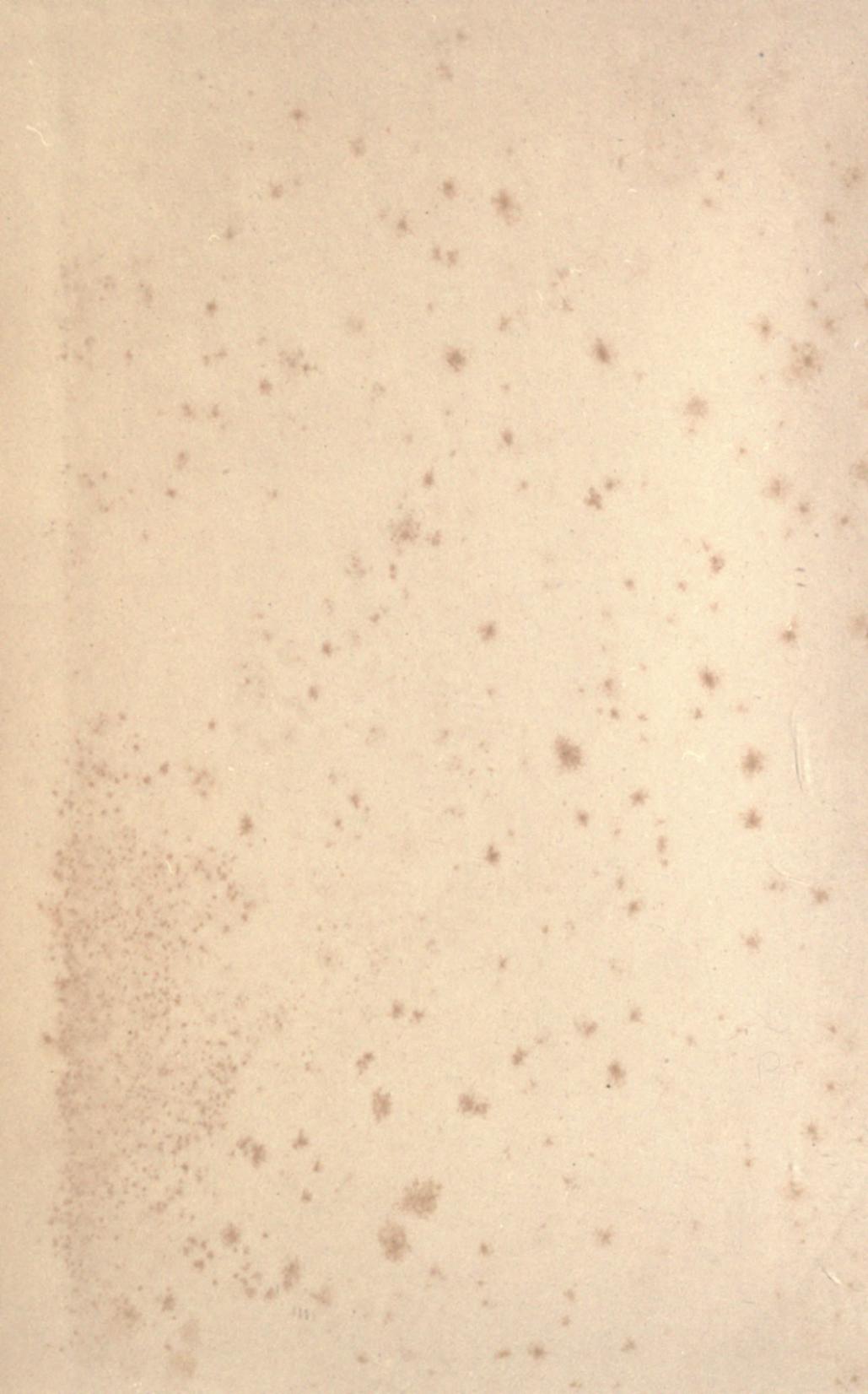


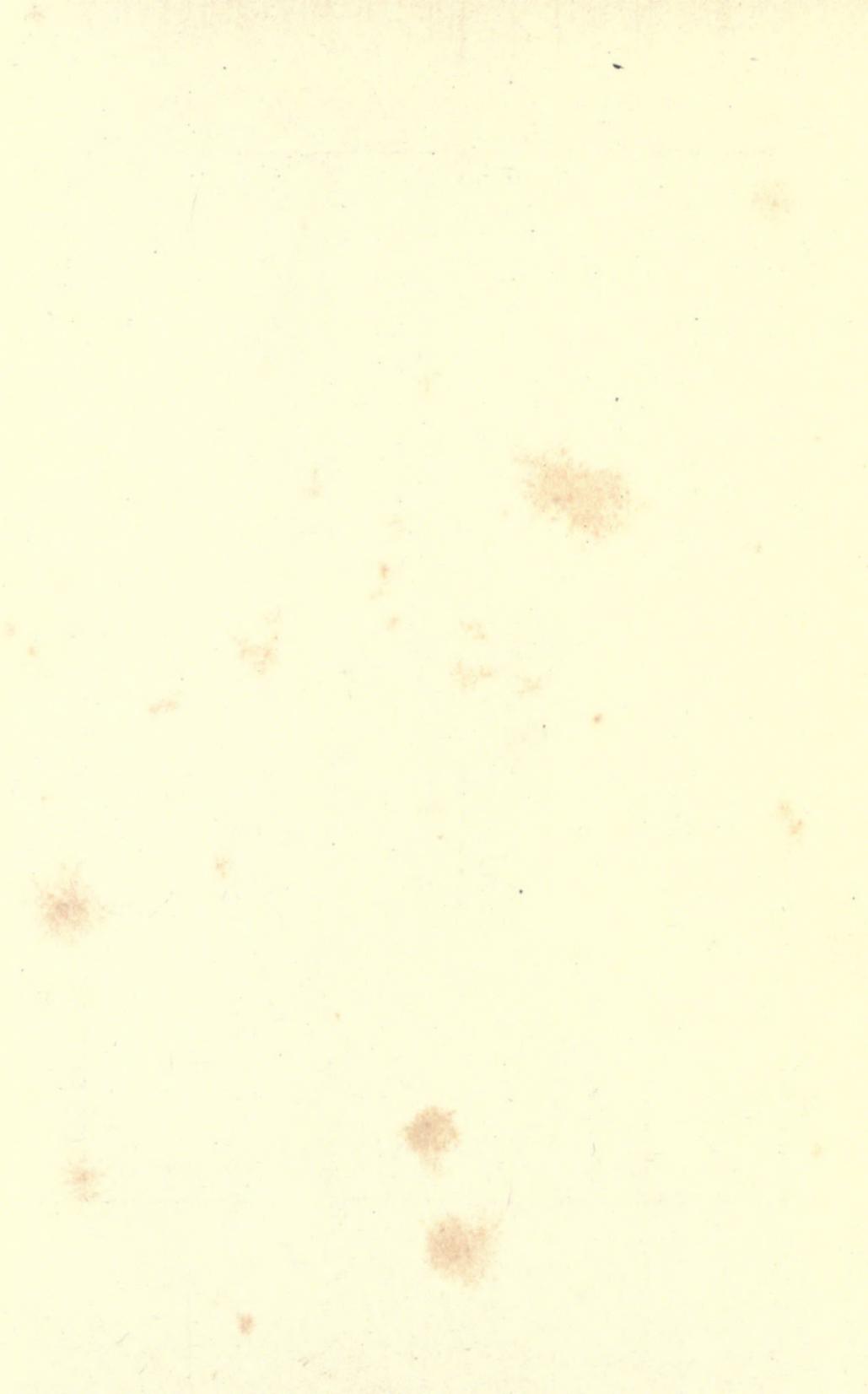
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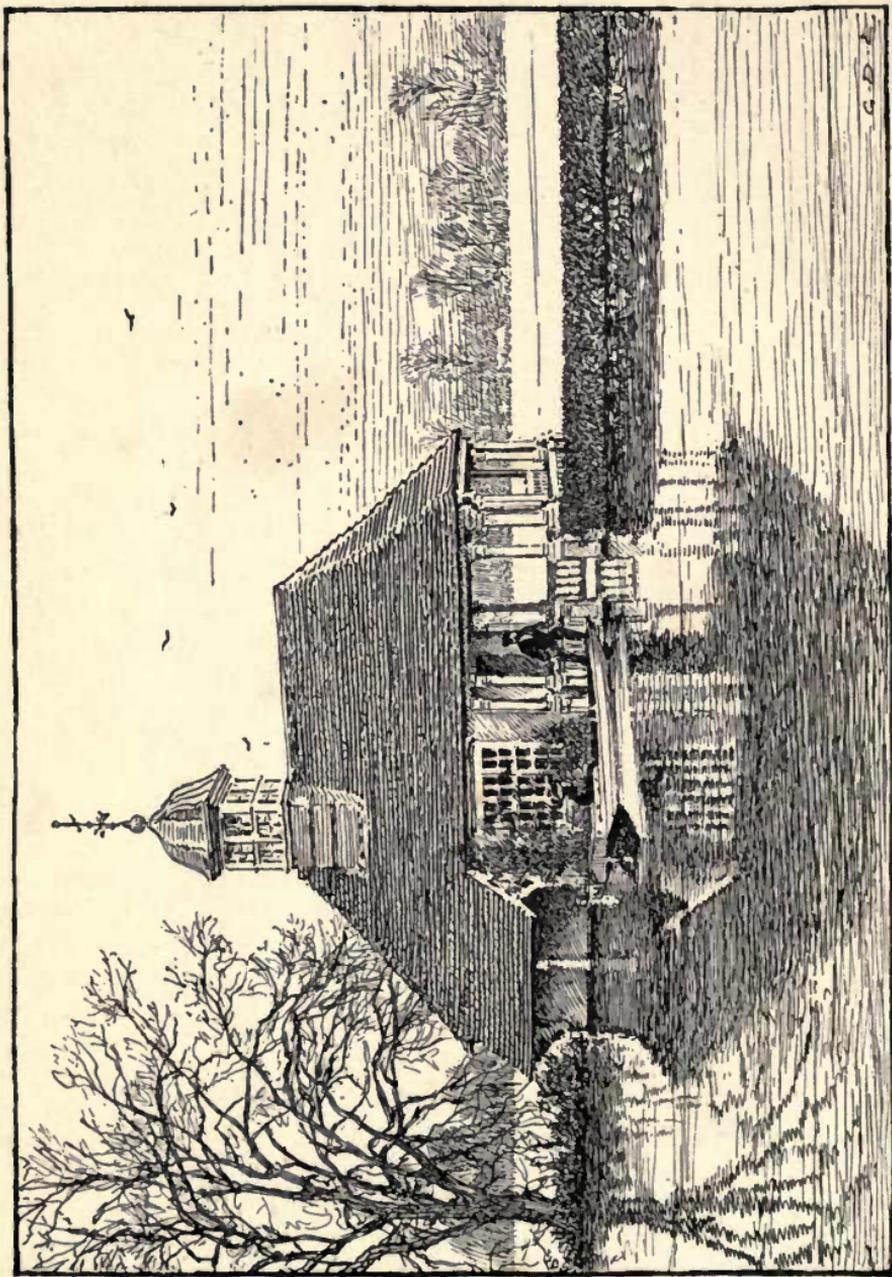




RIVERSIDE LETTERS







TENNIS-COURT AND BOAT-HOUSE AT RIVERSIDE DURING THE FLOOD, 1894.

[Frontispiece.]

# RIVERSIDE LETTERS

A CONTINUATION OF  
"LETTERS TO MARCO"

BY  
GEORGE D. LESLIE, R.A.

AUTHOR OF "OUR RIVER"

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR*

London  
MACMILLAN AND CO., LTD.  
NEW YORK: MACMILLAN & CO.

1896

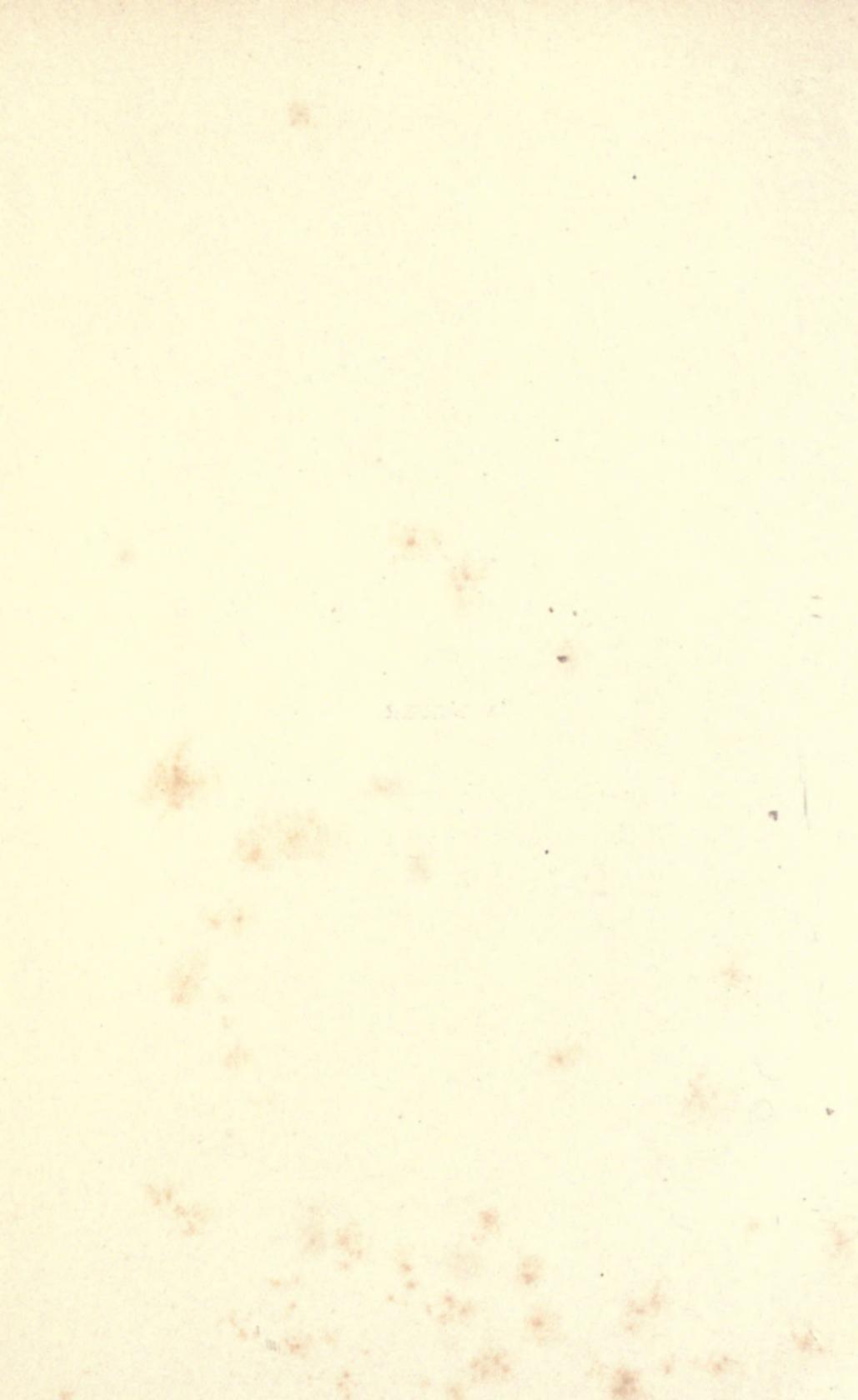
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To Marian

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## PREFACE

ENCOURAGED by the favourable reception that my "Letters to Marco" met with, I continued, during the last two years, to write to my old friend. Though the present letters were all duly transmitted to Mr. Marks at the time they were written, I cannot, as in the case of the former series, say that I had no thought of their afterwards appearing in print. For the sake of distinction I have entitled them "Riverside Letters."

In these letters my readers will find many notes and observations on my garden and the plants and flowers in it, as to which I felt that I had not said all I could have wished in the former series. Numerous as are the books, by various writers, that have recently appeared on Gardens and Flowers,

the subject is as inexhaustible as it is interesting, and it seems to me to be regretted that, considering how much admiration members of my profession have for flowers, so few of them have written anything on the subject.

I am sorry to say that, besides my own, I believe no artist's name appears on the list of Fellows of the Royal Horticultural Society. It would, I am convinced, greatly benefit the Society if a number of artists joined it as Fellows, and one or two of them were called upon annually to assist in judging the plants and awarding the prizes.

I take this opportunity of sincerely thanking all those kind friends who have helped to add interest to these letters by allowing me to make use of their instructive communications.

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## LETTER I

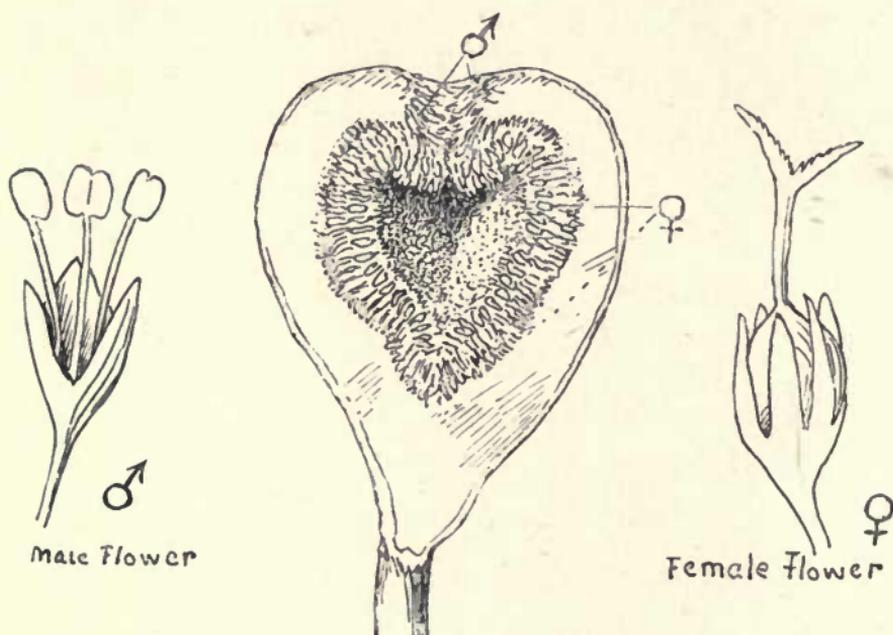
Blossom of the Fig—Letter from E. G. Baker, Esq.—Similarity of the *Dorstenia*—The Sunflower—Fertilisation of the Fig—Letter from the Bishop of Reading—Anecdote of a Clergyman and Tomtits.

*19th January, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO—The following extract from a letter that I have received from Mr. E. G. Baker, of the Royal Gardens, Kew, on the subject of the blossom of the fig may be interesting to you, so I send it together with his drawing.

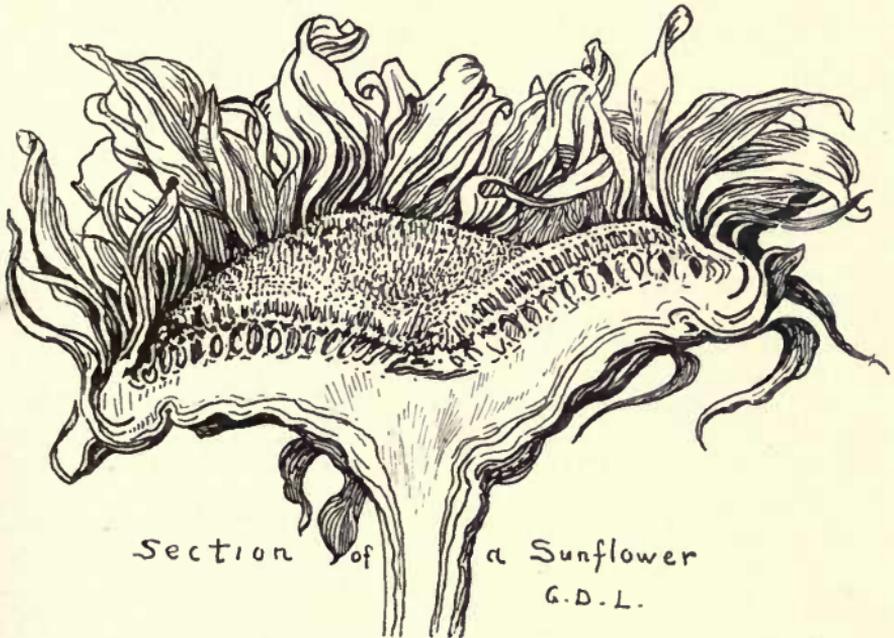
“——You say that you have been unable to find the flowers. As I happened to have by me a book giving a fair representation I thought, perhaps, it might interest you if I made a rough copy. The fig is the recep-

tacle, the flowers being inside. You perhaps know the *Dorstenia*, which is commonly grown in greenhouses, it is allied to the fig, but here the receptacle is flat and the flowers can be seen, while in the fig they are quite hidden from view."



The little drawing that Mr. Baker sent me explains the arrangement perfectly—the male flowers being situated by themselves in the little entrance to the interior of the fig, whilst the females occupy the whole of the cavity

itself. The female flowers are shut up thus in a sort of harem, all together, the entrance to which is guarded by the males.



I have not the opportunity of meeting a *Dorstenia* here, but I have cut a huge sunflower in half and drawn it as it partakes of a similar arrangement, for if you could close up this sunflower on to its centre something very like a fig would result. Anyhow it cannot be the *colour* or *beauty* of the flower that

assists the fertilisation of the fig. I must, in justice to the evolutionists, however, state that in warm countries there is a very minute long-shaped insect that does make its way into the inside of the fig, and that fig culturers sometimes pierce the entrance to hasten the ripening, possibly by thus admitting the insect. Sometimes they also put one drop of very pure olive oil on this entrance. This has to be done just at the exact time when the fig shows signs of commencing to swell, but how this assists in the ripening I do not know, and it seems to me that the oil would effectually bar the entrance to the insect.

You will no doubt be as much pleased as I was by a bird anecdote sent to me by the Bishop of Reading; he writes:—"Perhaps the following may interest you, testifying as it does to a certainly remarkable exhibition of the sympathy between the human family and the birds. I have a friend, a small man, whose smallness was somewhat compensated by the possession of a luxuriant beard. At

the Winchester Quingentenary Celebration this year I met him, reduced in size, and, like Bottom, translated. The beard was gone. The history of its disappearance was this. In the spring of this year my friend—a most ardent naturalist—watched from his dressing-room window the nest-building of some tits; they were sorely put to it for hair to line the nest. How they made known to him their want I know not, but the emergency was so great, and their anxiety to be ready for the coming family so urgent, that at last he made up his mind to the sacrifice of his beard, depositing the shorn glories on his window-sill, and watching the process of weaving the lining of the nest with calm regret and satisfied charity.”

## LETTER II

Reviews and Notices of Former Letters—Black-headed Gulls—  
Error in Description—Japanese Gardens—Flower Arrangement  
—Kindness to Flowers—Line Arrangement—Suicides and  
Accidental Drowning.

*12th February, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO—I think I may congratulate myself on the kind and favourable character of the notices that my letters received in the papers and reviews. Through the courtesy of my publishers, I believe I must have seen all that appeared, and I am glad to say there were only two which were in any sense adverse. The writers of these hostile notices fell foul of the superficiality of my knowledge of natural history, both pointing out as an example of this superficiality, the blunder I

made in the twenty-second letter as to the gulls which my wife and I saw feeding with the rooks on the flooded meadows opposite our house. I wrote: "They were probably the small black-headed gull, *which at this time of the year lose their black caps*; at any rate, these had white heads." The words in italics constitute my blunder. I knew that a change took place in the colour of the head at that season, but had reversed, in my mind, the order of the change at the time I wrote; the fact being that the birds in the spring change their white caps for black ones. I still believe, however, that the gulls we saw were the so-called "black-headed gulls" in their winter plumage. My critics were, I think, in error as to the date of the occurrence, thinking it took place on the 10th of April, the date when the letter was written, whereas I witnessed the scene on the 22nd of March. Now it is quite possible that, owing to the severe return of winter, which took place in March, 1889, mentioned in the preceding

letter (XXI.), in consequence of which the river had risen in flood on the 22nd, that the spring change in the birds' plumage had been delayed. I am very familiar with the little black-headed gull, as my brother Robert had one for many years; and I knew that the change in plumage was a very sudden affair. In a letter to Mr. Ruskin, March 3rd, 1884, my brother says: "My small black-headed gull 'Jack' is still flourishing, and the time is *coming* when I look for that *singularly sudden* change in the plumage of his head which took place last March." (Italics mine.) The birds I saw were so exactly like in shape and size to my brother's bird that I am still convinced that they were of that species. My critics are both ready enough with the Latin name of the bird (with which I did not care to bother you), but neither suggests what other sort of small gulls these that we saw could have been if they were not the black-headed ones. After all, the fact of the matter is, that when I wrote the correct name of the

gulls I saw was of very little importance either to you or me, my purpose being, as an artist, to convey to you, a brother artist, the charming effect produced by the white gulls and black rocks in the bright sunshine feeding together in the shallow flood water on the meadow. At the same time it was a careless blunder of mine about the change of plumage, and so no doubt I deserved correction.

