowers reached that side of the pasture. At the top it was dry and sunny, and here wild tansy grew; and where it was stony and the grass could not do much, wild thyme flourished on the rough hot ground—

and both of these contributed a warm aromatic scent to the air, and the quaint little Lady's-Tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) added further delight when a late crop was taken off the meadows in August.

There were plenty of other lovely plants in that field, including butterfly orchises, but I am only writing about the scented flowers; there were a great many of these. And when the field was cut for hay it nearly took one's breath away just to stand and feast upon the perfume—and it was a veritable feast!

But I admit that the scented stuff did not make first-class feed for cattle! And it would have scandalised a modern university-trained agriculturist! Hence, when the war came, with its urgent need for foodstuffs for man and beast, that field had to be ploughed up and planted with oats. The world needed oats at the time far more than it needed perfume, and most of the scent-giving plants had to go!

Since then—as oats didn't do at all well in that situation—the field has been re-sown with grass-seed. Only—and this is a point to be noticed—it isn't the same kind of grass as before. It is better grass (so they tell me), and more desirable for cattle. It looks very good grass; and it yields a good hay crop. *But it has no scent when cut*, or nothing to speak of. The Sweet Vernal grass (to say nothing of the legion of other stuff that wasn't grass, but was part and parcel of the old-fashioned new-mown hay scent) is missing, and will never return.

Now what took place in my fields has taken place all over the country—the old sweet-smelling herbage has been cleared away or ploughed in, and a better feed-crop substituted. This is a gain to the food-producing capability of the country—and food is still an urgent need—but it is a distinct loss to our more æsthetic sense of smell.

Yet another scent of the country-side that is rapidly disappearing, and will soon be extinct, is the scent of the summer rain falling on the dust of the clean country roads. Yellow sandy lanes, chalky white roads winding like ribbons over the green downs, deep-lying loamy lanes set between high hedges—all these are fast becoming one even, serviceable surface of asphalt.

And where the tar cauldron has not yet penetrated, the motor vehicle has, and track-marks or odours of petrol take all from the subtle scent that used to rise from such roads when a shower fell, or the dew of a summer night damped both road and hedgerow. Yet no one can deny that the asphalt and the motor vehicles are both of them boons!

Then there are the hedgerows. Only a few years ago, these were liberal providers of scent for the wayfarer. Hawthorn, honeysuckle, and wild rose—to name only three of many inhabitants of the roadside—were proverbial for their perfume, which they flung abroad with the utmost lavishness whether the season were good or bad. Just to say over their names is to conjure up dreams of beauty and sweetness.

But where are they now? How much scent of hawthorn, honeysuckle, or wild rose floats over the country-side to-day? Only a very small amount in comparison with pre-war days. I won't enlarge on this, as I have mentioned it in another chapter.

In most rural districts the authorities, wisely, demand that all hedges bordering public roads or lanes shall be kept cut sufficiently low to enable motorists to see over the tops and round the corners. This is a most necessary rule; for lack of it in the past many a serious accident has taken place. A tangled mass of honeysuckle, or clematis, or waving branches of hawthorn—at the wrong place—may be the cause of fatal collisions, if they impede the chauffeur's view.

Nevertheless this cutting of thousands of hedges all the country over has taken much of the sweetness and delight from the country air. It is true that the roots of hawthorn, honeysuckle, wild rose, and clematis still remain, but their bloom is gone and with it their perfume. Here and there an enterprising spray, that has managed to dodge the billhook of the hedger, throws out a blossom triumphantly and smiles cheerily at the passer-by. But the myriads that used to scent the summer air are gone, never to return, and the world is considerably the poorer in consequence.

Turning to towns, we find most of the old-time scents have completely vanished, having been enveloped by the mass of ever-growing population. Only a few years ago many of the suburbs of our great cities were composed of beautiful homes set in lovely gardens. Some of the London suburbs, for instance, such as Hampstead, Hendon, Sydenham, and Croydon, were ablaze with well-kept flower gardens, which filled the air with thoughts of heliotrope and syringas, lilacs and wistaria.

But the war and the crushing taxation have made it next to impossible for such gardens to be maintained nowadays. The upkeep of such houses and grounds is beyond the purse of any but war profiteers, and the lovely old places have been converted into flats; or, like John Ruskin's dear old house on Herne Hill, turned into hotels and boarding houses, with additional buildings about the grounds.

And the gardens are no longer laid out with heliotrope, mignonette, and the old-fashioned roses that knew what was expected of them in the way of scent, and provided it generously. No longer are raspberries and strawberries scenting the air of kitchen-gardens all round London. The laburnums and mountain-ash trees have been cut down to give more light in the “flat” kitchens. All quite necessary too. But it has thus come about that the suburbs of our great cities no longer contribute anything in the way of perfume, or natural beauty, for the benefit of those who cannot often go farther afield in search of such delights.

It is true that public parks are more plentiful now than they were a generation ago. This is a step in the right direction. But the areas occupied by lovely gardens in the past were far greater than those now occupied by our parks. And in any case, even the best of our parks do not cultivate as many flowers to the acre as were cultivated in the gardens they have replaced.

There is yet another branch of civilisation which is depriving the world of the scent of flowers, and that is the present-day method of seeking to improve the form and colouring of certain flowers at the expense of their perfume.