Our Professor Anderson lent me some extremely interesting papers on gardening and flower arrangement amongst the Japanese, which I have been reading lately; he also kindly sent me a number of photographs of gardens in Japan. It appears that the Japanese approach flower culture and flower arrangement with a sort of religious, artistic, and scientific spirit, which is entirely unknown to European nations. The following quotation from a paper written by T. Conder, Esq., F.R.I.B.A., published by the Asiatic Society of Japan, gives one an idea of the views with

which flower treatment is regarded by this curious nation.

“The high esteem in which the art has been held is illustrated by the following ten virtues or merits attributed to those engaged in its pursuit, namely :—

*Koishikko*.—The privilege of associating with superiors.

*Seijō jōkō*.—Ease and dignity before men of rank.

*Muitannen*.—A serene disposition and forgetfulness of cares.

*Dokuraku ni Katarazu*.—Amusement in solitude.

*Sōmoku meichi*.—Familiarity with the nature of plants and trees.

*Shujin aikiō*.—The respect of mankind.

*Chobo furuu*.—Constant gentleness of character.

*Sēikon gōjō*.—Healthiness of mind and body.

*Shimbutsu haizo*.—A religious spirit.

*Showaku ribetsu.* — Self-abnegation and restraint.”<sup>1</sup>

The following on the question of cutting flowers is interesting; you may remember that in one of my former letters, I said that in some cases it seemed to me a kindness to flowers to gather them, namely when the weather was vile out of doors. I was therefore pleased to read—

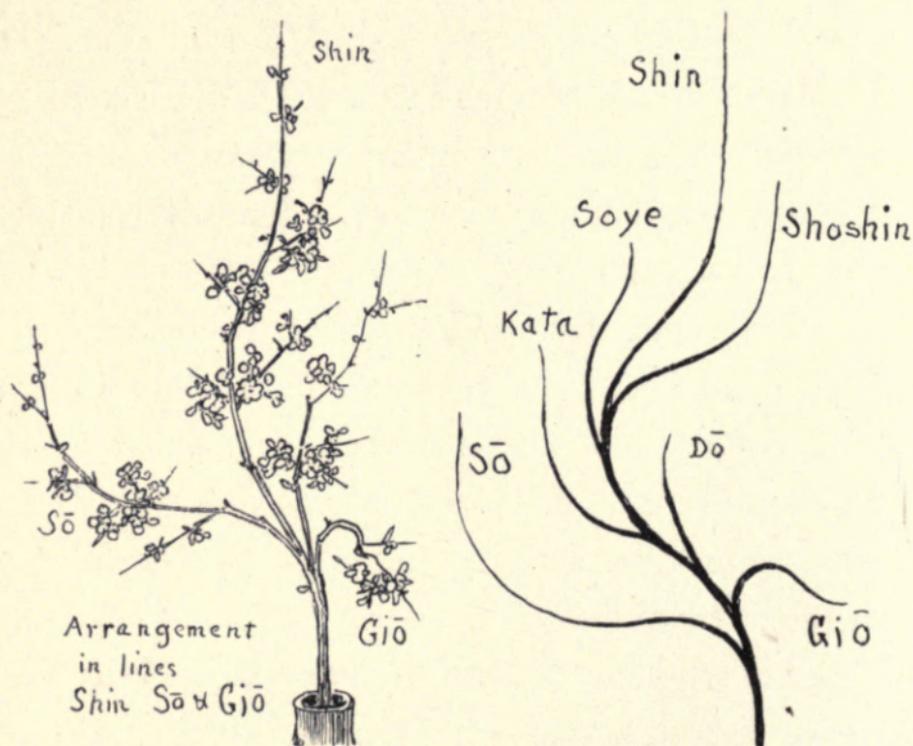
“The same Buddhist doctrine which forbade the wanton sacrifice of animal life is said to have suggested the gathering of flowers liable to rapid destruction in a tropical climate, and prolonging their life by careful preservation.”

The whole of Mr. Conder's paper is of great interest, and he gives a number of pages of diagrams and line plans of Japanese flower arrangement; from which the extreme importance that the Japanese attach to line is very evident. Beauty of line appears to have

<sup>1</sup> Trans. of the Asiatic Soc. of Japan. Vol. XVII., Part II.

been made a most abstruse study of by these curious people for generations.

All the lines with them have names and significations, and certain leading lines are



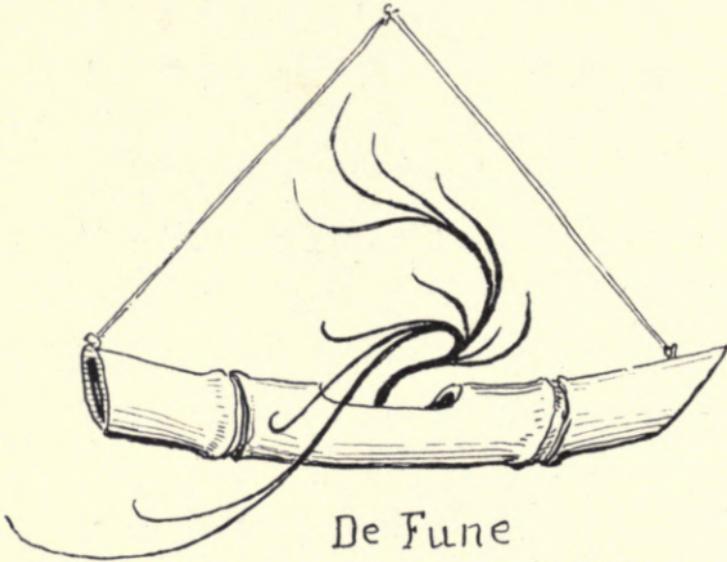
never absent from the arrangement. Here is one, as an example, of a seven line arrangement.

The long centre line, Shin, is always

present as the predominant line in the composition, and the shortest, called Gio, is likewise never absent, though the character of the curves varies a good deal according to the number of the sprays employed. They use small branches and sprays of blossoming trees much more than we do, and select and trim them according to the lines they are intended to take in the composition. In every case line is everything, our bunchy haphazard bouquet method being quite unknown to them or discarded as wanting in taste.

They generally support these sprays by fixing them into little heaps of stones at the bottom of pans or vases of water. The significance which these lines are sometimes made to take you may judge of by this example, called *De Fune*, it is the line arrangement of a spray fixed in a hanging piece of bamboo and is meant to represent an outward bound ship. Similarly they arrange lines in such a piece of bamboo to figure

a ship at anchor, in full sail, in a gale, home-ward bound, &c., &c.



De Fune  
(Outward bound Ship)

Judging from the photographs, the Japanese garden must be pretty and very quaint. They use much rock-work and stones of large size. They are fond of pools of water or small watercourses, with large slabs of stone for bridges, the paths have often little stone steps in them up and down; they clip and manipulate their bushes and trees, but not in the solid formal manner of our old

gardens ; indeed they seem to have a great feeling for wild natural arrangement which would delight Mr. Robinson's heart.

When any tragic event occurs in a small country town it is felt by everybody in a manner that is unknown to town dwellers. Yesterday there was a sad case of suicide here, and to-day the horror of the thing seems to be reflected in every face you meet ; small crowds of townsfolk are all day long to be seen on the bridge staring at the boat-house in which the poor drowned body has been placed.

Much as I enjoy living by our river, the number of deaths by drowning that occur every year in our immediate vicinity is rather appalling. A policeman, who is fixed at Benson, told me that he had to attend six or seven inquests on an average every year at that place alone, all cases of accidental or suicidal drowning.

## LETTER III

Death of Author's Donkey—Burial—Buffon's Description of the Ass—Henry Moore, R.A.—Anecdote of Tomtits Fighting—The Mild Winter.

*1st March, 1894.*

MY DEAR MARCO—I think I never told you of the great loss we sustained in the death of our dear old favourite Rosie, which took place last October. She was only ill, apparently, for a day or two, and I was not anxious about her, as she took her coffee and some breakfast I gave her the day before that on which she died, and seemed decidedly better then; but on Sunday morning we found her lying on her side in the stable in a state of collapse. I sent for the vet., who came, but could do nothing except to pro-

nounce that she was dying, in his opinion, as much from old age as anything else. I am inclined to think, however, that the extraordinary drought in the spring and summer (1893) had somehow injured her health, as she must have greatly missed the fresh grass, which was her chief diet. Her little paddock was completely baked up for three months, and she had to be fed on odds and ends from the kitchen garden. Her death was deeply lamented by all who knew her; she had many friends in the town besides ourselves, children and others frequently stopping to talk to her, and feed her through the railings of her paddock as they passed by. With the help of my boys I dug her grave, and superintended her funeral. I had, with aching heart, to break the sad news to Madame Maës, who sent me three white rose-bushes to plant over the grave. I shall have to get a new donkey before next summer to work the mowing machine, but it will be impossible to get one so sweet and com-

panionable as poor Rosie. To thoroughly enjoy and appreciate the full truth and beauty of the relation between Sancho and his Dapple, you should keep a donkey yourself and make a pet of it.

I was reminded of my loss by a letter I have just received from an anonymous correspondent, a reader of my letters, enclosing Buffon's description of the Ass. I suppose Buffon would not now be looked upon as much of an authority, but for graphic power and truth the enclosed would be very hard to beat. My obliging correspondent says of it: "If it is not already known to you, you will, I feel sure, enjoy it immensely; if you do know it, like all good things it will be none the less good for being tasted again."

### *L'Âne.*

"L'âne est un âne, et n'est point un cheval dégénéré, un cheval à queue nue: il n'est ni étranger, ni intrus, ni bâtard; il a comme

tous les autres animaux, sa famille, son espèce, et son rang ; son sang est pur, et quoique sa noblesse soit moins illustre, elle est tous aussi bonne, tous aussi ancienne que celle du cheval. Pourquoi donc tans de mépris pour cet animal, si bon, si patient, si sobre, si utile ? Les hommes mépresent-ils jusques dans les animaux, ceux qui les servent trop bien et à trop peu de frais ? On donne au cheval de l'éducation, on le soigne, on l'instruit, on l'exerce, tandis que l'âne, abandonné à la grossièreté du dernier des valets ou à la malice des enfans, bien loin d'acquérir, ne peut que perdre son éducation ; et s'il n'avoit pas un grand fonds de bonnes qualités, il les perdrait en effet par la manière dont on le traite : il est le jouet, le plastron, le bardeau des rustres, qui le conduisent le bâton à la main, qui le frappent, le surchargent, l'excèdent sans précaution, sans ménagement. On ne fais pas attention que l'âne serois par lui-même, et pour nous le premier, le plus beau, le mieux fais, le plus

distingué des animaux, si dans le monde il n'y avoit point de cheval : il est le second au lieu d'être le premier, et par cela seul il semble n'être plus rien. C'est la comparaison qui le dégrade. On le regarde, on le juge, non pas en lui-même, mais relativement au cheval : on oublie qu'il est âne, qu'il a toutes les qualités de sa nature, tous les dons attachés à son espèce ; et on ne pense qu'à la figure et aux qualités du cheval, qui lui manquent, et qu'il ne doit point avoir.

“ Il est de son naturel, aussi humble, aussi patient, aussi tranquille, que le cheval est fier, ardent, impetueux ; il souffre avec constance, et peut-être avec courage, les châtimens et les coups ; il est sobre, et sur la quantité et sur la qualité de la nourriture ; il est fort délicat sur l'eau : il ne veut boire que de la plus claire, et aux ruisseaux qui lui sont connus : il bois aussi sobrement qu'il mange, et n'enfonce point du tous son nez dans l'eau. Comme on ne prend pas la peine de l'étriller, il se roule souvent sur le gazon,

sur les chardons, sur la fougère, et semble par là reprocher à son maître le peu de soin qu'on prend de lui : car il ne se vautre pas comme le cheval, dans la fange et dans l'eau, il craint même de se mouiller les pieds, et se détourne pour éviter la boue : aussi a-t-il la jambe plus sèche et plus nette que le cheval. Il est susceptible d'éducation, et l'on en a vu d'assez bien dressés pour faire curiosité de spectacle."

I met Henry Moore on Tuesday at the R.A., who told me the following pretty little story in the bird line. He was sketching one day on the edge of an old quarry, on one side of him there was a steep sloping mass of débris and tangled bushes, on this slope he caught sight of what looked like a gray ball, moving in an eccentric way. He clambered down and caught the fluffy mass in his hands ; it proved to be two tom-tits in deadly conflict ; so eager were they in their animosity that they never attempted to separate, and were caught quite easily. Moore thought he would take them home to examine them at

his leisure, so he carefully folded them up in a red silk handkerchief and put them in a loose pocket of his great coat. When he got home, however, he was much surprised to find that they had both escaped, the handkerchief was still carefully folded but a large hole had been pecked through it. Considering that it was a silk handkerchief this work of the tits seems to me very remarkable and clever.

We have had a delightful winter this year, the majority of days being mild and bright, and the frosts of brief duration. The rains have not been of a persistent character, though there have been many violent gales of almost phenomenal force.

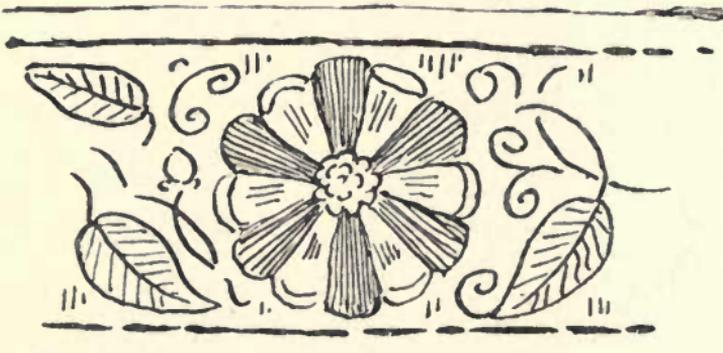
## LETTER IV

Mural Decoration in Old House at Crowmarsh—"Ben"—Chasing Larks—Number of Larks—Migration of Larks—A Rookery in a Gale—Birds as Weather Cocks—Weather Changes.

*12th March, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO—Hearing that some rather curious mural decoration had been found in two old cottages which were being repaired and altered at Crowmarsh, I went over there on Wednesday to see them. The building had been originally one house, not by any means large, built in the Tudor period, and probably always used as a farmhouse. Some time ago it had been divided into two cottages and disconnected altogether from the farm-buildings which belonged to it.

I made some rough memorandums of parts



Mural Decoration, from a Cottage at Crowmarsh.

of the decoration, which I enclose. The room in which this decoration was found is quite a small room, on the upper floor, next the roof; the decoration consists of a sort of bordering, running all round the walls next to the ceiling, its width is about one foot, and it is apparently on the broad beams, which form what are termed the plates, on which the rafters rest. These beams are a little over a foot in width and had been painted in tempera of a cream colour; on this the patterns are worked in brownish colour. The execution is very vigorous and evidently entirely free-handed; it is varied throughout, with no trace of stencil anywhere. The interest of this work is in the evidence it bears to the generally prevailing artistic taste in the 16th century, when we find such a small farm-house in the country thus decorated. I do not believe the whole work took very long to execute; it is so free and bold that I should say that it had been begun and finished in a day; probably most house-painters in those times could easily

have done work of a similar character. The artistic character and freedom of this decoration contrasted painfully with the cheap little



*Ben*

wall-papers with which the lower rooms of the cottages had just been adorned.

I know you are not such an ardent dog-lover as I am, I trust therefore you will pardon me for boring you about our little dog "Ben." He is a mere puppy still, sixteen

months old, but with great character and clever qualities. He takes me out for walks in the afternoon (as all good dogs should their masters), and his great delight, when we reach the open arable land which surrounds this town, is to start off at full speed, in the mad endeavour to catch a lark. He runs with his nose to earth, like a fox-hound, and as the birds spring up right in front of him, I have no doubt he hunts by scent. He takes no notice of other birds, such as rooks, starlings, or sparrows, which most puppies chase. I am inclined to think that larks are rather game birds, and leave a strong scent. He lays his nose to earth and starts off running when no birds are visible, but as he runs the larks keep rising before him, right in front of his nose. I have read somewhere, I think, that larks are more numerous in Great Britain than any other birds, and I am disposed to believe it. Of course there is an enormous quantity of sparrows, but the sparrow confines himself chiefly to the

immediate vicinity of man, whereas the lark's habitat is spread over the broad land in every direction. In the winter I have sometimes witnessed the partial migration of larks; a broad continuous stream of birds from N.E. to S.W. which flew overhead uninterruptedly for nearly twenty minutes. I was told these birds go to the marshy lands about the estuaries of our southern rivers.

Yesterday we were out with the dog about sunset, there was a cold west wind blowing, the sun going down in a clear sky, just after a slight shower with its accompanying rainbow. When we reached the open fields Ben started off at once hunting, though at the time not a bird was to be seen anywhere; but it was astonishing to see him put up larks in every direction as he "scoured awa' in lang excursion," at times quite out of sight. Many of these, when thus disturbed, began to rise and sing, but not in the upward circling manner which they do in the midday sunshine. As far as I could judge there seemed

a pair of larks on every twenty yards square where the dog ran.

During this walk, whilst the before-mentioned shower was going on, we sheltered by a wall with overhanging ivy on it, just opposite a rookery ; the wind was blowing fiercely



A Rookery in a Gale.

and the nests on the tops of the elms swayed about in a way which suggested seasickness, or that the eggs might roll out or get addled. Beside each nest its two proprietors were perched, all of them head to

wind, reminding me of a fleet of luggers at anchor. They seemed to hold on with great ease. The sight reminded me of a fact about birds, which Sir Edwin Landseer once pointed out to me, namely, that all birds, when perched on trees or bushes, serve as weather cocks, as they invariably arrange themselves head to wind. He told me that he found this fact most useful in deer-stalking, as he could always determine which way the wind was blowing on a distant hill, a most important knowledge in deer-stalking, by observing the birds with his field-glass. The reason of the bird's position is easily understood when we consider the set of its plumage and call to mind the ridiculous and uncomfortable objects our domestic poultry look when running, as sailors say, before the wind, their tails blown open over their backs and the birds almost blown off their legs.

March came in this year as a lion, but thank goodness a west wind lion, and the proverbial peck of dust is at present wanting

owing to the succession of showers which alternate with bright sunshine. It is not exactly April weather, as the rain generally lasts for five or six hours with equal intervals of sunshine. I am getting in a good stock of oxygen in preparation for the selection work at the R. A. next month : here, at any rate, I escape the importunities of the "Artists' Parasites" with which my town-dwelling brethren are so grievously afflicted at this season.

## LETTER V

A Cool Glass-house—Sun-heat—Stoking—Gardeners—Accumulation of Sun-heat under Glass—Fig-tree—Strawberries—Chrysanthemums—Natural *v.* Artificial Blooming—Yellow-hammers at Play—Gnats.

*16th March, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO—I get a large amount of pleasure from my little greenhouse, especially in the spring, when, though the sun shines often enough, the keen winds prevent me from enjoying the outdoor garden. I have no heating apparatus to this house; on the whole I think it suits me better without. I know what an enlarged scope artificial heat gives to one's horticultural and floricultural operations, in the way of grapes, orchids, ferns and hot-house things in general; but I

get as many grapes as I want given me by kind neighbours, am not an admirer of the eccentric character of most orchids, and prefer hardy plants that give no trouble to any exotics that require cosseting.

All these luxuries entail besides the dirty and disagreeable work of stoking, either on yourself or on a gardener; if you do it yourself, unless the glasshouse is the only sort of garden you possess, the time taken up by it will be too great; if you leave it to your gardener (that is, should you keep only one and a boy as I do) you will be sure to find that he will very soon spend the greater part of his time pottering about the house, neglecting the outdoor work, or leaving it to the boy as much as possible. Whenever you happen to visit the glasshouse it is almost a certainty that you will find him already there, or that he will come in directly afterwards. The place will be no sweet sanctum of your own, so that at last you will get into the custom of visiting the place only on Sundays,

when the gardener ceases from troubling. I believe that most gentlemen who keep a large staff of gardeners and have much glass seldom see the inside of their hothouses except on Sundays, and probably have very little knowledge of, or control over, what is grown in them. My little greenhouse is "a poor thing, but mine own," and in it I can carry on any sort of fooleries I like in floricultural, or other, experiments without dread of interference.

On a bright sunshiny bleak day in March the temperature inside the place is delightful, the mere sun heat being of a pleasanter character than when hot pipes are employed. These always seem to me to give a damp, stuffy atmosphere. By the way, it was only quite lately that I learnt how it is the sun heat accumulates under glass; I had a vague idea, as I dare say most ordinary gardeners have, that the glass somehow drew the heat, and that was all; I had in fact never considered the fact seriously. My

son, however, who had studied physics, gave me the proper explanation ; it is simple enough, just as the explanation of a good conjuring trick always is ; it is owing to the fact that glass allows *luminous heat* to pass through it readily, but is a bad conductor of *non-luminous heat* ; so the heat gets caught inside the house in a sort of trap, the light carrying the heat through the glass and there leaving it to shift for itself to get out again ; thus it becomes stored, being continually accumulated as long as the sun shines.

I do not attempt very much in my glass-house ; the back wall is devoted to my fig-tree, and in lieu of the usual stand for pots in the front I have a solid bed of rich soil three feet deep, in which I can plant anything I like. There is a large tank for rain water in one corner, and some shelves to carry pots close up to the glass.

My fig-tree is a great success, it now nearly fills the back wall, and I have to prune it every year, cutting out the old wood

and training the young in its place. Just now the buds are bursting at the ends of the shoots, the young leaves unfolding themselves in the cleanest and neatest way imaginable ; they are most fascinating things to watch day by day. The young figs are already of a lovely colour and considerable size. This tree gives me little trouble and quantities of fruit ; a little manure in the winter and plenty of water in the spring is all I have to give it. It yields abundance of fruit, the first crop beginning to ripen in June, and going on until the second crop comes on, so that I am able to gather a few figs nearly every day from the end of June to the middle of November. There is always enough for all of us, and as we are all very partial to the fruit, that means a good many figs. I get a few dishes of early strawberries from some plants in pots, they bloom about the end of March, and as few bees come in then, I fertilise the blossoms myself with a paint brush. I used to grow tomatoes in the front bed, but I gave

them up, as they required a good deal of looking after, and kept the sun from the fig-tree ; besides which I found that they did far better in the open air. I now have in this front bed one or two clumps of chrysanthemums, they are of good ordinary sorts, dark red, yellow, and white ; they have not been moved for four or five years, and nothing done to them except cutting them down in the winter, adding a little top dressing each year, and watering freely in the summer ; otherwise they are left entirely alone to grow at their own sweet will, and very well they do it, rising to the glass roof, bending over, down, and up again in beautiful and graceful curves, intertwining with one another in inextricable confusion, and at length blooming in numberless clusters, which, when gathered entire with long stalks are extremely decorative for the house.

I have no bother in striking, potting, re-potting, tying up, disbudding, placing out of doors, carrying them in again, fumigating, or

messing with liquid manure. No doubt the sight of my wild-looking plants would drive a professional "Mum"-grower frantic ; but I maintain that the large free *clusters* of bloom that I pick in November, are far more lovely in their grace and variety, than any of the huge solitary fatted up things which one sees at shows, and which are little better than gigantic rosettes, each on a thick stem by itself, tied stiff and stark all the way up to a stick. Four or five such at times occupy one pot, but in every case all the natural graceful tendency of the plant is severely repressed and thwarted by a whole year's laborious meddling with nature. It is the old old story, monstrosity usurping the place of beauty, the wonderful and the monstrous appealing to the great majority of minds so much more forcibly than the beautiful.

I make further use of my glasshouse by starting annuals in it in pots and boxes, also providing my wife with pans of mustard and

cross from time to time. Here, too, I study the ways of my toads and sundry other creatures, and here I hang up and keep my own particular trowels, shears, and other gardening implements which would otherwise get appropriated by the man or the boy.

When I receive any parcel of new plants it is here that I unpack them, here too I pack presents of flowers or plants for my friends. Altogether the place has become to me almost as enjoyable a structure as my studio itself, the feeling that I ought not to be wasting my time in it adding greatly to the intensity of my enjoyment.

On a drive to Ewelme last Wednesday I saw quite a flock of Yellow-hammers by the hedge on the roadside, their bright plumage looking very pretty as contrasted with the gray hedge. They kept up with the carriage for quite a long distance, flitting up and across and back over the hedge just in front of us.

These birds are peculiarly fond of this

sort of game. Why do they do it? When it is only a pair of birds that perform these antics one naturally supposes that it is done to divert the attention of the passer-by from the situation of their nest; but here was a flock of a dozen or more apparently engaged in mere play; they seem to enjoy letting you approach quite near and then popping away over the hedge to appear again a little farther on. I have often seen swarms of gnats keep up with me along a road, and the river-flies will sometimes travel long distances in company with a boat, but for what purpose I am quite at a loss to imagine.

## LETTER VI.

Selection of Pictures at the R.A.—*Iris Susiana*—Difficulties of its Culture—Author's Method—The Mourning Iris—Description of Flower—*Iris Tuberosa*—Tulips—*Tulipa Greigi*—Toads in Greenhouse—Toad Changing its Skin—Wood-lice—"Old Sows"—Wren—Cuckoo—Wryneck.

16th April, 1894.

DEAR MARCO—I returned from the selection of pictures at the R.A. on the 11th, having been sitting with the others for eight days judging some 15,000 works. Alas! alas! As bad luck would have it, I thus missed the first burst into bloom of an *Iris Susiana*, to which I had been looking forward with great eagerness. This iris is very difficult to manage in our fickle climate. It is six years since it bloomed with me, then it did so in the open garden, but I have never

succeeded in repeating this triumph in the open air, and this is the first success after many failures, even under glass. This iris in its native land is generally covered with snow during the short sharp winter, and makes its extremely rapid growth during the short spring which follows; after blooming it endures the long baking drought of summer, which ripens the tuberous roots thoroughly. Of course, in our country such an arrangement in the open ground can hardly be expected, and though when planted in the open the tubers thrive and grow amazingly, they make in our damp autumns far too early a start, throwing up a number of strong green blades which are almost always doomed to destruction by the last frosts of winter, without showing the least sign of bloom. The books say that they require some protection, such as a handlight, in the winter; but I have tried this over and over again without the slightest success.

In my little greenhouse, however, I think I

have mastered the difficulties of its culture at last. My method is to defer planting until very late in the autumn; I put the tubers into rather a small pot of nearly pure river sand, this pot I place inside another larger one, and plug the space between the pots with dry moss. I place the pots on a shelf in the sunniest part of the greenhouse, and give no water at all until some time after Christmas. Strange to say the green shoots often begin to show before the plants have received a drop of water. I give the water very liberally at first, but in great moderation as the plant shoots into growth. I let it have all the sun that shines, and if the frosts are *very* severe at any time I take the pots into my studio whilst the extreme cold lasts. This year my treatment has been quite successful, and the plant burst into bloom on the 4th of April, whilst I was still from home. My wife told me that when she entered the greenhouse in the morning the sight of the two blooms quite made her start, and well it might,

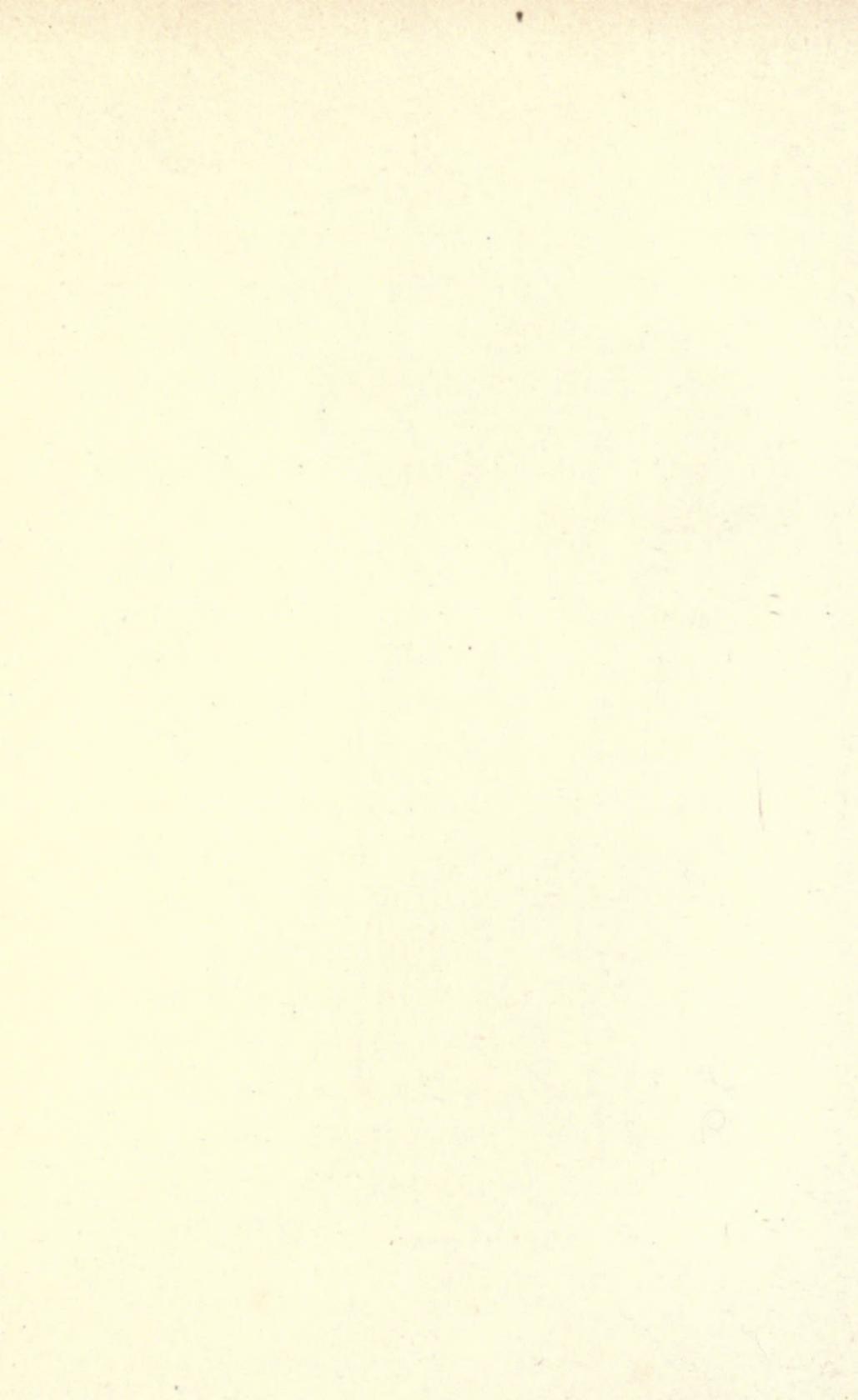
for I can safely say I know no flower that approaches this in individuality, sombre majesty of colour, or dignity of form.

It is called commonly "the mourning iris," on account of its sombre grayish colour, a gray to which it is quite impossible to give a name; the standards, as the upper leaves of an iris are called, are large, round, and beautifully laced with this dark gray; Gerard says, "like unto a guinea fowl's plumage," but this is scarcely an accurate description. These standards form a sort of arching canopy over what I should call the working parts of the flower, possibly protecting them from extreme heat. The falls, or lower leaves, are darker, the markings being closer, with an almost black velvety spot in the centre, which is surmounted by dark fur. The wing-like covers to the entrance to the ovaries are also of the darkest shade. The blooms are very large and much more globose in shape than the common German iris. I hope you will forgive me for boring you thus about this



IRIS SUSIANA.

[To face page 44.]



flower, and kindly make allowance for the enthusiasm of a gardener, who has been struggling for six years with Nature, when at length his efforts are crowned with success.

All the irises are lovely, but this one far surpasses all others that I know, in the mysterious glamour that it inspires when seen by any one for the first time. The little *Iris tuberosa*, or snake's-head iris, approaches *I. Susiana*, in my opinion, perhaps nearer than any other in fascinating interest. This iris has been beautifully described by E. V. B. in her delightful book *Days and Hours in a Garden*; it is, like the mourning iris, sombre in tint, a mixture of olive, brown, velvety black, gold and green, that is exceedingly harmonious, the foliage is long and narrow, the small blooms are at first wrapt up so tightly that they hardly show, and the flower itself is so small that to see its quaint beauty one has either to stoop down or pick the bloom.

This iris is hardy enough; if the spring is fairly mild, and the curious little bulbs are

planted in a sheltered place near a wall, it never fails to bloom. But you will have to go and look for it, as its humble size and sombre colour render it invisible to all but those who have eyes to see, and know how to use them.

It promises to be a good season for my tulips, they are mostly of the late blooming varieties, Parrots, Gesner, and the old-fashioned long-stalked sorts that flourish usually in cottage gardens; the only early tulip I have is the Turkestan tulip or *Tulipa Greigi*, which came into bloom here on the third of this month; this magnificent flower might well be termed king of all tulips. I know of none that approach it in size and brilliancy; when it is fully out its colour is of the most dazzling orange vermilion, but it is even more beautiful in colour before it is fully expanded. I measured two huge buds, and found they were each a trifle over five inches in length, which is enormous for a tulip of any sort.

This tulip is very hardy indeed; its foliage

is curiously variegated with chocolate-coloured spots ; it is one of the first bulbs to shoot out above the ground, and snow, frost, and rain harm it not. It is just the tulip for my garden, where things get left alone, and rest in peace from year to year, as it does better for being undisturbed ; these bulbs of mine have been seven years in their present place, and are this year finer than ever I remember them.

On Sunday the 8th I found my two toads swimming in the tank in the greenhouse, it was the first time this year that I had seen them, I cannot say how long they might have been in the water, but it was impossible for them to get out again, the water being low in the tank, and the tank having an overhanging flange on its top edge, so I placed a board sloping down into the water, which they availed themselves of, for the next morning they were both beneath the root branches of the fig-tree. I did not look for them again until the 14th, when I could only find one.

This one appeared profusely covered with moist exudation, and on examining it closer, I discovered that it was in the act of changing its skin; the animal raised itself on its legs at intervals and strained itself in some way so as to render its body very thin and gaunt; in these efforts its eyes, which generally protrude considerably, closed and sank down to the level of the rest of its head.

The old skin seemed very flexible and glutinous, but a small portion only remained when I saw it, just about the head and shoulders; it was dragging this forward with its forepaws and cramming it into its mouth. I watched until the whole was swallowed. After the operation the markings on the new coat were very strong and bright, and the beast seemed exhausted, utterly refusing to take the least notice of the wood-lice that I placed for it. The next day its coat was dry, and, with the exception that the markings were still rather conspicuous, it had regained its usual appearance. The

mention of wood-lice reminds me that I received a letter some time ago from your brother John in which he tells me, apropos of a note in one of my former letters, as to woodlice being called "God Almighty's pigs," that his wife told him that her brother, Fred Walker, and her sisters when children, always called these animals "old sows," and that they had the name from an old gardener.

I have not much in the way of bird news for you. On the 13th at lunch-time we had the treat of seeing a little cock-tail wren perch on a honeysuckle close to the dining-room window, flit his wings, cock his tail, and sing several times with unmistakable signs of joy and exultation. I mention this as a treat, as indeed it was, but it is also an event to note, because it is so very seldom that these dainty little birds ever allow you to catch more than a momentary glimpse of them as they flit and creep amongst the hedges and along the old walls; the

song is something like that of a robin but much shriller and more hurried.

The cuckoo has already (April 16th) been heard here, but not by me. I have heard, however, the wryneck, which is called "the cuckoo's mate." Hook told me that the country people regard the first note of this bird as a warning that the proper time for peeling the oak-bark has arrived, they think that the bird says "Peel, peel, peel, peel, peel."

## LETTER VII

“Jew’s Mallow”—*Kerria Japonica*—Corchorus—Next-door Neighbours—A Funeral in the Forties—Old Friends and “Real” Flowers—Pine-apple Place—Reminiscences of Childhood.

30th April, 1894.

DEAR MARCO—People may be held fortunate who strike up friendships with plants and flowers early in life, for unlike other friends, these never grow old or desert us, but return each year with their sweet faces unaltered. One of my earliest acquaintances amongst flowers is “the Jew’s Mallow,” or *Kerria Japonica*, and yet I had lived for more than fifty years in familiarity with it before learning to name it correctly. It is, I suppose, an introduction from Japan, but it must have been introduced into England a

long time ago, for it is a very old and established favourite in cottage gardens almost



*Kerria Japonica.*

everywhere ; I cannot, however, find any allusion to it in Gerard ; its name "Jew's Mallow " is ambiguous and misleading, for it

is in no sense a mallow. It acquired this name by a mistake, for formerly botanists had named it *Corchorus Japonica* from its similarity in appearance to *Corchorus olitorius*, a Syrian plant, used by the Jews as a pot-herb, and hence the name "Jew's Mallow." *Corchorus capsularis*, another species, very similar in appearance, is the plant from the fibre of which jute is made. Our plant, however, is of a different natural order, that of the roses, belonging to the genus *Kerria*. It is generally seen as a climbing wall shrub beside a cottage door or summer-house. I only know it in its common or double yellow form, though there is a pretty single one, and I believe a white variety. Its flowers look very like small tufts of orange wool, the leaves are pointed, much serrated, and of a warm green colour, their surface is rendered dull by deep corrugations. Though I was never properly introduced to this *Kerria* until a year ago, I have known and loved it ever

since I was six years old. The front garden of the house in Pine Apple Place, Edgware Road, where I was born, was separated from the next-door garden by a light iron railing; this plant was in our neighbour's garden against this railing, so that we had the benefit of its beauty on our side as well; yet though we continually broke the tenth commandment as to the flowers, I do not remember that we ever broke the eighth; this was not so much owing to our moral principles as to the awe with which we regarded our neighbours. They were unknown to us except by name, all of them "grown up," solemn and sedate, not to say grim, in character; the plants grew in direct view of their parlour window, and it would have been a risky thing to have put our little arms through the railings after the flowers. The first death, I ever recollect, was that of the head of this family next door. The funeral was an awful thing as viewed by us through the slats of the

venetian blinds. The undertaker's men took large plumes of feathers out of black bags and stuck them in the horses' heads and on the hearse. Two "mutes" stood on guard at the door with what looked like brooms wrapped up in crape. Horrible and gruesome was the garniture of a funeral in those days, as no doubt you will remember.

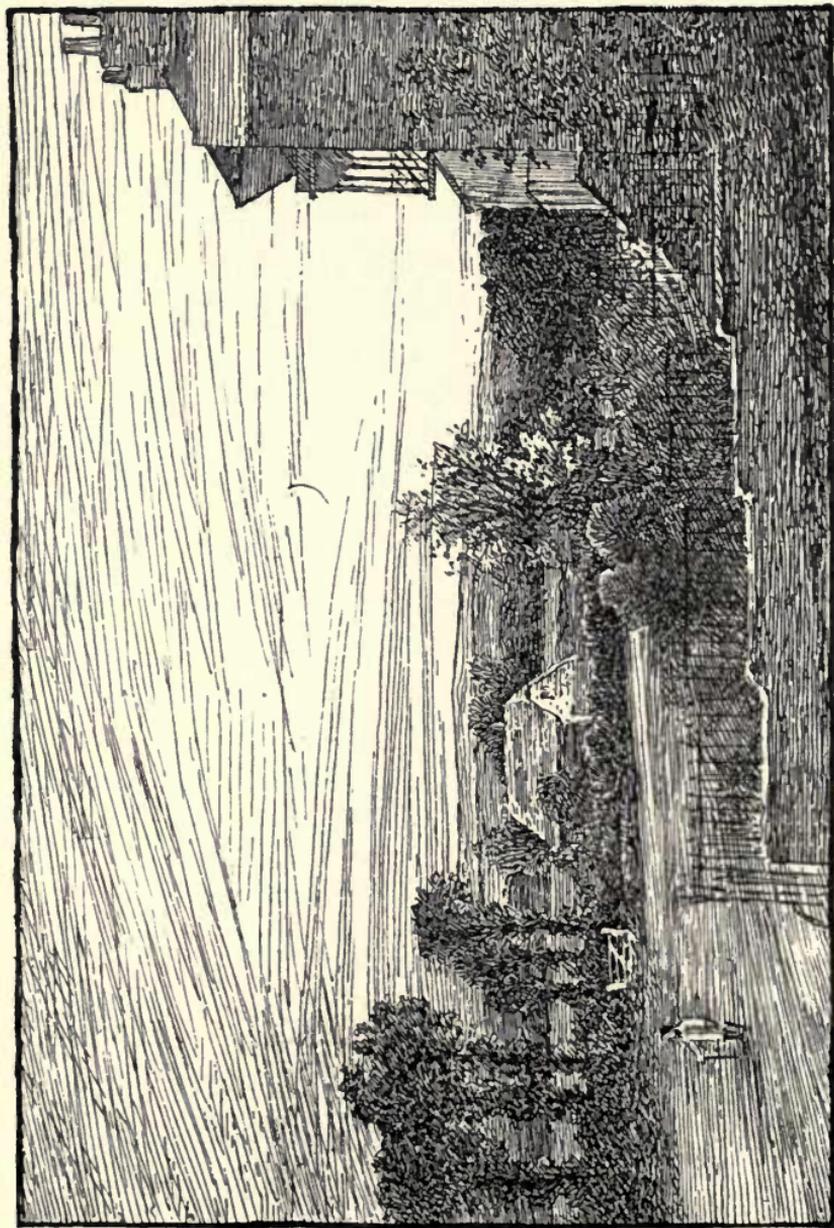
I overheard my nurse saying that the poor gentleman had died from a sore throat ("bronchitis" was not invented then), from which I gathered that a sore throat was a mortal complaint and certain death; and not long afterwards, when my own throat may have been a little relaxed, I recollect I lay awake nearly a whole night, in fearful misery, expecting death at any moment.

The sight of this little yellow flower still always recalls to me our old front garden and our mysterious neighbours; and it is rather a curious fact that during all the years that have intervened, I have never got any nearer to

the plant than my neighbour's garden, for it never grew in either my father's, my mother's or my own gardens, whilst in all the gardens next to all these it has invariably flourished.

There is at present a fine plant on the summer-house in my neighbour's garden, and D.V. I will really have one in my own before next year. Another equally old friend is the Japan Quince, sometimes called *Camelia Japonica*. This has grown, I am happy to say, in all my gardens, and lives and thrives with me still. My human living friends, of fifty years standing, I can now, alas! count easily on the fingers of one hand; how changed in appearance are even these! whereas the "old familiar faces" of the flowers once loved remain the same year after year, young and beautiful. These old friends are to me the *real flowers* with which I am content to live and die; I never feel much longing for the brilliant novelties, which are yearly announced and figured, in gaudy colours, in the nurserymen's catalogues. I





[To face page 57.]

THE EDGWARE ROAD, SEEN FROM NO. 12 PINE-APPLE PLACE, IN 1835.  
*From a picture by C. R. LESLIE, R.A.*

wonder whether the son of an enthusiastic orchid-grower would feel in his old age as much love and delight on meeting with orchids that he had known in his father's glasshouses as a child, as I do with my well-remembered garden friends. I suppose he might possibly ; but though I went into plenty of conservatories and hothouses as a child, I never entertain the same feeling for exotics as I do for this Kerria, Japan Quince, and all the other dear old hardy friends of my youth.

When we lived in Pine-Apple Place, there were hayfields in front of our house ; so pretty was the view from our parlour window that Constable presented my father with a round mirror, to hang opposite to the window so as to reflect the green fields and hedge-row elms. Hamilton Terrace was all grass then, and Abercorn Place a mere country lane, from the sides of which the wild Convolvuluses, that my father introduced into his picture of *Perdita* were gathered. Cherries

and peaches ripened well in our garden, to say nothing of apples and pears.

My eldest sister was a first-rate gardener. She kept bees too, and knew her flowers thoroughly and well ; of these we always had plenty. We younger ones had also little gardens of our own, and thus it was that I imbibed an early and true love for flowers, by which I mean not only delight in them as beautiful objects, but also the pleasure to be found, and found only, in tending to their culture personally, and watching the phases of their growth and nature from year to year. All the flowers that grew in that old garden I have now in my new one along with many others, but none are so dear to me as the old favourites.

This is, I am afraid, a sentimental letter, but I trust you will pardon it, for it is a wet day and I am all alone, which may in some way account for it.

## LETTER VIII

The Farmers' Troubles—Fickle Climate—Mild Weather—Hard Frosts in May—Damage done by Frost—Wood-pigeons—Food for Young Birds—Stallions and Mushrooms.

*22nd May, 1894.*

MY DEAR MARCO—It has often been remarked that farmers are a grumbling lot and never satisfied under any circumstances, but I think, from my experience of them since living in the country, that they certainly do not deserve this character. I have, on the contrary, been much struck by the manly patience with which they have lately struggled on through these years of agricultural depression; and really, when one lives in the country, as I do, with a small garden to look after, you soon find cause to sympathise with the

farmers in their complaints as to the fickle character of our climate.

I am not fond of grumbling at the weather, as no doubt it is better ordered than if we had the management of it, but one cannot get over with equanimity the disasters that occur every now and then through the sudden changes of climate to which our islands are peculiarly liable. Last Thursday everything in my garden was in the most promising condition; we had had plenty of nice rain, the temperature had gone up; the irises and pæonies were in full bloom, roses were in bud, indeed my Maréchal Niel was in more than bud; the columbines were well out and a host of other perennials making a fine show. The lilacs were nearly over, but the hawthorns and laburnums shone out in glory against the blue sky; birds sang in every tree, the young starlings in their nest in the sycamore tree were screeching and squealing all day long, and I walked in the evening to Shillingford to hear the nightingales. But alas! on Fri-

day the wind began to whip round to the N.E., the sky, it is true, remained clear, but little by little the wind grew stronger and colder, whilst clouds began to appear and rob us of much sun heat, and on Sunday night there was a hard frost which was repeated on Monday night, and the catastrophe was complete.

Now all my irises are shrivelled up, and the oriental poppies have blackened petals and drooping buds. Some lovely tender sprays of *Heuchera sanguinea* which had just begun to bloom, and which were the very pride of my heart, are all bent double and burnt up past all hope. Two beautiful sprigs of blossom on a buck-bean in my bog garden are reduced to a loathsome brown mass. These, for a few samples of the havoc wrought amongst my flowers, will suffice; in the kitchen garden, all my potato halms have turned from a healthy green colour to that of withered seaweed; the young kidney beans are in much the same plight, their broad

leaves hanging over and lobbing about like a row of drunken men. Young marrow plants are reduced to absolute nothingness, and so on, and so on, everywhere you look.

The cruel wind seems to fall away to a calm towards evening and the nights are clear and bright ; towards morning there is a thick white mist and at six o'clock the grass and roofs are white with frost. The sky is cloudless at first, but about eight o'clock the old persistent devil-wind begins again bringing with it paltry gray clouds and the day is passed in alternate intervals of scorching sun and cold rain or sleet. You in town would only notice the cold, but here, we are painfully alive to the widespread misery and loss such weather brings.

No doubt but that the birds must suffer too; Peter brought me yesterday two dead swallows, which he picked up by the boat-house, no doubt killed by the cold. I can only hope that they were a husband and wife, so that only one family may have suffered.

There is a County Agricultural Show about to be held in the meadow opposite our house, on the other side of the river ; the whole field has been enclosed with hoarding and filled with tents and sheds, &c., which to-day look gay with flags. It is to be opened to-morrow. There are some small elm trees enclosed within this hoarding, in which usually sundry woodpigeons build ; the birds I expect have been scared away by the preparations for the show, which have been going on ever since the beginning of April, and have come over to my garden, where they, I believe, have built some nests. I do not know exactly where their nests are situated, but one or two of these large birds are always about the walnut tree and in the shrubbery near my studio. They remind me of the members of the Senior United Service Club when they are driven over by the annual cleaning to take refuge in the peaceful halls of the Athenæum. I recognise these birds as fierce and distinguished strangers immediately,

when they start out of my shrubbery with tremendous slapping of their powerful wings. They are wonderfully heavy birds and seem to fly with considerable exertion. It is quite possible that their nests may be low down and easy to find, for I saw last year, in a friend's garden, a woodpigeon sitting close on her nest in a thorn bush, not more than eight feet from the ground ; the bush itself grew at one corner of a tennis-court on which games were played continually, and the bird would allow people to look at her without stirring.

I received an interesting letter from a very old friend who resides at Lewes, in which were notes on one or two subjects mentioned in my former letters ; he gives a receipt for making proper food for young birds, such as I described in Letter XIX. It is, "ground oatmeal rubbed through a fine sieve, so as to get rid of every particle of husk, which would otherwise choke them ; mix with this a small portion of almost any kind of sweet biscuit, and add a fresh snail chopped very

fine. Make this about the consistency of pap, feed every two or three hours, of all things early in the morning. With almost all descriptions of small birds (other than thrushes) the oatmeal and biscuit alone ; food fresh every day." He says, "With regard to robins, I have observed that they frequently, after nesting, leave the old quarters and are not seen for three or four months, but are sure to return as winter approaches, that is to say, the one—seldom two old birds—never more." He also adds as to what I said of mushrooms (Letter XIII.) : "I assure you the farmer's account to you of the production of mushrooms was no matter of superstition, but, I have no doubt, a matter of fact. But an even surer way of getting mushroom-spawn, would be to have an entire horse in your stable for a week or a fortnight, and put down in his bed some old rotten sacking, and leave it to be saturated ; the more rotten the better, then make up your mushroom bed, and I venture to say that you

will get a fine crop of mushrooms." I should not care to have such a horse in my stable for a fortnight, but I may try the experiment some day, as a friend of mine near here has one or two fine stallions; if I succeed I will let you know.