Nature is always interesting in her manner of rewarding man’s efforts to improve upon her original work. If we want larger flowers, and strive to secure these by scientific knowledge, we get the larger flowers in due course, but we get fewer of them in proportion as their size increases. We may desire to get a different shape or a more intense colour, and Nature permits these changes to come about, but the scent will possibly be decreased, or the strength of the plant may be lessened.

It seems as though Nature set a limit and said—

“You may do what you like within these lines, but you cannot overstep them; what you gain in one direction you must sacrifice in another.”

The result of this is seen with many of our most popular flowers. How often one takes a “sniff” at some beautiful rose in the hope of finding a delicious scent, only to be disappointed! The perfumes of rose, carnation, musk, mignonette, and several other flowers—even the time-honoured and homely wallflower!—that formerly were valued for their scents, are disappearing (or have entirely gone) from the highly-cultivated varieties; and our gardens, in consequence, are losing some of their greatest charm.

It is desirable to have improved varieties of flowers or fruits, but it is a great pity when the improvement annuls some of the finest characteristics of the plant.

“But how can I help in this matter?” is the natural question of the reader.

The average individual, such as you and I, can best help in this case by doing all that is possible to make up for some of the lost scents—producing others equally desirable. We cannot reinstate the old-time hay fields; we cannot bring back those lovely homes and gardens that clustered just outside the big cities. But at least we can see to it that our smaller gardens, or window-boxes even, if we live in a flat, contribute something in the way of perfume to the district. If every window-ledge and every garden grew some sweet-smelling flowers and specialised in perfume, the world would soon be a different place so far as odours are concerned.

Other Popular Books
by
Flora Klickmann

The Flower-Patch among the Hills
Between the Larch-Woods and the Weir
The Trail of the Ragged Robin
The Carillon of Scarpa
The Shining Way
The Path to Fame
Many Questions

Mending Your Nerves

The Lure of the Pen
A Book for would be Authors

Printed in Great Britain

The 27th Edition now Selling. 3/6 net (by post, 3/10).

The Flower-Patch
among the Hills

By FLORA KLICKMANN,

Editor of the "Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine," etc.

A Book of Cheerfulness: you just smile
your way right through.

WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT IT.

Miss Marie Corelli said:

"Your delightful book charms me by its homely truth and captivating simplicity. Your descriptions of the country are delicious, and not less your presentments of the quaint village folk, such as we meet in rural places every day. Your 'tone' and feeling is both helpful and cheering in these spells of dark weather and sad thoughts. While reading your pages one almost feels that 'peace' is once more with us and the blessedness of happy summer days. Indeed, the book itself is a true 'flower-patch among the hills.' With friendly wishes for its prolonged success."

Mrs. Florence L. Barclay said:

"A sense of fun, a perception of beauty, a love of life, and above all, an uplift, are the qualities we need in books to which we turn for our lighter reading during these strenuous days. Without question, these qualities flourish and abound in 'The Flower-Patch among the Hills.' Fun peeps out from almost every page."

Sir W. Robertson Nicoll said in the "British Weekly":

"'The Flower-Patch among the Hills' is the happy title of a new book by Flora Klickmann. It is apparently based upon actual experiences of a country village and its surroundings. Human beings and natural objects are vigilantly and kindly watched, and Miss

Klickmann knows how to make her impressions interesting and illuminating. I should imagine that, with women especially, this book would be a great favourite. But, speaking for myself, I have read it with great pleasure.”

Fifth Edition now Selling. 5/- net (by post, 5/6).

The Lure of the Pen

A Book for would-be Authors.

By FLORA KLICKMANN.

Author of "The Flower-Patch among the Hills," "Between the Larch-woods and the Weir," "The Trail of the Ragged Robin," etc.

MATTERS TOUCHED UPON.

Section I.—MSS. THAT FAIL. WHY THEY FAIL.

“ II.—ON TRAINING YOURSELF FOR LITERARY WORK.

“ III.—THE HELP THAT BOOKS CAN GIVE.

“ IV.—POINTS A WRITER OUGHT TO NOTE.

“ V.—AUTHOR, PUBLISHER, AND PUBLIC.

The "Times" says:

"Flora Klickmann wields herself a very bright and ready pen, and out of the abundance of her experience she gives helpful advice on every side of the subject."

The "Spectator" says:

"Miss Klickmann's wide experience of journalism and publishing has qualified her admirably to produce a technical treatise on the art she practises so well."

The "British Weekly" says:

"Miss Klickmann, in her brilliant, womanly, kindly, way, deals with many blunders."

The "Church Family Newspaper" says:

"Miss Klickmann may claim to have penned the most informing,

entertaining, and delightful book about books which has seen light for a very long time.”

The “Church Times” says:

“Miss Flora Klickmann is an Editor of acknowledged competence, and when she is so good as to talk frankly about her work she is entitled to an attentive and respectful hearing. More, she compels it; her book is full of wit and sound sense.”

The “Bookman” says:

“It is not only invaluable to the literary aspirant, but also a work of amusement, interest, and information to the general reader.”

The “Daily News” says:

“Miss Flora Klickmann’s gaily-written volume contains much good advice.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

[The end of *Flower-Patch Neighbours* by Flora Klickmann]