## LETTER IX

The Chilterns—Swincombe Down—"Cuckoo Pens"—Helleborine  
—The County Agricultural Show—Kerry Cows—Wet Season  
—Hired Gardeners—Watering and Weeding—Pruning Roses.

*7th June, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO — Yesterday I drove to Swincombe to look at a collection of old family pictures belonging to some friends of mine. The day was rather like one in March than June, but I enjoyed the drive notwithstanding, as the country out in that direction is very beautiful. The Chilterns are the high range of chalk downs that are situated in the south-eastern corner of the county of Oxford; they differ from most of the other chalk downs in the south of England, in that they are plentifully wooded and

studded all over with villages, farmsteads, and gentlemen's houses and parks. The western and north-western flanks of these hills are by far the most beautiful in variety of scenery. On this side, along the entire range, huge downs jut out like promontories into the plains below. The extremities of these spurs are generally two or three miles apart, but at their bases the little valleys between them contract into most picturesque secluded combes. In these, if any one wished to live in seclusion "far from the madding crowd," could be found most charming retreats of natural loveliness. In one of these combes, "Swincombe," the old house is situated, where were the pictures I went to see. The tops of these jutting spurs are more or less devoid of wood, though most of them are dotted about with juniper bushes, and some have on their summits isolated clumps of trees which are in this part of the country called "Cuckoo Pens." I suppose pen means a hill or peak, but how cuckoo

comes in I know not ; they speak of " Swincombe Cuckoo Pen," " Brightwell Cuckoo Pen," and so on. Swincombe Down itself is, I think, one of the grandest of any of these promontories, the view from the top being very extensive. High Clere Beacon can be easily seen from there, over the tops of the Compton Downs.

In the woods on the side of this chalk down numbers of beautiful wild flowers are to be found, of those kinds of course which love a calcareous soil, many of the rarer kinds being met with. Here I picked one or two blooms, though I am sorry to say not quite full out, of helleborine (*Epipactis Grandiflora*) just about the time that the race for the Derby was being run and won on another celebrated chalk down in Surrey. I thought the helleborine would have opened in water and a warm room, but it did not, and I drew it as it was ; it belongs to the orchis tribe, and is very graceful.

The agricultural show on the meadow

opposite our house is over, and the hoarding which surrounded it, and which spoilt the view



Helleborine.

from our windows ever since the beginning of April, is at length down, and made up into

parcels of wood which are to be sold by auction on the spot.

The show was of the usual character of that sort of thing ; what pleased me most were the little black Kerry cows, which were not much larger than . Du Maurier's St. Bernard dog, they should have had red halters instead of white, to have set them off properly. The riding and jumping competitions were very exciting, one cannot help feeling proud of a country that produces the plucky young centaurs who take these jumps, over a stiff hedge with a broad piece of water beyond it, and who remount again and again after failures until they succeed. There was a lady amongst them who jumped everything in the boldest way. There were a great number of shire stallions exhibited, to say nothing of bulls and rams, and as these animals were on the field for a considerable time, I shall be curious to see if any mushrooms appear this autumn.

The weather this year seems to be making

up for the dry season last year with a vengeance. I should not mind it so much were it not accompanied by such persistently strong winds, mostly from the north. The hedges and trees everywhere show the effects of the two nights of cruel frost on the 20th and 21st of last month. Our walnut tree was a special sufferer, and indeed everything came badly off in my garden, except, perhaps, the monthly roses on the trellis, on either side of the path to the boathouse. These seem to have escaped bravely, the cold in some way adding to their colour and prolonging the duration of the bloom. The rain is, however, very troublesome, loading the boughs of bloom so heavily, that they hang about in a most untidy way; I relieve them every day, as well as I can, by gently shaking off much of the wet, but still they scarcely recover their proper places. I am afraid to allude to this trouble to my gardener, or he would at once go down the rows and ruthlessly bind the straggling shoots back to the trellis with tarred string, in

hideous bundles. There are two things which I believe no hired gardener ever can or will do properly, namely, tying up and weeding. When he does the latter he "worrits" about in the most disastrous manner with fork, hoe, and rake, hoofing all your bulbs and seedlings, bent only on producing great expanses of tidy but bare mould. Nothing can persuade him to use his fingers or to stoop. And, as to tying up, his only idea is to plant a stake right down into the very heart of the plant's roots, and bind the wandering sprays up into a bundle like an old Gampy umbrella. I have only one man and a boy, but even that is bad enough, and I envy not those wealthy people who keep scores of gardeners, for they can scarcely call their gardens their own. In such gardens these minions seem ever present, bobbing up from behind the different bushes like "Clan Alpine warriors true" on every side where you least expect them; every walk and border is haunted by its real master, every greenhouse has its man in possession.

Sundays and the late hours of evening are the only times on which the real owner can enjoy his possessions in peace.

I have to do this tying up and weeding mostly myself, and my hands are hardly ever without scores and scratches from the thorns. Still it is better so, and after all it is astonishing how little needs really to be done. Roses of all things resent interference, and it is wonderful how well they do when left alone. Of course if large show specimens are wanted pruning is essential, but these are gained by the loss of all glory of growth. I have a hardy climbing rose that has grown up into a tall fir tree, covering it with its bloom, which has a charming effect as seen from the upper windows of the house. An unpruned rose-bush may look, to some, untidy, but the number of blooms more than compensates for everything.

## LETTER X

Names of Roses—Old-Fashioned Names—Snobbishness of Modern Nomenclature—“Florists’ Flowers”—Open Roses—China Roses—Plants *about* Roses—Thick Planting in a Border—Example of—Lavender.

15th June, 1894.

DEAR MARCO—I was gathering some roses the other day, to send to a friend in town, my little girl Lydia was helping me, I regretted to her how few white ones there were in the garden, but I remembered that I had just received a present of two nice roots of a rose called “La Reine Blanche,” whereupon Lydia wanted to know why they so often give roses French names. It is not a very easy question to answer. All the roses with French names were not originated in France,

numbers of them have been bred in England. I rather think it is because we English have not sufficient poetry or imagination to give pretty names to our nice things ; so we write our dinner *menu* in French, and any new fashionable colour is generally introduced under a French name. In old times we were a little more proud of our nationality and displayed a certain amount of good taste in these matters, some of our old-fashioned roses still retaining their very pretty names. "the maiden's blush," "eglantine," "five sisters," "the velvet" and "moss rose." But it is rather sad that nowadays when English names are provided not only for new roses, but for many other flowers, generally denominated "florists'," that our national snobbishness should so much prevail. Thus we have Dukes of Albany, Edinburgh, Connaught, Teck, and Wellington, Baronesses and Countesses of this and that, and Mr. Gladstones, &c., without end, with hosts of names of people of lesser or no fame at all. One rose is called "Lord Bacon,"

which is wrong and foolish, because there never was such a person, the supposed author of Shakespeare being "Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam." Now and then we come on a name of the good old sort; as, for example, "Pride of Waltham," "Queen of Queens," or "Fair Rosamund."

When these snobbish names are given to what are called "Florists' Flowers" I do not regret it so much as in the case of the roses, as I am not a great admirer of most of the florist's pets. Begonias, gloxinias, show chrysanthemums, and some others give me no delight; the natural flower amongst such plants has generally been tortured out of existence by persistent and tasteless interference. Even our roses have been, I think, a little spoilt by cultivators. The dog-rose, sweet briar, or the damask being still far ahead, in pure loveliness, of the whole herd of modern bred roses. One forgives a cabbage or a moss rose for not showing its golden stamens on account of its delicious perfume,

but many of the huge hybrids at our shows cannot plead this excuse. I hope the time is not far distant when prizes will be given for the best exhibits of open roses of all sorts; and that by the judicious crossing of such old favourites as the damask, the Macartney, the Persian, and the Austrian briar, &c., we may arrive at some pretty varieties to which, let us hope, good old English names may be given.

No roses in a garden pay better, for the little trouble that they give, than the common China rose. A very dear friend of mine, for whose taste in flowers and gardens I have the greatest veneration, advised me, when I first took up this place, above all things to have plenty of these delightful roses. I have ever since felt grateful to her for having given me that advice, and thankful that I followed it.

On either side of the brick-paved path that leads from the drawing-room door to the boat-house, I planted rows of China roses, sup-

ported by low trellis-work. None of the arrangements that I have effected in my garden have been more successful, or met with greater admiration, than these rows of China roses. They have been planted for about twelve years, and though I have never done anything to them except occasionally cutting out dead wood, and tying up here and there, they are finer this year than I ever remember to have seen them. They are hardly ever touched by blight of any sort, they yield many more clusters of bloom than any rose I know; they go on blooming, as long as the weather is at all mild, even up to Christmas-time; nothing is prettier than a bunch of their half-open buds, with their foliage, picked late in the autumn; cold weather seems to add a deeper hue to their colour; this year the cold wet weather and the frosts did them rather good than harm, as their colour never was finer, and the first blossoming time has been prolonged.

The weight of the raindrops on their boughs

gave me some work, as I mentioned in my last letter, but it did not injure the flowers otherwise; whereas numbers of the fatter blooms of my other roses, Maréchal Neil, Gloires, and General Jacquimenots were rotted in the bud by wet. I give only a slight top dressing now and then to the narrow borders in which these roses are planted, which has to serve for them and sundry other plants, chiefly aquilegias or columbines, which grow, mostly self-sown, from year to year, closely over the rose roots. I have read in some rose-grower's book that roses resent having plants above their roots, but I believe from repeated trials and observation that they resent much more having only bare earth; anyhow my roses and columbines get along in perfect accord. These columbines are chiefly crosses between *A. cerulea* and *A. chrysantha*, infinitely varied in their colour and form. Great numbers of bulbs lurk beneath the columbines such as crocuses, scillas, tulips, and daffodils, which put in a cheerful appear-

ance in the spring ; none of these are ever touched, but still the whole bed goes on from year to year, and as far as I can see without deterioration anywhere.

In an adjoining garden, kept by a retired engine driver, is a border still more crowded than mine, roses, lilies, columbines, pansies, Canterbury bells, and many other perennials, are in the bed, and against the wall an apricot tree, a peach, and a Maréchal Neil rose. This bed is never dug or touched with hoe or fork, and is densely packed, but still the roses bloom in perfection as do the white lilies and all the other plants, whilst the crops of peaches and apricots are simply splendid.

It is but fair to state, however, that the wall at the back of the bed is that of a malt house, which has a furnace at work in it during the winter ; that the aspect is due south, and that the soapsuds, from the Mondays' wash tubs, generally go on to it when the weather is dry.

On one side of my trellis of roses, where

the lawn slopes away, I have a thick hedge of lavender, it grows bulging out, and covers a sloping bit of grass which used to be rather difficult to mow.

This arrangement of mine meets with more approbation from visitors than anything else in my garden, whilst the roses, the trellis and the lavender afford me constant satisfaction from the sense of permanence they give the place.

## LETTER XI

Summer Effect in a Garden—Autumn Flowers—Luxuriant Growth  
—The Principles of Seeing Objects Rightly—Points of View—  
Transmitted Light—A New Acquaintance—The Redstart—  
Ant-heaps.

*2nd July, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO—My garden is, I think, to-day in the very zenith of its beauty ; but as much of its extra glory is due to the poppies, which are very fine this year, I am afraid that it will not last very much longer in its perfection. I never try to keep up appearances after July, chiefly because, as the boys' holidays then commence, it is quite impossible to prevent the devastation occasioned by the hunting for tennis balls, romping, and games of all sorts, that take

place. So my garden gets a holiday in the autumn, as well as the boys. It looks a little untidy, I admit, but it is a better thing for the perennials to let them die and shed their seed naturally, than to tidy them up, and cut them down, in order to make room for autumn flowers. I am no very great admirer of the usual autumn flowers, such as zinnias, dahlias, China asters, &c., they are very bright and gay, it is true, but lack *delicacy* of beauty. My untidy beds, however, are not entirely devoid of bloom, as there are plenty of Japanese anemones, tall phloxes, asters, colchicums, &c., with monthly roses, and sundry hardy things which keep on blooming away until the frosts come. In October and November I go all over my borders, cutting down, dividing, altering, &c.; giving here and there a top dressing of leaf-mould and manure. Bonfires at that time of the year hardly ever go out, the scent of which has ever been delightful to me.

My garden has been wildly luxuriant this year, a perfect jungle, but a jungle of flowers, owing to the frequent showers and moderate sunshine. Tying up was out of the question as there was no place anywhere to step amidst the thick growth; so the plants rambled as they liked and supported one another, indeed they had no room to fall down; the result being an intermingling of blooms, as varied as it was beautiful. Columbines and campanulas grew up into the rose bushes; nasturtiums, cornflowers, poppies, and snapdragons, all of them self-sown plants, filled up every vacant place. Whilst character and individuality was kept up in different places by plants of large habit, such as sea hollies, globe thistles, tall mulleins, and white foxgloves, alstrœmerias, acanthuses, bocconias, centaurea macrocephala and others; the last-mentioned is a very picturesque subject, having very large thistle-like flowers, which look rather like bunches of yellow silk growing out of fir

cones. Weeds have this year had little chance, as they found no bare places left for them to grow in, and what few sow thistles or nipple worts there were I easily got rid of by that most useful of all garden tools, a long-handled spud of this shape.



There were, however, some dismal failures this year, notably amongst the lilies, which suffered severely by the cruel frosts on the 21st and 22nd of May. The strawberries too were utterly ruined, we have none, neither will there be any walnuts or mulberries on my trees.

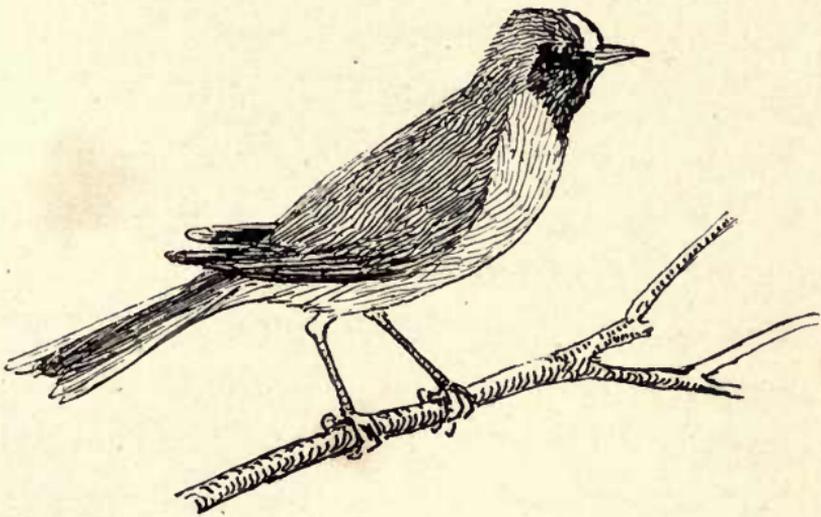
You know well how few people there are who, when they come into your studio, know the proper place in which to stand from which to view your pictures. I recollect, in old times, on "Show Sundays" you and I used to place obstacles in the way to prevent

people from standing in the wrong places, and how even then they would repeatedly move these obstacles. It is really astonishing how ignorant the generality of people are about the simple principles of seeing things rightly. I have to take just the same care when I am showing friends the flowers in my garden, as I do when they come to see my pictures in my studio, I generally conduct them cunningly to the best points of view before directing their attention to a flower border. In a garden it makes all the difference whether the spectator has the light behind or in front of him. When the light comes through the border towards you every petal and leaf is enriched by transparency and the colour intensified, whilst if the light is behind you and shines dead on the objects in your front the effect is cold and opaque. You might as well look at a stained glass window from the outside in order to judge of the beauty of its colour, as at a bed of flowers with the

light coming from behind you. When walking through fields with the sun on one side of you the grass on the side that the sun is on looks far richer in colour than it does on the other side ; in fact the whole landscape is richer and stronger in effect when the light comes *through* it to the spectator, though the other aspect has great beauties of its own as well. The early morning is by far the best time of the day in which to see a garden in perfection, the rays of the sun are then low and horizontal, and, therefore, as they come across the flowers towards you, the transparency of leaf and petal is doubly intensified, added to which the flowers themselves are fresh and lovely after their night's rest and adorned with glittering dewdrops.

A few days ago I made the acquaintance of a little bird that was new to me, namely, the redstart. The afternoon had been very wet and warm, at about six o'clock the rain cleared off and the sun came out, everything

looked glittering and beautiful, when my attention was called to an extra amount of twit-twit-tit-tit-titting in the shrubbery. There were several tomtits about, but I also caught sight of two little birds amongst them, about



The Red Start.

the size of a flycatcher, very active, with gray backs, russet wings, black bibs under their bills, white crests on their foreheads, orange tawny breasts, and more or less orange tails. One might have imagined them to have been crosses between a robin and a tomtit. They

flew about from tree to tree, flirting their tails as if to show off the orange feathers in them. One flew very close to me on to the pole of the tennis-net, and from thence on to the lawn to a place where I had smashed an ant heap. I watched them for some time with my glass from the boathouse window, and saw them feeding on a low wall that keeps up one of my borders, which has many ants' nests about it. I made a little sketch on the spot, whilst my recollection was fresh, which I send you. I then consulted dear old Bewick; found out that the birds were redstarts, and that they fed much on ants and their eggs. Bewick scarcely gives the active brisk look that the birds I saw possessed, in his representation. Peter tells me that he has often seen these birds in the garden, but it is strange that I have never noticed them before, and I do not believe that they nest here, or I think that I must have noticed them. I fancy possibly that they are attracted by the numbers of small field ants' nests that

abound in my lawns and on the old walls that keep up the river frontage, and that these birds pay us occasional visits for feeding purposes. I am the more inclined to this view of the case as it appeared to me, when I first saw them, that the tomtits were resenting their intrusion as strangers, which accounted for the twit-tit-tit-titting that I heard.

## LETTER XII

Winterbourne — “ An Escape ” — Mimulus — Lily-of-the-Valley  
Growing Wild—High Clere Beacon—Panoramic View—Pas-  
toral Scenery—Ramsbury Manor House—Superstition as to  
Bees—Bees Stinging—The Rev. E. Hawkins and His Bee  
Carriage—Fred. Walker’s Bees—Bees in a Billiard Room.

*20th July, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO—On a recent visit to my friend Mr. Fisher, of Winterbourne, near Newbury, I saw a very interesting example of what botanists term “an escape.” The little brook “The Winterbourne” for about two miles of its length, is at present thickly planted along its edges with mimulus, or monkey flower, which has at some time or another found its way to the brookside by seed from a cottage garden near the head of the stream. When I first noticed the luxu-

riant blaze of yellow flowers, I took them for marsh marigolds, but as it was in July of course these could not have been in flower. I never saw any naturalisation of a garden flower more complete. The plant had taken thorough possession of the fringes of the brook, from the little village of Winterbourne, all the way to where it joins the Lambourne, near Donnington Castle. I did not see any after that on the sides of the Lambourne, but no doubt the steeper banks of this much larger stream prevented the seeds from finding a congenial root-hold. The smaller brook flowed along down a rather steep course without any definite banks; it ran through long grass, clumps of water-flogs, masses of water-cresses, forget-me-nots, and other aquatic plants, amongst which this *mimulus* seemed to be very much at home.

It is evidently a semi-aquatic. I never cared for it much as a garden plant, it being generally rather dwarf and dowdy-looking, but when it found so congenial and natural

an environment as this brook-side afforded, it presented a very much more vigorous and effective appearance, and I at once saw how nature had intended the plant to look, and where it should grow and flourish. It was a very good object lesson on the importance of giving any plant in your garden, that you wish to see in perfection, as near an approximation as you can in soil and situation to that which it would have in its wild natural state.

In a good-sized spinney near Mr. Fisher's house the "Lily of the Valley," *Convallaria majalis*, grows in the utmost abundance. This is a native of our country, though rather scarce, and as the little wood in which these that I saw grow is well away from any garden, I have no doubt but that they have flourished here undisturbed from time immemorial.\* Mr. Fisher, whose father had the house and farm before him, knows nothing as to their

\* Gerard says the "Convall Lily" grew in his time on Hampstead Heath, "fower miles from London," in great abundance at Lee in Essex, and on Bushey Heath and many other places.

ever having been introduced here. The whole wood is thick with these lilies, and in the spring Mr. Fisher's daughters gather any quantities.

I am not, as you know, a great admirer of the vast panoramic views that are obtained from our hills and high downs, but that which is seen from High Clere Beacon, near Newbury, is certainly one of the most beautiful I ever saw. Lord Carnarvon's park, with its magnificently wooded undulating grounds and lakes gives the foreground on one side quite a romantic appearance; the tower of the house looking very like a cathedral one.

The whole Kennet valley with its water meadows and the downs behind it is on the north, the Surrey hills to the Hind Head on the east, and right away to Winchester on the south; the intervening spaces being covered by innumerable farmsteads, pasture land, and gentlemen's seats. The whole forms a panoramic view of lovely pastoral scenery, peaceful in character, and rich in historic interest

and association, such as can only be found in our own dear country. Such views as these always cause me to feel rather sad, possibly because one cannot help the foreboding that, all this simple character, these hedge-rows, thatched cottages, barns, and all the rest of the picturesque and lovable features of old-fashioned agriculture, must before long give way, that the inevitably slate roof and tall chimney will take their place, and that, beyond market gardening beneath glass, and some dairy farming, agriculture will cease to exist for us in England.

A lady reader of my former letters sends me some interesting notes about bees; perhaps you may remember when you and I were at Ramsbury Manor house, the bees had taken possession of the roof of an old out-of-the-way garden summer house, and that an old man told us that these bees had forsaken their regular hives for this place, because the bee master had neglected to inform them on the occasion of a death in

the family belonging to the manor. He said that it was a well-known fact that bees if they were not told, by knocking on their hive and by the voice, of a death in the family, would either die or leave their hive. I can scarcely believe this to be more than a superstition, founded on an occasional coincidence, but here is a plain statement of fact that at any rate is curious. My lady informant writes: "There is a remarkable superstition (?) that obtains in Hants, and I think in all bee-keeping provinces, viz. that on the decease of any member of the family, a man has to go round to the bee-hives, tap them gently, and tell them of the death, or else the bees will die before the next swarming time. That they die if *not told* I have proved to be a fact in my own family, and the only explanation I offer is, that by or through the wonderful instinct of the bee, it divines that there is a shadow of misery over the home they are connected with, which so overclouds their sensitive nature, that they need the reassuring

mesmeric touch of the human hand and voice to keep them in health or life. On the death of my youngest son, ——— came to ask me if he might go tell the bees ; not understanding the old custom of that county I marvelled, but said ‘yes,’ it was done and the bees remained ; but on the death of my brother, some time afterwards, though I counselled the same, the matter was ‘pooh-poohed’ and the bees all died.”

This lady also gives evidence as to the fact that bees will not sting those people who are fond of them and who are not afraid ; that such people can handle a swarm, without any protection on their face and hands, without getting stung, I believe to be quite true, as my second son, when at Marlborough, used regularly to help his master to hive his bees, when they swarmed, with no protection on, and he told me that the bees hardly ever stung him, and that even if they did, accidentally, the sting gave little or no pain. My lady informant further writes :—

“ Hants is especially a county for bees, the immense clover fields yielding them glorious feeding grounds. The Rev. E. Hawkins, late rector of Overton, Hants, used to have a bee-carriage into which he lifted his hives, and drove with them many miles to pasture them ; camping out with them several days. The bees would return at nightfall to their own hives in the bee-carriage on the strange camping ground which was eighteen or twenty miles distant from Overton.”

No doubt you remember the swarm of bees that had taken up their abode in the old dis-used chimney in Fred Walker's garden in St. Petersburg Place. Walker used to put a little pan of water for the bees to drink from and would never allow the bees to be disturbed ; there must have been a great many as they had been there many years without ever throwing off any swarms, and were an immense time in returning to their hive in the evening. I remember a swarm of bees that hived themselves in the ceiling of a billiard-

room in a house at East Sheen. They no doubt had been there for many years and at last the weight of the honey broke down the ceiling, and the whole mass falling on to the table quite spoilt the cloth.

## LETTER XIII

St. Leonard's Church—Snails on Walls—Tracks of Snails—Distance Travelled by Snails—Moorhens—Resemblance to Domestic Hens—Their Voices Compared—St. Swithin—St. Bartholomew—Strolling Players—Ingenious Advertisement.

*22nd August, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO—On the 9th of this month, when I was inspecting the walls of our old church of St. Leonards, in my capacity as churchwarden, my attention was drawn to the vast number of small snails which were adhering to the surface of the walls, chiefly on the south or sunny side, though there were a few on the north side as well. I am much puzzled as to the object these little snails can have in thus climbing the walls and apparently remaining there torpid for so long ;

I have looked at them several times since and find that they are still all there. They are nearly all of one sort ; of a pale cream colour with black stripes on their whorls. At first I thought that they were dead or that the shells were empty, as when I picked them off the animal was scarcely to be seen ; but I afterwards found that it had only drawn itself up into the innermost coils of its shell. All



that I squashed had the snail inside them, but still I thought that they might be dead or dying until a day or two ago when I took some home to draw for you ; I put these on my drawing board, flat, and drew one ; but the next day, when I came to look at the board, they had all righted themselves and had crawled to some distance. I cannot imagine what could be the purpose of these

snails thus spreading themselves out on the walls—it could not be for food, for the walls were entirely bare of vegetation; neither could it be in order to collect lime from the walls, as there were quite as many on the glass windows and the iron piping. The grass in the churchyard was long and moist, amongst it were plants of the common wild mallow on which I found several of the same sort of snails feeding. It was far too early in the year for them to have been in search of hibernating quarters; it was also rather too late in the year for them to have crawled there for breeding purposes. Snails do not mind rain in the least, or I should have thought, as we had been having a very wet season, that they had climbed the walls to dry and sun themselves; possibly they had been increasing the growth of their shells and climbed the walls to rest themselves and to harden their shells in the sun and air.\*

\* I looked at these walls on the 28th September, 1895, and found that there were still a number of snails on the walls then, though perhaps not quite so many as on the 8th of August the year before.

I have frequently noticed that the common tabby snail at times, during the summer months, takes to mounting walls and odd places, resting apparently on the elevated situation for a considerable time; they generally seem to choose angles, where two walls meet, or some shelter or ledge, and almost always select a dry bare wall. The dryness of the wall leads to their destruction, in my garden, for the dry wall shows up their track and directs my attention to them.

I have often seen long tortuous tracks of snails over bare walls and even on the inner walls of sheds and outbuildings.

In the breeding season I have seen these snail tracks in a very marked manner; once I followed such a track and found a snail at its end that had met another coming from an opposite direction, the two sharing a sudden and ignominious death.

It is astonishing what a distance snails will travel. I have known them travel more than half-way across my tennis court, in the

middle of the day, in the hot sun, a very exhausting process, as they continually leave a track of slime behind them. In the night-time, when they usually travel, no doubt they could go very much farther as the ground is damp with dew and easier for their mode of progress.

Moorhens are very rightly named, as they are not only very like our domestic hens in aspect and way of walking and feeding, but their cry also greatly resembles that of our hens. The commonest noise that they make is a sharp jerky one which sounds like *chěckgrěc*, but they have also an alarm or danger cry which is not at all unlike that which a hen makes when it is being chased or caught. Young moorhens cheep just like little chickens, and when older, and they get driven away by their parents, I have heard them make just the cry or plaintive cheep that large chickens do about the time that they are cracking their voices.

This year the old saying about St. Swithin

has come curiously true, to-day is the only entirely dry day that we have had since the 15th ult. Next Friday is St. Bartholomew's day. There is an old saying about that day as well, which though in horrible metre runs thus :

“ All the tears St. Swithin can cry,  
St. Bartlemy's dusty mantle wipes dry.”

St. Bartlemy's day, however, is the 40th after St. Swithin's, so perhaps it is only the natural end of the spell.

We were visited last week by a strolling company of actors, who had an ingenious method of advertisement. The company were here three days; the proprietress walked about the town, shopping and distributing hand-bills, followed by a large dog with a coat on, on which was an advertisement of the play; a young donkey with a collar round his neck also followed his mistress, with the dog, entering all the shops and houses that she did, no doubt getting fed and petted every now and then. It was a very droll and rather pretty sight.

## LETTER XIV

Wagtails—Bats—Their Flight and Steering—Rain on Water—  
Smooth Parts—Theory as to the Cause—Acanthuses—De-  
scription of their Bloom—“ Bear’s Breech ”—Gerard’s Account  
—Kingfisher’s Note.

*24th October, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO—As I have had to be in town four days a week during this month, doing duty as visitor in the schools at the R. A. I have had little leisure to make notes on anything that would interest you. I saw a tern on September 26th, hawking up and down over the river ; it was quite alone and only stayed one day near here. There seemed to me to have been a greater number of wagtails on our lawns during September than usual ; these

birds have a sharp jerky little note which sounds like "chipsit." At times they will rise in the air, making a momentary hover, after a fly, very much in the style of a flycatcher; sparrows will sometimes execute a similar manœuvre but in a far clumsier fashion. The gray wag-tail is almost as common about here as the pied one; it has a pretty yellow throat and breast; they seem particularly fond of the edges of the river.

When you think what a clumsy thing a bat is in appearance, is it not marvellous how extremely rapid its flight is? Their wings and general structure are so totally different to those of the swallow, and yet they catch and feed on very much the same prey. Though they have not the swift dart of the swallow they fly very quickly, doubling and turning even more rapidly and suddenly than the birds do. As they have no tail their steering must be effected entirely by their wings, which are divided into sections by

their long slender finger-bones, and I suppose that the partial closing, or extra expansion, of one of these sections would cause the animal to turn very suddenly. This is my theory, but as they fly so irregularly and rapidly it is quite impossible to ascertain accurately how they manage. I once picked up a little bat which had a slit in the delicate web of a section of one of its wings, it could hardly fly at all in consequence of this damage; I put it in as secure a place as I could find, thinking that perhaps with rest the rent might be repaired, but I am afraid that the creature perished after all.

On a wet day I often sit in the little room over the boathouse, and watch the effect of the rain on the surface of the river. Provided that the wind is moderate in force, just enough to ruffle the water, the rain and wind together give the surface the look of dull gray frosted silver. But I dare say you may have noticed that there are, in different places, certain perfectly smooth shiny parts inter-

mingled with the general roughened surface. These are always long strip-shaped pieces, flowing out with the stream, which keep continually altering their curving forms. I cannot account for these smooth places except by supposing that they are due to some kind of oil on the water ; my reason for this supposition is that I have noticed they very frequently have as their starting point some little patch of rushes or weeds ; these rushes, I believe, as they get stirred by the wind set free an oil from the mud around their roots, which rises to the surface and flows off down the stream. The fact that tiny streaks of smooth water can be seen below even solitary rushes lends strength to my theory. That the rushes cause the smooth places by the shelter they afford from the wind cannot be entertained, as these streaks of smooth water flow always from the rushes down stream even when the wind is blowing directly up. These markings on the river surface, during rain, have, as far as I remember, never been

indicated by landscape painters, though they are very beautiful in nature, forming fine graceful lines on the dull gray surface and likewise helping to give the level look by their perspective ; but when I come to think of it landscape painters very seldom paint the effect of rain on a river at all.

Though we have had such a cold, wet summer, it is curious that my acanthuses bloomed magnificently. These plants, with me, are very shy bloomers ; I have had them now for over six years in my garden, and this is only the second time that they have bloomed. They are very handsome, throwing up huge spikes of bloom, the character of which is just what I greatly admire, having plenty of quaint construction. They retain their form, like the teasle, far into the autumn, when the seed pods swell up beneath a sort of little roof of a purplish colour ; this first forms part of the beauty of the flower, and remains unchanged until the seed is nearly ripe. The whole plant bristles with sharp

spines, which suggest a connection with the thistle tribe, but the plant is no relation to the thistles ; the spines are differently disposed, being confined to the points of the bloom spikes, and to the tips of the numerous divisions of the leaves and not on the stalks or stems. These spines are very sharp, their prick being irritating to the skin. The foliage is remarkably beautiful, it is the plant which is supposed to have suggested the ornamental leaves on the Corinthian capital. Though not very hardy in our climate, the roots hardly ever die, but I believe it never blooms in the summer that succeeds a very hard winter. It is common in Greece and the Holy Land ; my nephew brought me some dry blooms from the latter place, where, he told me, he at one time rode knee deep through masses of the plant.

I am quite at a loss to account for the curious name sometimes given to the acanthus, viz., "Bear's Breech." Gerard does not much help me on this point ; this is what he says :—

“The tame or garden Branke Ursine is named in Latin *Sativus*, or *Hortensis Acanthus*, in Greek *παῖδερος*: and of Galen, Oribasius and Plinie *μελάμφυλλας*: Plinie also calleth this *Acanthus lenis*, or smooth Branke Ursine, and reporteth it to be a citie herbe and to serve for arbors: some name it *Branca Ursina* (others use to call *Cowparsnep* by the name of *Branca Ursina*). The Italians call it *Acantho*, and *Branca Orsina*: the Spaniards *Terna Gignante*: the ingravers of old time were wont to carve the leaves of this Branke Ursine in pillers, and other workes, and also upon the eares of pots, as among others Virgill testifieth in the third Eclog of his *Bucolickes*.

Et nobis idem Alcimedon duo poculo fecit,  
Et mollis circum est ansas amplexus Acantho.”

At this season of the year, when the steam launches and holiday people have ceased from troubling, the river is very delightful, and I enjoy taking my little dog with me in the punt of an afternoon; I land him on the bank

and he seems never tired of hunting for water-rats. Kingfishers are much more frequently seen at this season, and their beauty is intensified by the subdued tones of the willows and rushes. They have a sort of shrill whistling note which is very pleasing, especially when two are together and hold conversation. I am afraid that I shall have very little more boating this year as the wind is blowing strongly from the south, with driving rain which will cause the river to rise.

## LETTER XV

Great Flood—Records—Studio in Danger—Flood-Gates and Sewage Works—Sufficiency of Thames Water Supply—Making a New Lake *versus* Spoiling an Old One—The Flood by Moonlight—Effects of Flood—Kingfisher—Boating in a Flood—Curious Effect of Flood on Daisies—Damage done by Flood.

*20th November, 1894.*

DEAR MARCO—No doubt you must have thought of us when in your morning paper you read accounts of the great flood that has been going on in the Thames Valley for the last fortnight. It has been the highest but one of any flood during this century, the water having risen to within nine inches of a recording mark on a stone at Shillingford, put up in 1809, which was the date of the great flood that carried away the centre arches of Wallingford Bridge. I have often

looked at this recording stone, in hot summer weather, with extreme incredulity, but there is no doubt, I feel sure now, as to its truthfulness.

The water did not, I am happy to say, come into our house anywhere, except in the cellar, beneath the kitchen, where a barrel of beer was lifted off its stand and carried away to some remote corner from whence it has not yet been recovered.

The width of the gravel path was all that was between the rising waters and the doors of our house, on the evening of the 15th, when the flood was at its highest; but there was a rise of another foot and a half above the path before the level of our floors could be reached, so I felt tolerably comfortable in my mind, such a further rise being almost impossible to imagine. My studio, in the cottage next door, was in greater danger, as the floor there was only six inches above the water level, and I was hard at work all Thursday morning putting such things away

as might get injured upon chairs and tables ; the next day I could not get to my studio at all without wading knee-deep, as the boat could not enter the narrow passage that led to the door. The flood here reached its extreme height on Thursday the 15th at 10.30 p.m., at which hour it distinctly ceased to rise. No perceptible fall took place, however, until Saturday the 17th.

A flood is not a noisy and terrific demonstration of the forces of nature, like a thunderstorm or a hurricane, but it has an appalling character of its own, in the quiet, stealthy, irresistible way with which the waters rise.

I could not help wondering of how much use were now the new ugly iron flood-gates that have taken the place of the picturesque wooden weirs ; and of what had happened to the new sewage works at the various riparian towns ; ours were flooded, the man holes burst open, and the sewage escaped into the river as of yore ; at Maidenhead, I believe, the whole sewage outlet was entirely submerged.

When one viewed these mighty volumes of water it seemed a little ridiculous that, only quite recently, the sufficiency of the Thames supply of water for London had been a subject of debate. If only a part of the superfluous water, which comes to us nearly every autumn, could be stored in a large lake above Oxford, in the water-meadow district between Eynsham and Lechlade, it seems to me that the water question for the metropolis would be settled. It would be far wiser, I believe, to *make* a new lake than to *spoil* a beautiful old one in Wales; neither would it be so expensive, as the labour employed would be chiefly that of the spade, which is the cheapest of all, it can be done by any sort of men, even by the *unemployed*.

As far as I have been concerned with the flood I have rather enjoyed it than otherwise, the weather, ever since the 15th, having been warm and lovely, with bright sun and moonshine, the sunrises and sun-

sets across the vast expanse of waters being extremely beautiful ; each night the moon shone brightly, so that I could go out over my garden in the little rowing punt and enjoy the extreme beauty and novelty of the effect.

The boathouse was, of course, a mere island, the water covering the floor of the little tea-room to the depth of six inches ; all the things in it had to be raised on tables and ledges. The tennis-court was covered by four feet of water, and formed a lovely calm pool to boat on. I took the opportunity in my boat of clipping the top of a hedge which was rather too high to reach under ordinary circumstances.

The moorhens made themselves quite at home amongst my shrubberies and kitchen garden. I noticed that all the birds seemed rather cowed by the unusual circumstances ; though they stuck to the place they appeared to miss the ground with their accustomed runs ; this was most noticeable in the case of the little

“Jenny Wrens,” which are generally very shy of showing themselves; they were now quite as tame as the robins, letting me have many opportunities of a good comfortable look at them.

On Friday I was in my punt with my little dog, over a corner of the tennis-court, when *our* kingfisher (for I feel sure it was the one that haunts this place continually) came and perched on a branch of the birch tree, not more than three yards from my boat; it did not appear in the least afraid, but stayed there quite three or four minutes, putting up its crest, pruning its wings, and enjoying the bright sunshine; whilst I could admire its exquisite plumage at my leisure. It then flew up the avenue of the shrubbery, and from thence on to a small apple tree in the kitchen garden, where I followed it in my boat, getting again quite close to it; it seemed scarcely to notice either me or the dog at all.

My two eldest boys came down from

town on Saturday and we rowed out *across* the river for quite half a mile from our house, which looked at that distance more as if it was on the banks of Southampton Water than on the Thames. It is neither difficult nor dangerous to navigate a small boat in a flood to any one who is a tolerable waterman, and who knows the ground well ; punting is, however, out of the question, it being impossible to cross the deep stream with a pole. The best boat to use is a small fishing punt fitted with oars, as it draws little water, is easily turned, and will go anywhere. I rowed up to the bridge and even through it ; the view from it was very fine, the river being one vast lake right away to Streatley Hill.

Yesterday, the 19th, the water had fallen rather more than four feet, and I walked over the tennis-court to inspect the state of my flower-beds. I picked a large bunch of monthly roses, which had been nearly but not quite submerged during the high water ;

they were none the worse for it. The lawn looked sodden and dirty ; the daisies on it seemed to have been much perturbed by their immersion ; all their little smooth green leaves, which generally lie so flat and tight on the ground, were raised straight up to the sky ; it looked as though, feeling the water over them, they had raised their arms up as a drowning person does. I do not know how to account for this action on the part of the daisies ; no other plants on the lawn had done the same, not even the plantains, but every single daisy leaf was standing straight up, looking very curious.

Very little damage was done by the flood in this place. The bridge had to be reached by boats from either end, as the roads to it were under water. There were some cottages near the river badly flooded ; one man caught a large perch in his sitting-room. I am happy to say that he was such a true sportsman that he gave the fish its liberty. But, with the exception of these cottages

and parts of some roads being flooded, and the overflow of the sewage into the river, Wallingford escaped wonderfully well as compared with Reading, Windsor, and Maidenhead, in which towns the damage was very great.

## LETTER XVI

Subsidence of River—Fine Weather—A Boy's Garden House—Old Willow Stump—Flowers in Late Autumn—List of Plants Blooming in December—Pansies Self-sown.

*30th November, 1894.*

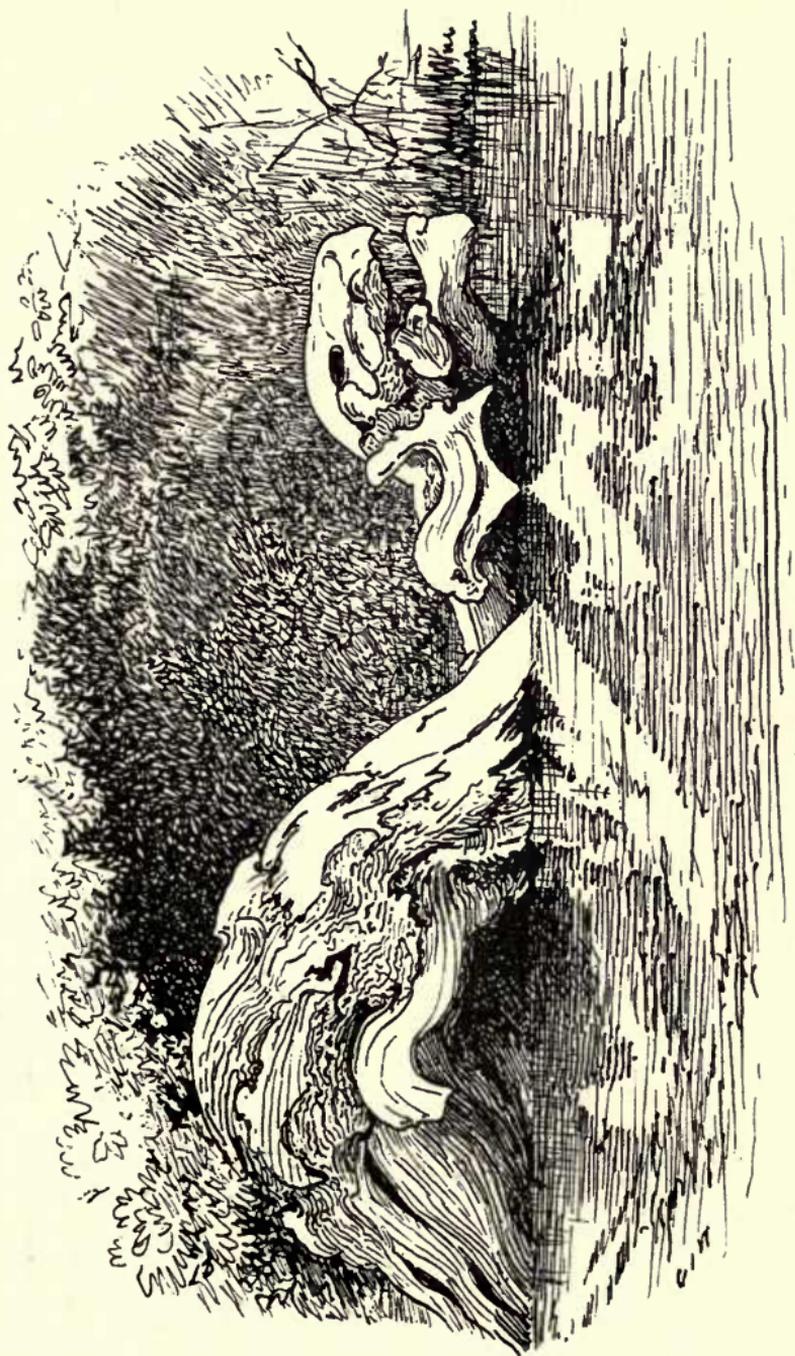
DEAR MARCO—The river has quite subsided again into its proper bed, the wind has shifted to the north-east, and our poor farmers have been getting on with their autumn sowing, which was so long deferred by the incessant rains.

Beyond a slight coating of sandy mud on those parts which were submerged, my garden looks just as it usually does at this season in other years. The subsoil is very porous, chiefly gravel and sand, so that the ground dries up very quickly.

To-day is lovely and bright, and I made a careful inspection of my borders, marking out places for some new introductions, and putting in some bulbs that I had been prevented from planting earlier by the flood. Here and there I found sundry tennis balls that had floated out from the hiding places in which they had lain since the summer ; it is needless to say that they had been nice new balls when first lost. I looked into a little wooden hut, that my youngest boy had built beneath the walnut tree, and found that it had stood the flood bravely, though the wall-paper and internal decorations had suffered considerably. In this little hut in the summer holidays my children used to have small parties, when they would roast potatoes, fry kippers, and make tea on a small stove, enjoying themselves greatly. An ugly bathing shed with a corrugated iron roof, which our corporation had put up on the river near here, did not fare so well as my boy's structure, for it was lifted bodily off its bearings, carried some

distance by the flood, and left lying across a hedge a total wreck.

We shall miss an old familiar friend next year from the banks of the river, between here and Benson, namely an old willow stump, of most quaint and picturesque appearance, much like some fearful dragon or antediluvian monster. It stretched for many a year horizontally out over the water, and must have attracted the notice of every passer-by. Last summer, as two young ladies and their brother were seated on it, it suddenly gave way, and subsided gently into the water; the young ladies were not displaced when it fell, but came down with it, seated, with their legs in the water. After this it remained there by the river bank for some weeks, and, luckily, I made a drawing of it as it looked in the water, which I send you. With the first rise of the flood in November, the log floated off and came down the stream, past our house, looking more weird than ever. It was landed by a fisherman, who made it fast to a stake on the



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OLD WILLOW STUMP.



bank and had just begun cutting it up for firewood when the water rose again and carried it off, where to I know not.

It is astonishing how plants will go on struggling into blossom in the late autumn as long as the weather is mild. I never worry my borders at this season by digging or tidying up, and as I make it a rule to have nothing in them but what is absolutely hardy, there are always at this time numbers of odds and ends of flowers from which to pick a nosegay if the frost keeps off. As there seems a likelihood of a sharp frost to-night I thought I would make a list of such blooms as I could find before that event takes place. You will understand, of course, that all the flowers in this list are not perhaps very fine specimens, though many of them are quite respectable ones.

Mignonette, snapdragons, marigolds, *Campanula pumila* and *persicifolia*, *Aubrietia*, *Veronica reptans*, Virginian spiderwort, Japanese anemone, stocks, nasturtium, scabious,

larkspur, *Tropeolum tuberosum*, *Ecremocarpus*, globe thistle, acanthus (of these last two, young second blooms), *Nigella damascena*, scarlet Geum, *Linum flavum*, *Aster ericordia*, sweet peas, the large St. John's wort, violets, primroses, and pansies.

I have not mentioned the monthly roses, the hardy jasmine *nudiflora*, or the lares-tinas, all which are usually in bloom at this season.

The other flowers I mentioned with the exception of the violets were mostly in beds above the line of the flood; the violets had been deeply submerged, but they are now blooming in numbers. As to the pansies they seemed to take no more notice of the flood than they do of the snow; I have some good sorts, and also an enormous quantity of little self-sown degenerate specimens which I have never the heart to eradicate as weeds. They are most persistent little plants and are hardly ever out of bloom. It is these little pansies that I selected for the design on the

cover of my book ; they seemed to me appropriate for that purpose, having to other and more elaborate and distinguished flowers just that same sort of relationship which these letters of mine have to works by authors of more authority.



Design from the cover of *Letters to Marco*.

Still these little pansies are not weeds, they claim the right to be considered as flowers, flowers too which are the emblems of thoughts, and, in this sense, the somewhat plaintive motto beneath them is appropriate.

## LETTER XVII

Protraction of Mild Weather—Primroses—A Cowslip on Christmas Day—Monthly Roses—First Winter-Aconite—Colt's-foot—Snowdrops and Crocuses—Mezereon—*Pyrus Japonica*—*Tropeolum Tuberosum*—Edible Tubers—Unsatisfactory Experiment.

28th December, 1894.

DEAR MARCO—Until now we have had nothing but mild weather, but this morning there was a smart ground frost, so that I fear it will not be long before the discomforts of winter will be upon us in earnest.

On Christmas Day a friend brought us a pretty bunch of primroses and one cowslip, which he had picked in the morning in a wood about four miles from here. I picked a number of charming buds from my monthly rose-bushes on the same day; on the 24th, I





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WINTER HELIOTROPE.

picked our first winter aconite, to-day there are quite a number out in the shrubbery. The winter aconite, with us, is far earlier than the snowdrop, and I always regard it as the first flower of the new year ; its claim might, however, be disputed by another plant, the sweet-scented colt's-foot, or "winter heliotrope" as it is sometimes called, which in sheltered places puts forth pretty heart-shaped leaves and a curious insignificant-looking head\* of bloom which has a strong and sweet scent.

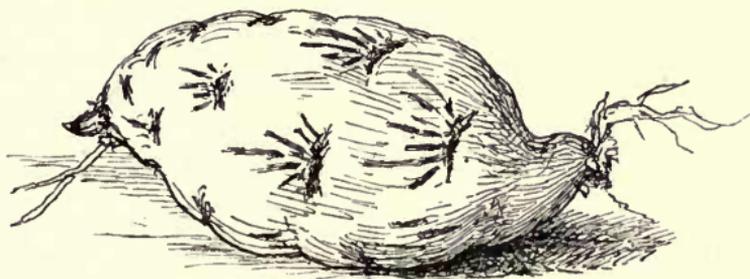
The aconites, however, are far more showy and spring-like in character than this colt's-foot, which is somewhat of a weed—in fact a relation to the butter burr. Besides, the colt's-foot gives in entirely at the first hard frost, leaves and bloom shrivelling to a blackened mass, from which it hardly ever manages to get out another bloom during the winter. The aconites, on the other hand, will remain above the ground frozen for a week

\* Botanists call it "a racemose panicle."

or more, and when the thaw comes go on with their blooming as if nothing had happened. The snowdrop and the crocus do not show so suddenly as the aconite, there is little to be seen of them but a tiny streak of white or yellow between their narrow leaves for days after the flower is really above the ground, whereas the aconite will thrust its loop through the earth on one fine morning and turn up its pretty yellow globe and green frill the next almost like a conjuring trick.

A Mezereon has been in bloom for some time, it is a small shrub with pinky lilac blossoms, somewhat like those of the peach, which are close to the stem, and come out almost before the plant has finished shedding its last year's leaves; the flowers have an exquisite perfume. In the summer the stems are covered with bright red berries which look very pretty amidst the extremely neat and dainty foliage. I have been told that there is a white-flowered Mezereon which is even still more beautiful, but I have not

been lucky enough either to see or possess one. The *Pyrus Japonica* is also in bloom ; this is a most aggravating shrub to gather bloom from, the flowers invariably growing in the most awkward places so that they cannot be picked without greatly damaging the whole shrub ; it is just one of those beauties of the garden that must be seen *in situ* to enjoy it properly ; seen thus, nothing exceeds the loveliness of its bright cherry-red blossoms, golden anthers and pale green leaflets, displayed on its picturesque and straggling thorny branches.



I had some tubers of a sort of climbing nasturtium, *Tropeolum tuberosum*, given me last spring, which I planted against a

wall ; they grew and covered a large space with pretty leaves and bright little flowers of a decorative character. It is a native of Peru, where, it is said, the tubers are eaten. It is not quite hardy with us and the tubers have to be taken up in the winter and stored. When I went a week ago to do this I found that each plant had formed a huge mass of rather pretty looking tubers, growing after the manner of potatoes, which I have dried and put away. I thought I should like to try what they tasted like, and so I washed and boiled one or two. They boiled soft and were of a yellowish colour inside, with a strong aromatic and rather peculiar flavour ; not nice enough, however, to induce me to cultivate them for the table.

## LETTER XVIII

Town and Country—"Winter and Rough Weather"—Floods—  
Blizzards—Thunderstorms—Compensation—Winter Aconites  
in Snow—Owls—Coke.

*29th January, 1895.*

DEAR MARCO — If "winter and rough weather" are not the "only enemies" that the countryman has to put up with they are certainly the most important. A town-dweller is not brought so continually face to face with the wild forces of Nature, or experiences such a succession of object lessons on the weakness of man when opposed to the baffling effects of those forces, as a countryman. It is one thing to sit over a cup of coffee and a slice of toast in the breakfast room of your snug town house and read

reports in the morning paper of floods, blizzards, and disastrous storms, but quite another to dwell in the very midst of the scenes of these disasters.

To wake up in the morning and see the sun rise over a huge lake which the day before was a broad meadow. To start for a walk and find yourself blocked, the footpath having entirely disappeared, or the water rushing over the road in a torrent, leaving its surface afterwards like so much shingle. To see small cottages with the stream running in at their front and out at their back doors, gaps torn out of their garden hedges, and the contents of their rubbish heaps carried away and scattered broadcast over the adjacent meadows, making them look, when the waters have subsided, like a field of battle. Or to find, after one such blizzard as we had last week, bushels of snow driven beneath your doors, or worse still through the cracks between the tiles of your roof, from whence it has to be caught in pails and bath-tubs

when it melts and comes through the bedroom ceilings.

In the garden you may find one morning, as I did lately, an old wall blown down by the gale, covering with its *débris* a favourite strawberry bed; or a large limb from a walnut tree fallen on the tops of some gooseberry bushes. Your work will be cut out pretty well for you sometimes in relieving evergreens and other things from the crushing weight of snow with which they get laden.

As to keeping appointments with distant neighbours, or taking your children to the little festive gatherings to which they have been invited, the difficulties of a moonless night and deep snow in a state of thaw can be readily imagined. A thunderstorm in town makes a noise, and the deluge of rain, which accompanies it, is inconvenient, but in the country when you are told that six bullocks have been struck dead by one flash of lightning in a meadow at no great distance from your house, or see a tree by the side of

a footpath which is your favourite Sunday walk, burning internally, having been struck the day before, a sense of the insecurity of life, to which the town-dweller is a stranger, naturally creeps over you. The wind is, however, always tempered to the shorn lamb, and I must confess that there are many compensations for these discomforts of "winter and rough weather." Sunrise over a flooded meadow is very beautiful. Market people crossing a flooded piece of road in waggons or boats make a good subject for a picture. Clean snow is a splendid thing for the children to play in, whilst the work of clearing it away from the paths or off the laden boughs is an invigorating and interesting occupation, and remarkably good for one's liver.

The bad state of the roads often affords a ready excuse for breaking an appointment to which you may be indifferent. As to that wall that came down, I was greatly relieved at finding that it was my neighbour who had to pay for rebuilding it.

“The new soft fallen mask of snow” in my shrubbery is pierced all over by the little yellow globes of the winter aconites; they looked very miserable until the snow came, but now when the sun shines they seem



quite happy, each managing to keep a little hollow around its stem and green frill, all stretching their little heads as far as they can to catch the sun. Feeding the birds is now a constant care, they empty the little

storehouse on its long pole in no time, and it has to be replenished several times a day. All through the winter, during the coldest nights, I hear the owls; the frost makes them apparently extra clamorous, but what they

“ pit their painch in  
I ain 'tis past my comprehension.”

Surely no mice, beetles, or small birds would be stirring in such weather. The ground must be as hard as iron, and where they can find food I cannot imagine. Birds of prey can, I believe, fast longer than other birds, and owls are at any rate very warmly clothed.

I forgot to mention, as one of the effects of the flood, that a heap of coke that was piled in the kitchen garden got lifted by the flood and floated about in every direction, so that ever since small deposits of this useful stuff keep turning up on the borders; coke does not make a good top-dressing.

## LETTER XIX

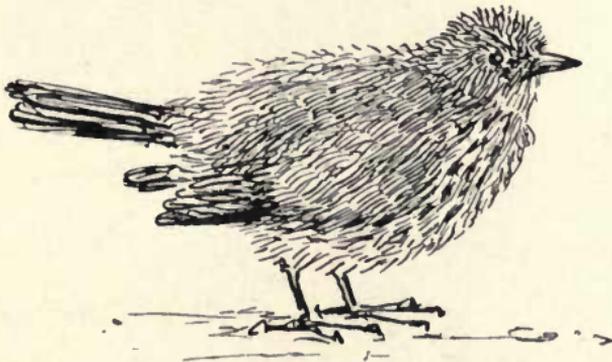
Prolonged Frost—Bird-Feeding—Thrushes—Blackbirds—Tomtits  
—Wrens—Moorhens—Ice Shelters—Gulls—Daffodils—Ther-  
mometers—Natural Thermometer—Effects of Frost on Aucuba  
—“Ben” and “The Royal Imp.”

*11th February, 1895.*

DEAR MARCO—This prolonged frost is very trying. It is perhaps a little warmer to-day, but the wind is bitter and in the north-east still. Yesterday morning there was a strongly marked solar halo, and a fall in the barometer, but nothing came of it except a slight increase of wind.

In feeding the birds I have the greatest difficulty in preventing the sparrows, rooks, and starlings from getting pretty nearly all I put out. The thrushes and blackbirds

fare very badly; the thrushes will persist in keeping on the ground, they do not alight on to the feeding board but creep about and, as it were, "stalk" their food stealthily and deliberately; in consequence of which the other more alert birds snatch it away from under their very beaks. As to the black-



Thrush in Cold Weather.

birds, they waste the best part of their time in fighting and chasing away each other and the smaller birds. I am quite at a loss to know how to manage the stuff so that these two sorts should get their proper share. The thrushes look by far the most miserable of any of the birds, with their feathers all

puffed up, quite unlike the slim and gallant shape they present in the summer. The blackbirds, on the other hand, never seem to lose the pride they take in the gallantry of their appearance, and raise and lower their tails on alighting as usual. I provide for the thrushes a little at times, by hunting out lumps of hybernating snails which I throw on to the lawns, where the thrushes soon make quick work in despatching them. I have never noticed any other bird but the thrush attack these snails.

The tits do not really need much outdoor relief, as the trees, bushes, old walls, &c., which are their usual hunting grounds, are not interfered with by the frost or snow. They never appear to me in the least distressed by the cold as other birds do, and I only hang bones and fat on strings for them, partly to keep them away from my gooseberry bushes, but chiefly for the pleasure of seeing them close up to my window. The little brown wrens never seem to come for food at all; no

doubt they likewise are not much inconvenienced by the frost. I see many creeping and flitting about, under the ivy and along the ledges of the old walls in the garden, looking quite happy and well.

The moorhens have not come up for food this year as they did during other winters. The reason of which is, I think, that they have plenty of snugly covered runs beside the river this year, which supply them with the necessary food and shelter. These runs are occasioned by the fact of the river having been very high when the frost began, and of its having fallen gradually ever since; this has caused the formation of huge flakes of ice in tiers, one above another, along the banks; on the tops of these layers of ice the snow drifted, whilst the water fell from beneath, leaving long sheltered arcades, the ground on the floors of which is probably unfrozen. These arcades have little openings into them here and there, through which the moorhens no doubt pass, finding inside most congenial

cover and feeding places. In most other winters, since I have lived here, the river was low when the frost began, so that the banks became hard and frostbound at once; in those winters the moorhens came much into my kitchen garden and frequently on to the lawn, even close up to the house, after the food we threw out.

The river has not been frozen right across here during this long frost, neither has the ice at the edges been of sufficient strength for skating on, no doubt owing to the constant fall of the water. Above the weir at Benson, where the water is penned up and still, however, some very strong ice has formed, on which plenty of skating has been carried on.

The flocks of gulls, which I hear have visited London owing to the long protracted frost, have not, as far as I know, been seen on the upper reaches of the Thames, though I have seen a solitary gull or two occasionally pass by.

I was much astonished to discover this morning that a clump of daffodils, which are

planted on the edge of the lawn, had pierced the turf and were showing quite three inches of green leaves above the ground ; the sun had just cleared the snow from the ground where they were, snow which had been lying there for nearly a fortnight, but the ground itself was still as hard as iron. How they possibly managed to force their way up I cannot imagine. I am quite sure that they have somehow come through since the long frost began, because during the mild weather that preceded it, I had expected to see them, and had searched for them in vain every day. These daffodils grow on rather a sheltered bank by the edge of the grass, and have not had a very deep covering of snow on them at any time, but the ground was and is still frozen hard and deeply around them.

I have not troubled you with statistics or thermometer readings anent the frost, as you get these, *ad nauseam*, in the daily papers. I have no thermometer in the garden, except a sort of living one, a certain aucuba laurel,

which grows just outside our garden door ; it is one of the plain green aucubas, a male plant I believe ; it is very sensitive to cold and has its regular degrees of misery marked on its foliage during the cold weather in the most unmistakable manner. So long as the frost keeps off its leaves splay out, large, green, and healthy, a slight frost causes them to droop, a harder one to curl inwards longitudinally, whilst a severe one darkens and shrivels them in an alarming manner. They recover themselves as the frost gives in an exactly reverse order, and when the thaw is complete they once more stretch out green and healthy. I have become quite an expert at reading this thermometer, and for my purposes scarcely need another. I just open the back door, look at the state of the foliage before going to bed, and from it know quite well whether to put lamps to my water-pipes or not. It is a far easier, quicker, and nearly as effectual a way of finding out the temperature as to stand

fiddling in the cold with a match, your spectacles, and a thermometer.

I do not take much interest in tables, records, or statistics, useful as they are no doubt in their way ; all I want to do is to save my plants and my pipes, and know how many blankets to put over me in bed.

Painting in my studio just now is almost out of the question, for in spite of a large Gill stove I cannot keep my hands warm for five consecutive minutes. I just look at my picture, put on an occasional touch, and run away.

Though you do not care much for dogs, I know you love cats, and it would please you to see our brown Ben and a fluffy black kitten, named "The Royal Imp," play together. She does his toilet for him at times, in front of the fire, which he greatly enjoys ; on the other hand, when he licks her he makes her hair uncomfortably wet. A cat's tongue always feels rather dry and rough, and acts like a comb on the fur, but the dog's tongue is soft and wet.

## LETTER XX

Backwardness of Spring—Peculiar Ending of the Long Frost—  
Effects of Frost on Roses—Puschinia—Alstroemerias—Ants,  
their Nests in Floods and Frosts.

*11th April, 1895.*

DEAR MARCO—The remarkable winter through which we have lately passed, has necessarily been followed by an unusually backward spring. The trees are only just beginning to show signs of life; the horse-chestnut trees and one or two others are at length bursting into bud, but the great majority look much the same as they did at Christmas time.

The most remarkable feature of the past winter's frost was its extreme protraction. Beginning with the New Year it continued,

with scarcely one break of importance, right up to the 18th of February, and even then did not end, as the severe frosts which Gilbert White described did, abruptly, with a sudden thaw, but took more than a fortnight before it could be said to have completely passed away; thawing by day with the sunshine, and freezing again during the nights.

I found the ground had been so deeply penetrated by the frost that it was quite impossible to dig, even on the 6th of March, sufficiently to sow potatoes, and even a fortnight after that I found the interior of a heap of rotten leaves quite hard and caked with frost. It was more like a North German winter than an English one, the deep penetration of the frost being no doubt due to its extreme protraction. The havoc it played with the water-pipes in town will cause it to be remembered by Londoners for many years.

I am gradually becoming aware of my

various losses in the garden, some are irreparable, whilst others may, I hope, prove only partial. A lovely Maréchal Niel is very badly injured, I cannot see a sign of a bud on it at present, whereas, I have seen it in former years with large flower buds showing at this date. My China or monthly roses, on either side of the trellised path, are also seriously damaged; there is far more dead wood on them than living, with hardly any flower buds at all showing anywhere. These roses I have always accounted as most hardy, but they have proved themselves inferior in this respect to the damask, the cabbage, the maiden's blush or the sweet brier, all which seem none the worse for the frost. The *Rosa rugosa*, Austrian briar, and some of the hybrid perpetuals are also fairly well.

My rosemary bushes have been severely punished, one or two are quite dead and the others only just alive. The laurestines and some other evergreens are badly scorched, even the lavender looks snubbed and dis-

heartened, but I think most of these things will revive and sprout afresh.

On the whole, thanks to the principle of having only hardy subjects in my garden, less damage has been done than I should have expected. The crocuses and scillas, though very late, were excessively beautiful this year. I had, through the kindness of my friend Miss Jekyll, the delight of seeing several large patches of *Puschinias* in bloom for the first time; they are bulbs with much resemblance of character to the *Scilla sibirica* but the flowers are of a delicate white with little longitudinal stripes of blue, or rather blue mingled with violet and green; they have also rather more flowers on each stem than the scillas. Miss Jekyll also gave me last autumn several other new good things, all of which are, I am happy to say, thriving; amongst others a dwarf *Hemerocalis* or day-lily, and a white sea-holly, *Eryngium giganteum*. I am afraid my *Iris Susiana* will not bloom this year, as it was impossible to

keep the cold out of the little greenhouse for so long a period.

My alstroemerias, of which I am very proud, are pushing through the ground as vigorously as ever, though the beds in which they grow were, first of all, for a week or more three feet under the flood-water, and after that, in the winter, frozen nearly solid for a month at least. These Peruvian lilies, as they are sometimes called, are generally supposed to be rather delicate and tender, but I am now convinced that, provided they are let alone, they will survive any weather. They must, however, be grown from seed, doing best with me when self-sown. Most people try to establish them from seedlings, which they buy in pots, but alstroemerias scarcely ever succeed in this way, the fact being that they will not stand transplanting, for their roots are long and hair-like, and the least damage to these injures the plant fatally. These plants just suit my "let things alone" style of gardening and thrive amazingly,

their wonderfully showy blooms being in the summer one of the chief glories of my garden.

The birds seem very well and much sweet singing goes on, though I think that there are hardly so many thrushes and black-birds as usual. The rooks' nests suffered much damage during the gale on the 24th of March.

I am greatly puzzled about the ants, how it is that they survive in their nests through the floods and frosts. We have many ant-nests along the brickwork by the edge of the river, mostly of the common black ant, which must have been under, at least, six feet of water, for a fortnight during the great flood; and more or less waterlogged afterwards for a much longer time; they then passed through the late severe winter, have since been flooded again slightly, and yet to-day I saw the usual little streams of ants running to and fro along the bricks just as usual. Are their nests watertight? Do

they hibernate? And if so, how are they protected from water and frost combined? Is it possible that they manage to close up their nests so that the water cannot penetrate? If they do this how do they obtain air? I have often noticed how difficult it is to wet an ant, or to drown one; perhaps they are covered with some oily substance which keeps them dry, and they may perhaps keep their nests dry by the same oily substance; but still they would have no air when under water. I would look the subject up in books, but I feel sure this is just one of those things that books would say nothing about. I sat next Sir John Lubbock last year at the Academy dinner, I wish I had thought of it then as I might have asked him.

## LETTER XXI

Curious Behaviour of a Wagtail—Difficulty of Accounting for Same—Rooks—Drought—Watering Plants—Favourite Flower Border—Advantages of a Raised Border—E. W. Cooke, R.A.—Bog Garden—*Cypripedium Spectabile*—Buck-Bean—Nuthatch and Nut.

30th May, 1895.

DEAR MARCO—The following account of the strange behaviour of a small bird will no doubt interest you. At Mr. H. W. Wells's house, Whitecross, which is half a mile from Riverside, about three weeks ago, a wagtail took to a persistent habit of flying up to one of the upper windows and tapping repeatedly and loudly with its beak against the glass. The room to which this window belonged was a nursery, and you may judge of the

character and persistency of the bird's tapping, for it became quite a nuisance, waking up the children out of their midday sleep. The bird came always at the same time, perched on the sill, and flew up repeatedly, a dozen or more times consecutively, striking its beak loudly on the glass each time. All manner of contrivances were tried, in the shape of strings and cotton to keep the bird away, but with no effect ; some rat-gins were even set on the sill where the bird perched, but I am happy to say it simply avoided them. After a bit the tappings became less frequent, and although the bird still pays an occasional visit it no longer occasions annoyance.

It seems almost impossible to account for this bird's strange behaviour. There were no flies or spiders apparent on the outsides or insides of the window panes. It was to the night nursery window only the bird came ; if the bird had been attracted by its own reflection in the glass, there were several other windows on that side of the

house, the west, in which the reflection would have been seen equally well but to which it never went.

Another little bird puzzle has occupied my mind lately, which is, that throughout the hot dry weather we have had for the last fortnight, a pair of rooks have taken to feeding on the lawn, just beneath the sycamore tree, every morning for an hour or two. I am quite sure it is the same pair, as I have looked at them very carefully ; they walk about always over the same spot, pecking at the ground much as the starlings do. I call it the same *spot*, as the area over which they walk is very limited. The puzzle to me is what they find to eat. The grass just there is almost brown with the drought, the only living things on it that I can discover being a few ants and some earwigs ; but there are many more of these insects on other parts of the lawn to which the rooks do not seem to go. And why have these rooks deserted their companions, unless they have been ostracised by them for some

breach of etiquette in rook life? They are unmistakably rooks, and are rather tame, allowing me to approach quite near at times. I wish there was some ornithological "Sherlock Holmes" to whom one might apply for a solution of these and other bird mysteries.

The drought this spring is nearly as bad as that which occurred the year before last, and the outlook for gardeners and farmers is becoming very serious. It is true we have had a few showers, just to break the long spell, but as the reports in the papers show, the precipitation, as they term it, has been very deficient ever since the commencement of the year.

It is strange that all the different sorts of weather have come to us in lumps lately; long rains and floods in the autumn—long frosts in the winter, and long drought in the spring. The long frost and the long drought have both been accompanied by a persistent strong wind from the north and east.

I have, by dint of watering from the river,

kept my flower borders in wonderful beauty : I take my coat off and do it myself ; I cannot trust the gardener, for he *will* use a huge can, with a great fierce rose on it, which sends a miniature thunder shower on to the tops of the plants, thereby battering them to the ground, whilst the water runs off in streams without penetrating to the roots at all. I have two handy-sized cans with long noses and no roses on them ; with these I give each plant that really wants it, once a week, a whole can all to itself, right close down to the ground, where the roots are, allowing plenty of time for it to soak well in. Of course this takes time, but it is the only way, and the result more than repays the trouble taken.

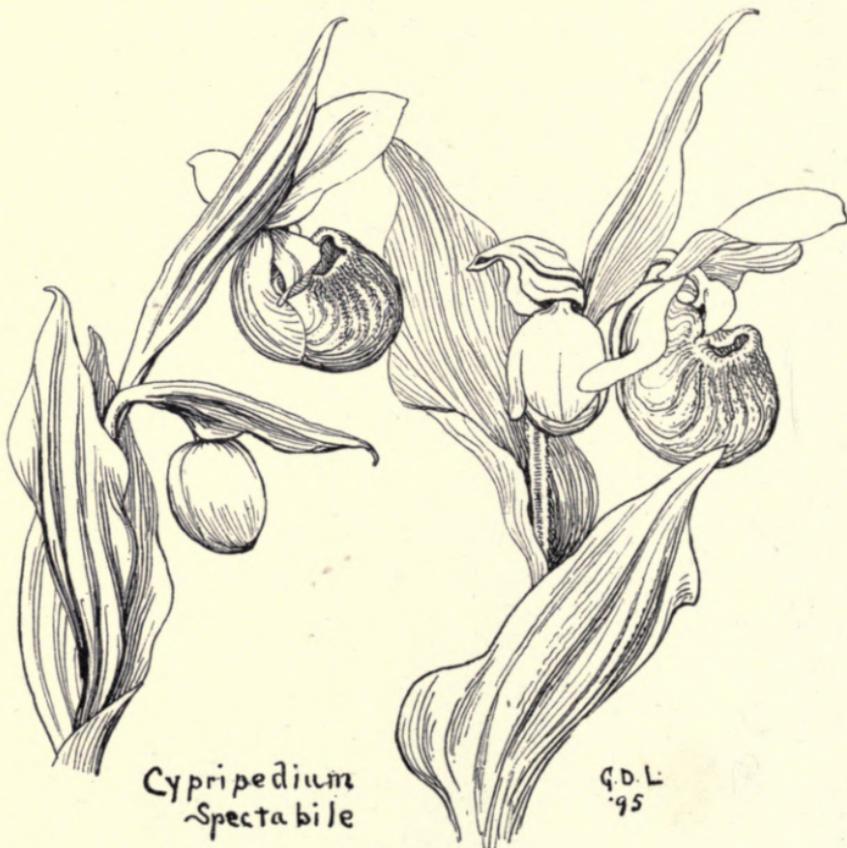
One of my borders is just now in great perfection, for in it are masses of irises and pæonies of various shades of colour, oriental poppies, large deep-red lilies (*Davuricum*), monks' hoods, and dornicums, these form the heavy brigade of the border ; a variety of smaller and perhaps more interesting things

mixed in front of these, and in the front of all masses of what are termed carpeting plants. This whole bed is raised, from the level of the tennis court, about three feet high ; its front is kept up, for its entire length, by a red brick wall, so that as you stand beside it you have all the plants and flowers in the border raised up, and their beauties displayed like goods upon a linendraper's counter. Flowers gain much by this arrangement, you have not to stoop to look at them, and the bare spaces of mould (if there are any) do not catch the eye, owing to the angle at which the view is taken. It is most convenient too for weeding and picking, as stooping is dispensed with. I sometimes think if I had to form a new flower garden that I would have all the beds raised up thus, with small retaining walls, say three feet high, with the paths sunk between them. It might be made very pretty, with occasional arches over the paths and steps up and down in places. From a distance it would look all

flowers, the paths being out of sight. You can have no idea, without having seen it, how much flowers gain by being raised up thus, nearer to the level of the eye. At any rate I think that a large part of every garden should be treated in this fashion. I remember E. W. Cooke, R.A., had something of the sort in his garden at Groombridge, which he used to call "The Bamboozleum," the paths were scooped out amongst and between some sandstone rocks, the hollows were planted with bamboos, and the raised ledges with Alpine plants; it was a delightful spot. In greenhouses and conservatories flowers are seen thus raised up, but the pots and obvious artificiality detract from the effect.

The floods last November came across the tennis-court right up to this raised border, and completely covered a little bog-garden which is just beneath the wall, and the whole of this small bog-garden must afterwards have been frozen solid for a long time in the





Cypripedium  
Spectabile

G.D.L.  
'95

winter, and yet in spite of all this a beautiful orchid, *Cypripedium spectabile*, is now more vigorous and flourishing than ever, each stem having two large creamy white buds ready to burst upon it. I have had the roots of this plant for three years, and this is the first bloom it has shown; you can easily imagine my excitement. A buck-bean in this bog has also done wonderfully well, blooming luxuriantly. Here also are some epimediums, the foliage of which is very delicate and graceful, they have wiry stalks, like the maiden-hair fern, with leaves of exquisite shape and lovely colour. At the four corners of this little garden are clumps of Japan irises, all very rich in promise of bloom. These semi-aquatic plants, though they possess the frail beauty of hot-house subjects, are all really as hardy as groundsel; these of mine having been left alone, unsheltered in any way, during the floods and frosts, have come out unscathed and lovely. I must say, however, that a frost in the

middle or at the end of May, will do them much harm, though only of a temporary character; also that the whole little bog has to be enclosed with wire, or the blackbirds and thrushes would during the dry, hot, weather, very soon scratch the place to pieces. Some frogs have taken up their abode in it, and keep it free from ants, which might otherwise become troublesome.

Just before I intended to post this letter, I witnessed, this afternoon, a bird's action, about which I had often heard and read, but never seen. It was that of a nuthatch cracking a nut. It has been often described accurately and fully, but I thought you might like to hear my account, taken fresh from nature. In the kitchen garden there is a large weeping willow hanging over the river, near which at sundry times I have heard a tapping noise, but never could find out what caused it. I did not expect to see a nuthatch there, as, most usually, I see these birds on the sycamore or walnut-tree at the other





NUTHATCH AND NUT.

[To face page 165.]

end of the garden. This afternoon, as I was dipping water from the river beneath the willow, I heard the noise just over my head, I stepped back gently, and there, very close indeed, on the slanting trunk of the tree, I saw the bird and its nut as plainly as possible. The willow bark is deeply corrugated with narrow furrows, into the angle of one of which the bird had thrust the nut (one of our filberts) and was perched above it, holding on firmly by its claws. It drew itself up, almost to a slope backwards, and with rigid body and neck came down on the nut with its beak, with machine-like accuracy. I made a roughish sketch which I enclose. Every now and then it would go round and give a tap or two from below, apparently for the purpose of the adjustment of the nut; but the main work was done from above. The bird remained some time, whilst I was there, hard at work, but flew away at last, leaving its nut unfinished.

Two things I derived from this observation,

first that the bird had chosen this tree on account of the character of its bark and of its sloping trunk, which made the retention of the nut in its place an easy matter ; and secondly, that as this was the 30th of May the nut must have come from a store, probably hidden somewhere by the bird, for of course the nut must have been a last year's nut : as I have heard this tapping at different times all through the winter and spring the store of nuts must have been pretty large to have lasted until now.

## LETTER XXII

Mistakes made by Artists in Painting Flowers—Water-Lilies—  
Teasel—Roses—Truth to Nature—Seed-cases—Winter Aconite  
—Christmas Rose—Crown Imperial—Wood Hyacinth—Drought  
—Glare Round the Sun.

*11th June, 1895.*

DEAR MARCO—When visiting our annual exhibitions I have often been rather distressed at the carelessness, as to the facts of nature, displayed by many artists in the introduction of flowers into their pictures. For instance, water-lilies are frequently represented growing in what is obviously meant to be shallow water ; whereas they grow only in deep water, and where the bottom is soft and muddy. White water-lilies are constantly painted with the foliage of the common yellow one ; the

leaves of the white water-lily are smaller than those of the yellow, and have a purplish-red hue. The common purple German iris is repeatedly introduced as an aquatic plant, growing in any sort of water at any sort of depth. I have seen even the yellow water flag figuring in a picture in very much deeper water than I believe it possibly could grow, represented, in fact, in the *middle* of a wide pool or river amongst *reeds*, which mostly indicate quite deep water ; the yellow flag, as far as I know, only grows on the margins of the water, and is seldom found more than half submerged. In one picture I noticed roses, poppies, and Roman hyacinths in bloom together ; in many others the relative sizes and proportions of the flowers introduced were quite curiously erroneous. Frequent liberties are taken with the colour of the foliage of laurels and other shrubs when introduced in backgrounds, a cold bluish green is used when it should have been a deep rich olive, and *vice versa*.

I have seen the teasel, fearfully scamped and libelled, even to representing it with gracefully curved stems. If any plant is precise, straight, and symmetrical it is the teasel; surely if a graceful, curling line is wanted there are numbers of plants which would have served the purpose.

Then again, one sees quite modern bred roses introduced into pictures the subjects of which are taken from classic or mediæval periods.

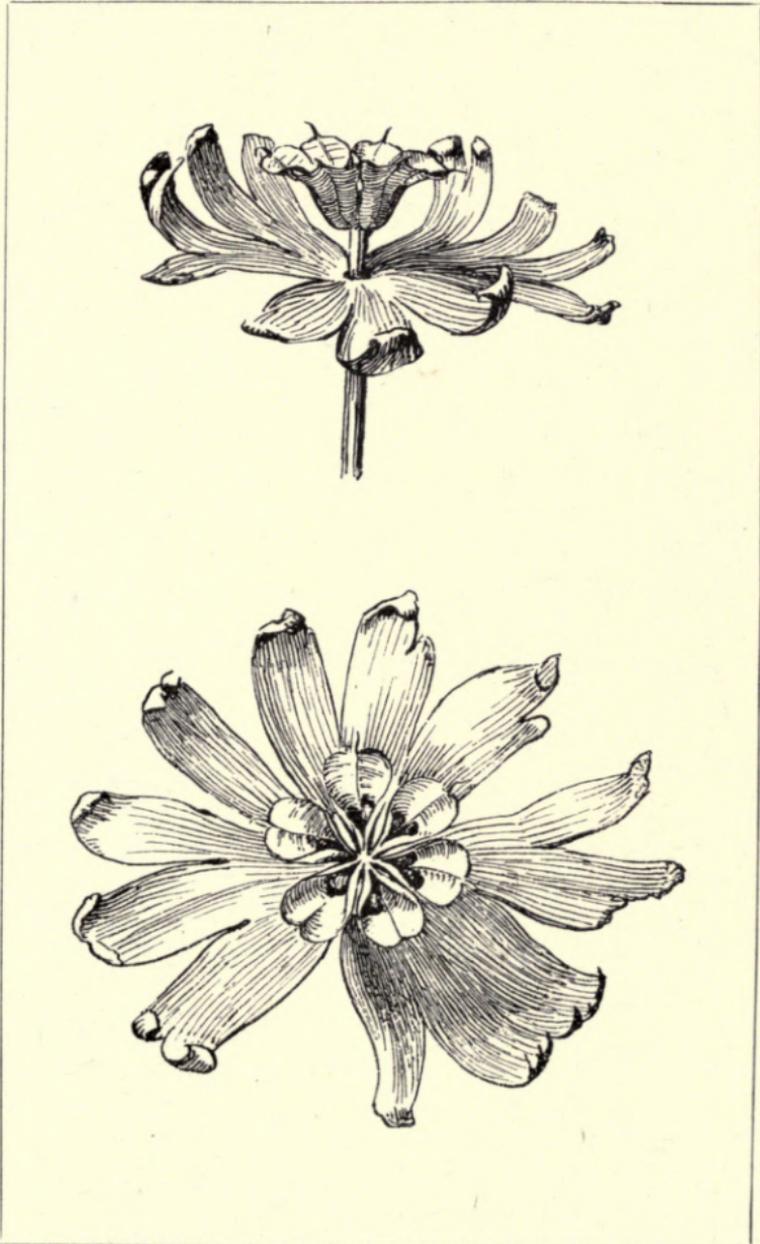
This violation of the facts and truths of nature is not confined alone to the representation of flowers, but is often displayed in other ways.

I noticed in a landscape this year a windmill going merrily round with one wind, whilst the clouds and some trees were evidently blown by quite another. It would do no harm to our painters if those who reviewed their works in the papers had sufficient intimacy with the ordinary truths of nature to be able to detect, at times, these misrepresen-

tations. Our greatest modern critic, who, alas, no longer writes, would never have passed over or tolerated such slovenly inaccuracies.

I must say, however, that many of our landscape painters display the greatest love and veneration for natural truth. Alfred Parsons and Ernest Waterlow, for example, being at all times thoroughly conscientious and trustworthy in their representations of nature. I think Waterlow's pair of pictures in No. VIII. room this year quite perfect in their truthfulness and beauty.

I send you a few more studies of seed pods which I have lately made. This one is that of a winter aconite, which I came across the other day ; I had never noticed the seed case of this little favourite of mine before and was greatly struck by its quaintness and beauty, either when viewed from above or from the side : the picturesque little frill which shields the flower as it emerges from the ground at its birth remains faithful even unto death. A



[To face page 170.]

SEED-CASE OF WINTER ACONITE.



similar faithfulness is displayed by the petals of the Christmas rose, they lose their lovely whiteness it is true, but remain in a leathery hard state around the cluster of seed pods to the very end. These seed pods



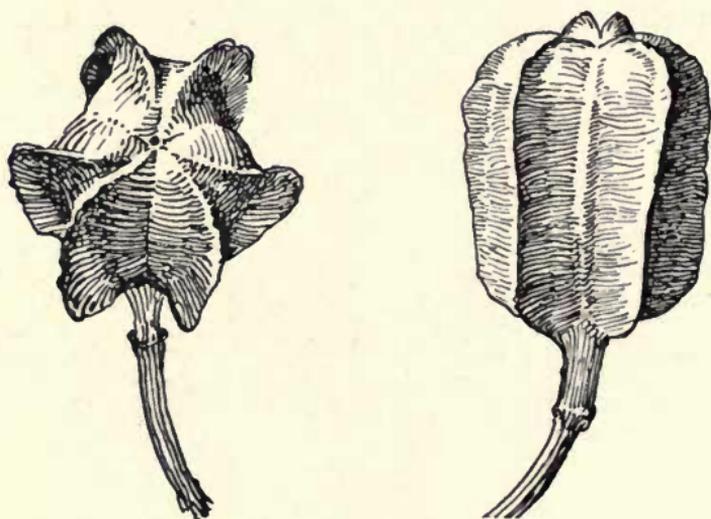
*Helleborus niger*



*Helleborus viridis*

look in my drawing rather like little sucking pigs at their meals; their shape is rendered perhaps more intelligible in the seed head of the green hellebore, where they look uncommonly like short stout pea pods. The green hellebore is a native of our country; my

root came from Bagley Wood, Oxford. The crown-imperial seed case speaks for itself, so like a knight's mace ; to show the projecting



Crown-imperial

flanges better I have drawn it from above as well as in elevation.

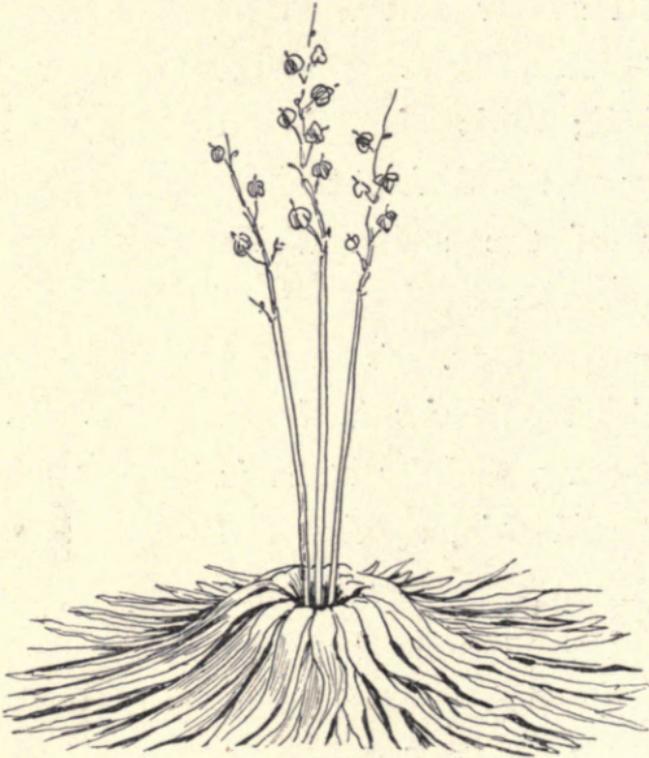
And here are some seed heads of the common wood hyacinth or bluebell ; they have a lot of picturesque drawing in them. The three-fold shape, so characteristic of all the lily tribe, is beautifully marked. These hyacinths sow themselves very freely,

many of my borders are quite pestered with their young seedlings. The little Siberian scilla also sows itself freely, but the seedlings do not spread so far and wide as do those of the common bluebell; this is chiefly owing to the different character of the stalks which support the seed cases of the two plants. The pod of *Scilla Siberica* is large and heavy, and its stalk is weak and thin, so that the pod when ripe lies on the ground and sheds its seed close to the parent bulb. The seed cases of the wood hyacinth, on the contrary, are supported on a tall stiff stalk which rises well above the decaying foliage. The foliage itself, as it dies, falls over and forms a sort of circular inclined plane around



Wood hyacinth

the stalk, on which the seeds, when they fall, roll down in every direction to the ground. This circular inclined plane is often very



Wood hyacinth run to seed

wide, so that the seeds are scattered to a distance from the parent bulb, and so the plant spreads and spreads until our woods and coppices are blue with the pretty flowers.

We are again experiencing a severe drought; and its effects are very serious to the farmers around here, where sheep-farming is one of the chief industries. The flocks depend largely on roots for their food in winter, and I have been told that unless we get some copious showers during the next fortnight the root crop will be entirely ruined, so you can imagine how anxiously the rain is longed for.

The long continued prevalence of northerly winds which has characterised the last six or seven years is very remarkable, and I cannot help associating it in some way with that peculiar white glare which has been so seldom absent from the sun during this period. This glare is seen, when there are no clouds about, pervading the sky, in the neighbourhood of the sun, most conspicuously in the mornings and evenings. I have pointed it out to friends here frequently, and am astonished that little or no notice is taken of it by those expert in meteorological matters.

As far as I have noticed this glare, it is rather more conspicuous when one of these spells of north wind sets in. These winds die away at night, when the sky is generally clear, and the thermometer low. In the mornings the sky is clear and there is no wind, but just as the sun gains power, about nine o'clock, the wind begins to blow with great force, sometimes bringing up clouds with it but very often blowing all day long with a clear sky. The drying up effect of the wind and sun together, with the coldness at night, have a most disastrous effect on all vegetable growth.

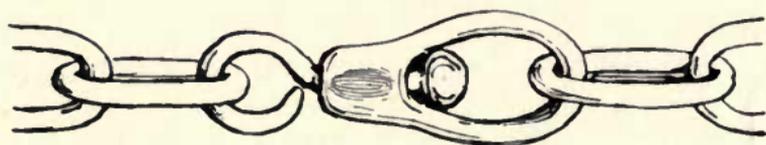
## LETTER XXIII

“The Shepherd’s Link”—Lilies—Curious Habits of their Bulbs  
—Greek Play at Bradfield College—Visit from a Young Owl—  
Owl’s Flight.

18th June, 1895.

DEAR MARCO—A few days ago, on a walk with my wife and some friends through the meadows, we came to a gate that was secured by a chain in which was what is called “A Shepherd’s Link.” To all appearances there was no possibility of undoing this chain unless this link could be opened. To save the ladies from having to climb the gate we tried in every possible way to solve the mystery of the fastening, but without success. On our return I was determined to have another try, and,

after some time, succeeded. The little secret was simple enough but extremely ingenious. I have drawn you a "Shepherd's Link" but do not intend to explain how it can be opened. The link is almost exactly like an ordinary chain swivel; its two parts move freely one within the other, but both are quite solid and simple in construction.



No force is required, and I have little doubt but that a shepherd could open it in a moment, even in the dark. I have repeatedly seen these links securing gate-chains in the country, and have climbed over without stopping to examine the fastenings, taking them for some sort of simple padlock which required a key.

Lilies have rather curious ways with them sometimes. Occasionally the bulbs will re-

main dormant in the ground for a whole season, springing up and flourishing the next year apparently all the stronger for their rest. About five years ago I planted two bulbs of a lily called *Pomponium verum*, which has pretty scarlet Turk's cap flowers; they flowered meagrely the first summer after planting; the next year they sent up plenty of foliage but very few blooms; the year after that they seemed to be in a very poor way indeed, and they never came up at all on the fourth year. Now, this year, there are three fine flowering spikes with one or two off-sets, all very vigorous and strong. A puzzling thing about these lilies is, that they have not come up in the place where they were originally planted; I put them in the very centre of the bed and now they are some at one edge and some at another. I am quite sure that the bed has not been disturbed by spade, trowel, or fork, and am at a loss to account for the apparent movement of the bulbs. Other bulbs are in this bed

beside the lilies—crocuses, scillas, and some Spanish irises; there are, too, some Iceland poppies; possibly the lilies have been crowded to one side by the growth around them.

We went over to Bradfield College last Thursday, to see the Greek play *Alceſtis*. No doubt you have read about these performances, which are given entirely in the open air in a well-constructed amphitheatre. The proscenium and all the accessories are designed with the utmost care and taste, the classic effect of the whole being very striking. All the while the performance was going on, when we were there, there was a lovely blue sky overhead, and sweet birds were singing amidst the wild rose-bushes and clematis, birch, ash, and walnut-trees, with which the summit of the amphitheatre is surrounded. In the centre of the semicircular pavement is an altar, on which incense is kept burning. The dresses of the actors and chorus are admirably designed and the colours most harmonious. The acting is animated and free

from conventionality. The female parts are taken by boys, skilfully made up. The musicians have quaint lyres and flutes. The chorus of old men sing their strophes and antistrophes to a droning air, moving in a slow measure all the time around the altar. All legs and arms are *really* bare, and the sandals are no made up things from the costumier's, but genuine ones which make a strange clattering when any quick movement takes place. I wished much you could have been there, as I feel sure you would have enjoyed it. Tadema was there on Saturday and was greatly delighted. This pretty revival is almost entirely due to the energy of the present Warden, who himself acted the principal part of King Admetus.

On Sunday night we were favoured by a visit from a young brown owl. My daughter noticed the bird first, as it was sitting on one of the window ledges on the side of our house which is next the road. We all went out to look at it; there was plenty of light

still, as it was but nine o'clock and the 16th of June. The bird seemed very tame and flew down on to the portico over the front door, then up on to the hood of a water-pipe, which was close to the window of the bath-



room. I went up there, opened the window, and looked out at the bird, which was scarcely three feet off; it did not fly away, but gave a juvenile "Tu-whee," and stared earnestly at my spectacles. I had a comfortable look at

the bird, its soft plumage and large eyes being very engaging. I made a sort of imitation of an owl's hoot, and the bird answered me in his own way directly. It remained about the house for some time, appearing at different windows. Country people have stupid prejudices against these birds, accounting them of ill omen ; for my own part I am so fond of their quaintness and exquisite plumage, to say nothing of the good they do, that I only look upon such a visit as this as a thing to be remembered thankfully.

This bird was, no doubt, a young one that had but just commenced to fly. Several pairs of brown owls nest near our house. My neighbour tells me that they have lately taken to building in the old elms in his garden. We also see owls in the sycamore tree, though I do not think that there are any nests. When an owl flies very close to any one the two things which startle most are the size of the head and broad wings of the bird, and the absolute noiselessness of its flight.

## LETTER XXIV

Running Water—Hereditary Love of Water—Boyhood of C. R.  
Leslie—Mad Turkey-Cock—The Spaniel and Hens—Ants—  
Ant-heaps—Eggs—Ant-heaps after Rain.

*9th July, 1895.*

DEAR MARCO—The fascination which running water has for me is, I believe, inherited from my father. The love of water as a means of recreation, is strongly felt not only by myself and my children, but by my brothers and their children as well.

My brother Bradford and I, as boys, were never happier than when engaged in making little dams and waterfalls across some small brook or other ; no walk much pleased us that did not lead either to or past some stream or river. Sailing boats and the sea are, as you

know, my eldest brother Robert's chief delight. My own children seem never tired of playing (messing?) about on the edge of the river; they care little for fishing compared to the delight of making little harbours, canals, &c., in the gravelly beach which is exposed when the river is low in summer time. Most of our family possess, too, a natural ability for mechanical science; we are all, as the Americans would say, "tinkers," a talent no doubt derived from my grandfather, who was distinctly a genius in this respect.

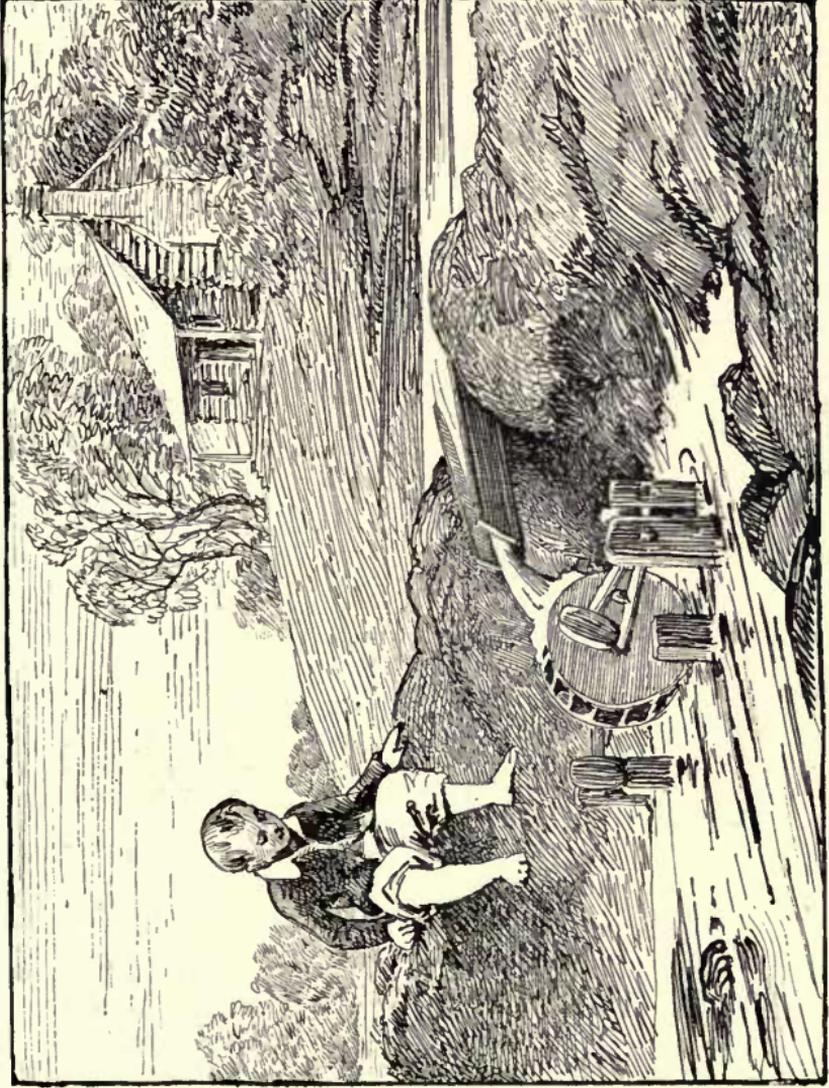
I have a sketch which my father made from recollection, of the happy days he spent as a boy in Chester county with his Uncle Ward, who had a farm and mill on a tributary of the Brandywine Creek, which proves that he had just this same delight in running water. His cousin had fixed for him, on a small stream, a little water-wheel with cams attached to its axle, which acted on two wooden hammers, causing them to rise and fall on little

anvils as the wheel went round and round with the water.

My father used to describe the delight that he took in this water-wheel, the pleasure he felt in watching it, and in paddling all day long barefoot about the brook. I have made a rough copy of his sketch for you, in the background is his uncle's log house.

My father told many stories of the happy times he spent with this uncle Ward ; amongst others I recollect one about a turkey cock who suffered in his old age from mental aberration, which took this comic form of showing itself. It one day scratched a large hole beneath an apple tree, and having rolled a number of apples into it, quietly settled itself down on them and sat there for days with the evident purpose of hatching them : nothing would persuade it to relinquish its self-imposed task until the apples all went rotten.

I heard a rather amusing story of a spaniel that belongs to a farmer living not far from here. The kennel of this dog is situ-



THE BOYHOOD OF C. R. LESLIE, R.A.

[To face page 186.]



ated in an orchard which is much frequented by poultry. In the mornings the spaniel lies outside his kennel—he always maintains a very friendly manner with the cocks and hens—and occasionally a hen will enter his kennel and there lay an egg. The dog never disturbs a hen who is thus occupied, but after she has layed her egg, finished her noise, and gone away, he enters the kennel and gobbles up the egg.

Just now the ants in my garden are very busy bringing up their eggs in piles to the surface of the ground, in order, as I suppose, that the sun's rays may warm and hatch them. Once or twice I have uncovered one of these subterranean piles, and taken all the eggs I could carry on a trowel and thrown them into the river. After which I have poured a can of cold water upon the place in order to drive the ants away by flooding the nest, but even after all this drastic treatment I have invariably found on visiting the spot that, in the course of a day or two, all the damage

seems to have been repaired and a fresh lot of eggs again heaped on the surface.

I have treated one nest in this way three times and yet to-day the ants are again placing a fresh pile of eggs on the top. From which I gather that though their perseverance and their fecundity are enormous their reasoning powers are very deficient.

It is this perpetual bringing up of the eggs to hatch in the warmth of the sun, which occasions the ant-hills in the meadows, for fine grains of earth are brought up each time, with the eggs, gradually forming large heaps.

After a heavy rain in summer time, a number of small ant-heaps are always seen on different parts of the lawn. Are these little heaps the proceeds of the repairs which have become necessary after the rain? If you examine these small piles you will generally find that they contain a few eggs. Have these been brought up to dry? Or if the heap were left alone would it in a short time become larger and contain more eggs? I

am disposed to believe it would, but how is it that this bringing up of eggs always first commences after a heavy rain? I never see any such little heaps on the lawn during a long dry hot spell of weather. The ants on the lawn all seem to be small red ones of the same sort as are found in meadows, in which, when the grass is cut, quite large ant-heaps are frequently laid open by the scythe, which operation discomforts the little red ants and blunts the scythe badly.

After a field has been mown starlings and other birds flock to it, so I expect that these dismantled heaps are part of the attraction.

## LETTER XXV

Grove End Road—Changes in St. John's Wood—Sir Edwin Landseer's House—T. H. Hills—Landseer's Butler—Anecdote of H.R.H. the Prince Consort—Description of Sir Edwin's Appearance—Miss Jessy Landseer—Sir Edwin's Garden—Original Cottage—New House—Studio—His Nervousness—Royal Portrait Picture—Birth of Twin Lambs—Landseer's Luggage—Kindness to Animals—Clipping Dogs' Ears—Hengler's Circus.

*6th August, 1895.*

DEAR MARCO—I was up in town last week and the week before, strange to say, staying at my old house in the Grove End Road. I went there to paint the portrait of a little granddaughter of Sir William Agnew. It was curious that I should be thus painting in my old studio, which I built, but which is no longer mine. In the afternoons I sometimes walked about the well-remembered neigh-

bourhood, in which I was born, and where you and I passed so many happy years with the "Boys of the Old St. John's Wood Brigade," now, alas! sadly diminished in number. Many changes have taken place, none perhaps more striking than the entire demolition of No. 18, St. John's Wood Road, Sir Edwin Landseer's house. The boundary walls of the garden were still up, but doomed; they were covered, it being the election time, with posters of the rival candidates for Marylebone. A few trees still stood in the garden, but of the house itself not one stone was left. In its place, already huge blocks of artisans' dwellings were rising, every available space being piled up with bricks and building materials.

I knew Sir Edwin all my life, and when I came to live in Grove End Road used to see him continually. In those days he suffered much from depression of mind, and when pressed in his work would send round for me

to come and help him, in some small way, with his pictures. I used to paint accessories for him, such as the checks on a Tartan shawl, or other objects of still life. Once I painted a hand holding a horse's bridle, Sir Edwin himself standing as my model. I put in also the yellow water-lilies in his picture of the *Fight between the Eagles and Swans*. Landseer always went over my work afterwards, with a big brush, to prevent its looking too neat and finished. He generally persuaded me to stay and lunch with him, after which he would sometimes go out with me, take a hansom, and drive all round Hampstead or Highgate to cheer and freshen himself up. He could not bear, at these times of depression, to be left alone, and I frequently stayed and dined with him, after which we played at billiards or went to the theatre. T. H. Hills,—“Dear Hills” as he was always called—was Landseer's greatest friend at that time; he looked after all his business affairs for him and did every-

thing for his health and comfort that his kind heart could possibly think of: Landseer loved him deeply, clinging to him as a nervous child does to its mother.

Landseer had an old servant, his butler, valet and faithful slave, named William, who knew and understood his master's ways and habits perfectly. Though Sir Edwin would bully this man at times, when he was put out, he thoroughly appreciated his usefulness and could not have got on at all without him. William was particularly assiduous in guarding the outer portal; no one could by any possibility gain direct access to Sir Edwin; not even though an appointment had been made. The answer would invariably be, "Sir Hedwin is not at home." H.R.H. the Prince Consort himself once received this answer when he called, amplified on that occasion by the assurance that "he had gone to a wedding," an entire fiction on William's part, as the Prince found out, for on walking boldly in and round the garden he noticed

Sir Edwin looking out of his studio window.

I paid so little regard to William's customary formula that at last he gave it up and would merely show me into the drawing-room and say that he would go and tell Miss Jessy. I had seldom long to wait before Landseer himself would appear, in an old home-spun shooting jacket; calico sleeves were tied on his arms like those that butchers' wear. He wore generally an old straw hat, the brim of which was lined with green, had his palette and brushes in his hand and looked extremely picturesque, reminding me strongly of some of the figures in Rembrandt's etchings. He did not, at once, speak, but would gaze at me with a queer scrutinising look, full of expression, for a moment or two, his lips beginning to quiver and move a little before the words came. He was always extremely kind and courteous in his manner. I was often struck by the great deference and politeness which he invariably showed to any

woman, whether a lady or not ; in short, his manners were those of a well-bred English gentleman.

Of his brilliance in society in general I have no need to tell, but it may be interesting to know that he was equally polished and amusing at his own table, though at it, besides himself, sat only his sister, one of his brothers, or some humble individual like myself. He was devotedly fond of his sister Jessy, and well he might be, for sure never man had a sister more self-sacrificing and affectionate.

The garden was very large and extended around the house on three of its sides ; it had been carefully planted with trees by Sir E. so as to shut out as many indications of other houses as possible. It reached from the St. John's Wood Road right to the canal, just where it issues from the Aberdeen Place tunnel. A well-grown silver birch grew in one part, which Landseer said he had brought from the Highlands as a seedling. There was also a fine old mulberry tree.

The original house when Landseer first came to live in St. John's Wood was quite a small cottage, rustic in character ; I have seen a sketch in water-colours of it done by Miss Jessy. St. John's Wood Road in those days was quite in the country ; on the other side of the way, to the east where now is Lord's Cricket Ground, was a sort of dairy-farm with barns, haystacks, and pigstyes ; in this place Landseer made many studies of cows, horses, pigs, &c.

Landseer, after living in the cottage for some time, at last pulled it down and built the house which was the one I remember. It was small but rather aristocratic and dignified in aspect ; it had two large rooms which served for studios, a billiard-room, a drawing-room, and a tiny dining-room, this last small room was lit by a skylight and the walls were decorated with masterly sketches in charcoal by Sir Edwin's own hand.

Landseer used only one of the large studios, the other being generally filled with lumber ;

the one he painted in was lit by a large ordinary window, with the lower part covered up : it was a gloomy looking place, the light just focussed on the easel at which he worked, whilst darkness brooded over the rest of the room, in which were other easels with canvases on them that were abandoned for the time. There was not the slightest attempt at decoration or adornment anywhere about the place. He had holland cloths fixed to the top edge of all his canvases, which he pulled down over his work the moment he left it. He moved his largest pictures about his room by himself, and resented any offers of assistance. In an armchair near a gloomy-looking stove his collie bitch "Lass" generally lay curled up.

Landseer was painfully nervous about showing his work to any one ; sometimes he would only allow you to see it as reflected in the large glass. It was dangerous to make any remark, even though it might be in praise, as I once found out to my great

regret. I had expressed my admiration for a beautifully painted group of dead ptarmigan, hares, &c., in a picture of his which also contained many people's portraits; the next morning I was extremely astonished and mortified at finding the whole group rubbed out, some rocks and heather being substituted in its place. I asked him why he had done this, as the group had appeared to me so exquisitely painted; he replied, "Yes, that's just it, I am not going to have the fellows say how much better I can paint fur and feathers than flesh."

The picture on which this destruction took place was that large one of the Queen and the Prince Consort with the Prince of Wales, Lady Jocelyn, and a number of Highland attendants, which no doubt you remember was exhibited in the exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1870. It had been exhibited once before in a somewhat unfinished state in 1854. I remember quite well that it looked a much finer picture

7<sup>th</sup> April 1870

Dear George

As you kindly consented  
to lend me your aid for  
an hour I hope you can afford  
to make good your intention  
one hour - I am so  
guided by Q. Commands  
and W. suggestions ~~that~~  
that I am indeed a  
Crazy 'nny thrice and  
the Boat picture are to

Jo & kinders on Monday  
11<sup>th</sup> Jo returns on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

What I ask you to do  
is - a bore of you - but  
will - make me to finish  
I improve the background  
if the lightness <sup>you</sup> want - (thus <sup>is</sup>)



and me know before  
~~before~~ Monday afternoon

is enough for me -

- I hope this may find  
you still a neighbor,

Dear Sir,

Sincerely yours

Danvers.



then in every respect than it did on its second appearance. I feel sure that the trouble that Landseer had over this picture did more than anything else to hasten his death. It had been in his studio for so many years that some of the personages portrayed in it were dead and the others of course greatly altered ; he had worked on the faces from time to time, often without nature, and had made so many alterations that the surface was utterly ruined, the freshly added colour sinking in and becoming opaque and heavy a few days after it was put on. He used to scrape out with bits of glass, which were broken to a curved scimitar shape, and the floor in front of this picture was frequently covered with paint scrapings.

This picture was not sent to the Academy until the day before the Private View ; it arrived quite early in the morning, when the servants were cleaning the rooms. Sir Edwin asked me to accompany him, to see his work in its place, and we drove to the Academy

together. After looking nervously at his picture for a few moments he took my arm and went round the other rooms of the exhibition ; I was struck by the kindly interest he took on this occasion in the works of others, particularly those by younger men, praising them sincerely and freely, and making inquiries of me as to the personalities of the painters ; this evinced much large-heartedness on his part when one knew how bitterly disappointed and distressed he must have felt about his own picture all the time.

To pass to more cheerful recollections, in his garden at one time I remember a hind was tethered, at another a ewe came to stay with Sir Edwin about which he related an interesting occurrence, imitating his man William's voice. A knock came to Landseer's bedroom door one morning before he was out of bed, " Please Sir Hedwin, the old sheep 'as 'ad a little lamb." " Very well, I'll be down directly ;" presently another knock, " Please Sir Hedwin, the old sheep 'as 'ad

another little lamb," which was the fact, and these St. John's Wood born lambs afterwards became the models for the picture entitled *Twins*.

Landseer had another story of how his man came, one morning, to him with "Please, Sir Hedwin, did you horder a lion?" The fact being that one that had died at the Zoo had been sent in a four-wheeled cab to Landseer to paint from.

Sir Edwin said that when he travelled he never troubled about his luggage, as William was always most anxious as to its safety, getting out at all big stations and junctions, and making inquiries of the guard about it. "How about them luggage?" "Well, what's it like?" says the guard. "Why it's as black as hink with a Hell on it."

Landseer had a good ear, was a first-rate mimic, and could imitate almost any voice either of man or brute. He was a true friend to all animals; it was, I believe, chiefly owing to his suggestion that limbs

of trees were placed in the dens of the larger carnivora at the Zoo, and I well remember how eagerly he took up the cause of the dogs against their cruel mutilators in the matter of ears, writing to the papers some very characteristic letters. To one advocate of the practice, who in a letter to the *Field* had stated that clipping the ears of dogs gave them in his opinion a clever look, Landseer replied that if this writer really thought so, he had better have his own ears clipped as no doubt it would make him look very clever. He abhorred bearing reins and all such abominations. I remember him once, at Hengler's Circus, going on bitterly at the manner the horses' heads were reined in, and testifying his delight when in one scene a pony had its head given it free from all reins.

This is scarcely one of my usual D.B. letters, but the sight of the old place recalled so many memories that I could not resist recording them in one of these letters to you.

## LETTER XXVI

Evening Primroses—Their Purity—*Enothera Tarraxifolia*—*Æ. Missouriensis*—*Æ. Fructicosa*—*Æ. Odorata*—The Mock Orange—Beauty of its Bloom—Arranging Flowers—Want of Taste in Floral Decoration—Pretty Combinations.

14th August, 1895.

DEAR MARCO—Hardly any flowers, that I know, equal the evening primrose in its exquisite purity: a charm which is, no doubt, owing to the fact that their blooms are so suddenly expanded and of so short duration. To enjoy their spotless purity in perfection you must rise very early in the morning; it is generally too dark when they first open, in the evening, to see them properly, and they go off very soon after mid-day. These flowers must expand very

rapidly; one might almost imagine that if you were to sit and watch, a distinct motion would be apparent. In the morning the bud is but a tight roll, about an inch and a half or two inches long; late in the afternoon it is a lovely funnel-shaped cup often three inches across.

The colour has a luminous quality that no pigment we possess can at all approximate; generally of a delicate pure yellow, but sometimes white. *Æ. tarraxifolia* has very large white blooms, which are quite startling when you come upon them unexpectedly in the evening; the foliage greatly resembles that of the dandelion, hence its name, but the habit of the plant is straggling and untidy, which, together with the fact that the blooms change to a rather dull pink as they go off, somewhat detracts from the value of the plant in my eyes. *Ænothera missouriensis* has yellow flowers nearly as large as *Æ. tarraxifolia*, the foliage being compact and of a lovely sub-

dued green with stems of a coral colour ; it is a very satisfactory plant, and when grown on the edge of a wall, coming up through a carpeting of stone-crop, as mine is, nothing can exceed its beauty. The flowers of *Æ. mis.* as they go off change to a rich orange colour, which in no way injures the general effect in the daytime. I care not for the tall biennial *Ænothera biennis*, as the fading blooms on this are too much in evidence, suggesting a slatternly woman in curl-papers. The little perennial, *Æ. fructicosa*, commonly known as "sun-drops," is a capital plant for the border ; its blossoms last well through the day and are produced in great abundance ; but it must have either a wet season or plenty of watering to keep it thriving in perfection, as if it gets dry it droops and looks miserable directly. It blooms earlier in the year than most of its family do, in May and June with me. Then there is a delightful annual sort, *Æ. odorata*, sweet-scented as its name

implies. I sowed some patches of this rather more, I think, than eight years ago, and though I have sown none since, I have never been without numbers of self-sown plants, coming up amidst the general tangle in the autumn, which are ever welcome, not alone for their lively beauty and profusion of bloom, but for their sweet scent, which is of a purity and innocence in harmony with their aspect, and which greatly resembles that of the cowslip. It is most refreshing, as the autumn comes on, to be thus reminded that there is such a period as spring. Most of the evening primroses seed very freely, some night-feeding insect no doubt doing the necessary fertilisation. The corolla of *Æ. tarraxifolia* is joined to the ovary by quite five inches of slender tube; the stamens are situated round the entrance of this tube, the pistil going down its entire length; on page 75 of my former Letters is a drawing of its curiously-shaped seed-pod.



[To face page 206.]

ENOThERA MISSOURIENSIS,



There are numbers of flowers, like the evening primroses, that can only be seen in their true glory as they grow. The blossom of the beautiful mock orange or syringa (*Philadelphum grandiflora*) is never satisfactory when gathered, but a bush in full bloom as seen against a blue sky affords one of the most lovely visions that any garden can produce; to my mind it surpasses both cherry and apple-blossom; there is a creamy character about the white flowers which renders them more harmonious against the blue than the pure white of the cherry, and I prefer their serene beauty to the gaiety of the apple-blossom.

The bushes throw up overhead strong arching shoots, often six or eight feet long, thickly laden with scented flower clusters, each in individual detail equalling in beauty the orange blossom of the bridal bouquet. Beyond this one glorious display the shrub has little to boast of in the way of interest.

As far as I can see it has no berries or

seed-pods, its foliage is in no way remarkable, and the long arching shoots, devoid of bloom, present a straggling and untidy appearance. It is no evergreen, and is seldom selected as a nesting place by birds, but it is thoroughly hardy, needs no care, and never fails in its one glorious display, unless when grown in a smoky atmosphere, being essentially a country subject.

Although I am really fond of plants and flowers I am a wretched hand at arranging them prettily when cut. I believe I am too anxious about it, as sometimes, quite by accident, when I throw the flowers together without any definite idea or plan pretty combinations occur. Some people have a gift in this matter. Most ladies *think* they can do it well, but really very few excel in the art. The flower arrangements at dinner tables are seldom in perfect taste; there is great lack of originality as well, any pretty idea as to combination being imitated *ad nauseam*. To my mind flowers on a table are seldom treated

as reverently as they deserve to be ; as a rule people are far too lavish in the use they make of flowers for decorative purposes. A few set off and telling at their best are worth hundreds squandered by vulgar opulence.

After all, flowers look far best when seen growing, especially if they are allowed to have their own way, sow themselves, and struggle amongst one another in sweet confusion ; the beauty of the more brilliant being greatly enhanced by the neutral tints of their surroundings, towards which setting-off even decay assists, as well as do numberless plants of sober tints and bizarre character ; such, for instance as *Gypsophila paniculata*, sea lavender, plume poppy, sea holly, mullein, rosemary, lavender, sedums, saxifrages and the like.

My niece, Katie, has a great natural gift for flower arrangement, she has placed, to-day, a beaker filled with a huge bunch of gypsophila, amongst which are a dozen of

the steely blue heads of the globe thistle ; as seen against a background of Dutch tiles the effect of this is extremely captivating. She wanders about my garden in the morning, in a quiet sort of way, picking up here and there little unconsidered trifles, with which she manages afterwards to produce charming and novel combinations. It is wonderful what she can do with the fading foliage of the pœony in late autumn. In fact I am continually being delighted and surprised by her graceful ingenuity.

## LETTER XXVII

Neighbour's Rookery Deserted—Reasons for—Kingfisher—Its Flight—Hovering—Kingfisher in India—Kingfisher's and Humming Bird Moth's Wings Compared—Wych Elms—Gainsborough's Tree—Sudbury—The Seaside.

*24th August, 1895.*

DEAR MARCO—My neighbour's rookery this year has been entirely deserted. In the spring some nests were begun as usual, but a severe gale in April carried away one or two, and shortly afterwards the rest were abandoned by the old birds. He tells me that there has been a marked decrease in the number of nests each year lately; and now the trees are completely forsaken. One or two reasons are suggested for this desertion, first, the old and oft-repeated opinion, that it is because the practice of shooting the young

rooks had been given up for several years. Next, that the great flood last year, and the severity and frequency of the gales of wind in the springs of recent years, had alarmed the rooks as to the safety of the trees, which are very near the edge of the river; and a third reason was, that possibly it was owing to the fact of several pairs of brown owls having taken up their abode in the trees close to the rookery. As to these owls, I believe that they came across the river to build in my neighbour's garden in the spring of last year, frightened out of their usual nesting places in some elms by the hammering and noise of the preparations for the Agricultural Show, just as were the wood-pigeons mentioned in a former letter.

I can hardly suppose, however, that the rooks would have cared a bit for the owls, though possibly they may have objected to having their night's rest disturbed by their hooting.

I see "our" kingfisher now frequently.

The flight of this bird is, I am quite sure, more remarkable for its absolute straightness than for its swiftness. The evenness and well-sustained rapidity of the beat of its wings, set far back on the awkwardly shaped body, is the chief characteristic of the bird's flight: it never closes its wings to make a swoop, or flies in undulating curves, as swallows and many other birds do.

As to the occasional hovering of the kingfisher alluded to in Letter XIII. of my former series, a friend, Colonel Luard, writes to me: "In India the gray kingfisher, which is the one most frequently seen, invariably hovers so far as I know, but I should have said with his beak almost vertically downwards. The fluttering of the wings is extremely rapid."

The position of the wings on the kingfisher is very much like that of the wings on a humming-bird moth, and as this hovers continually in its flight, it seems reasonable to suppose that the bird could also hover easily.

I have several wych elms in my garden, three of them on the edge of the river, over which their branches hang and bend down in the most graceful manner. The foliage and habit of this tree is excessively beautiful, a great contrast to that of the ordinary hedge-row elm, which has been characterised by Professor Ruskin as "sticking its elbows out in an awkward fashion." The leaves are longer and more pointed than those of the common elm, and the branches have a tendency to weep. This is the tree which Gainsborough so frequently introduces into his backgrounds, and which he renders by a flimsy conventional sort of execution which is familiar to all lovers of his works. At times his rendering of the tree is objectionable from its extreme carelessness, but it is never without a distinct indication of the character of the tree intended to be represented.

Until I had been to Sudbury, his birthplace, in Suffolk, I never gave Gainsborough credit for much attempt at truth to nature in the

treatment of his foliage. But in the beautifully wooded and undulating parks and meadows, which abound in that vicinity, the prevailing tree is the wych elm, and I was reminded of his lovely landscapes and backgrounds on every side. If a man has any soul at all the trees he knew best as a boy remain his favourites to the end of his life.

We leave here next week for a change of air at the seaside. Much I grudge it, as I cannot bear to be away from my garden for any length of time. Boscombe, near Bournemouth, is our destination, but one seaside place is as bad as another to me now ; after the first three days' pleasure in inhaling the ozone, the monotony and seasidedness of the thing palls on me dreadfully.

## LETTER XXVIII

Boscombe—Christchurch—Old and Modern Work—Scenery at Bournemouth—The Sweet Chestnut Tree—Titian's Tree—Beauty of Sweet Chestnut Tree—Hop Poles—Impressionist School of Landscape Painters—Martins Hawking over the Sea.

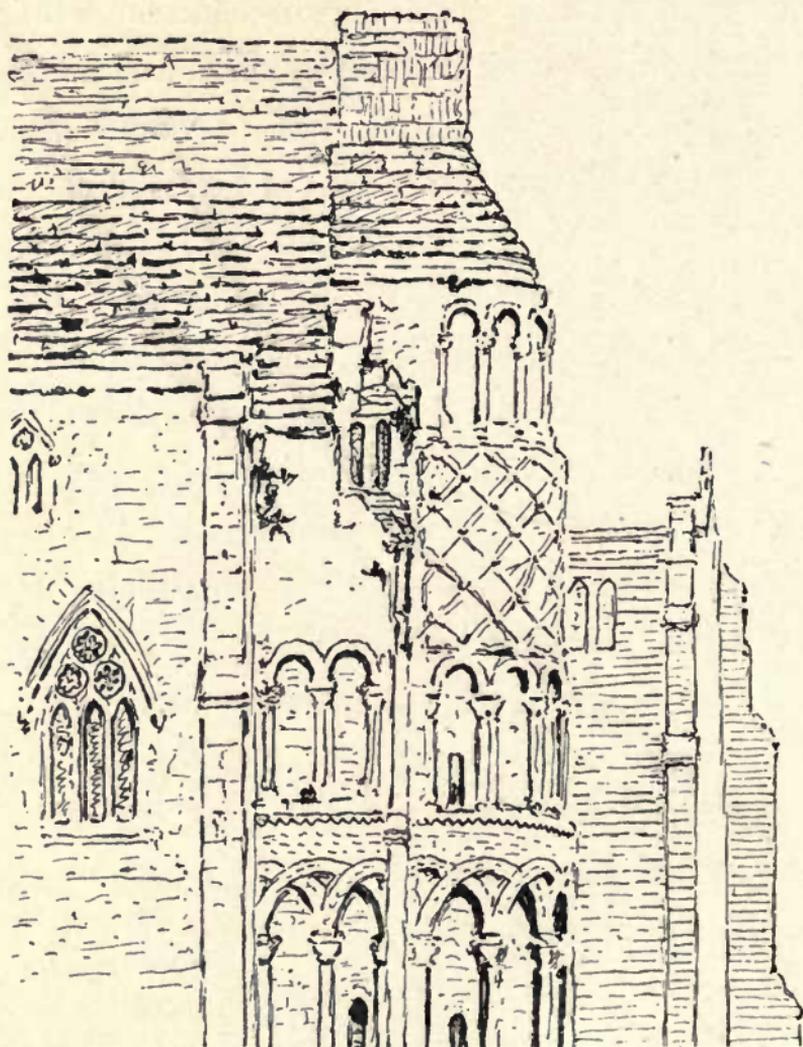
*12th September, 1895.*

DEAR MARCO—Many happy returns of the day (to-morrow)\* to you. We are still at the seaside, but return, probably, next week to Wallingford. I have enjoyed this place more than I anticipated, chiefly owing to the wonderfully warm and summerlike weather that has continued ever since we have been here. By far the best thing in this neighbourhood is the Abbey Church at Christchurch, which reminds me much of St. Albans before

\* The 13th of September, Mr. Marks's birthday.

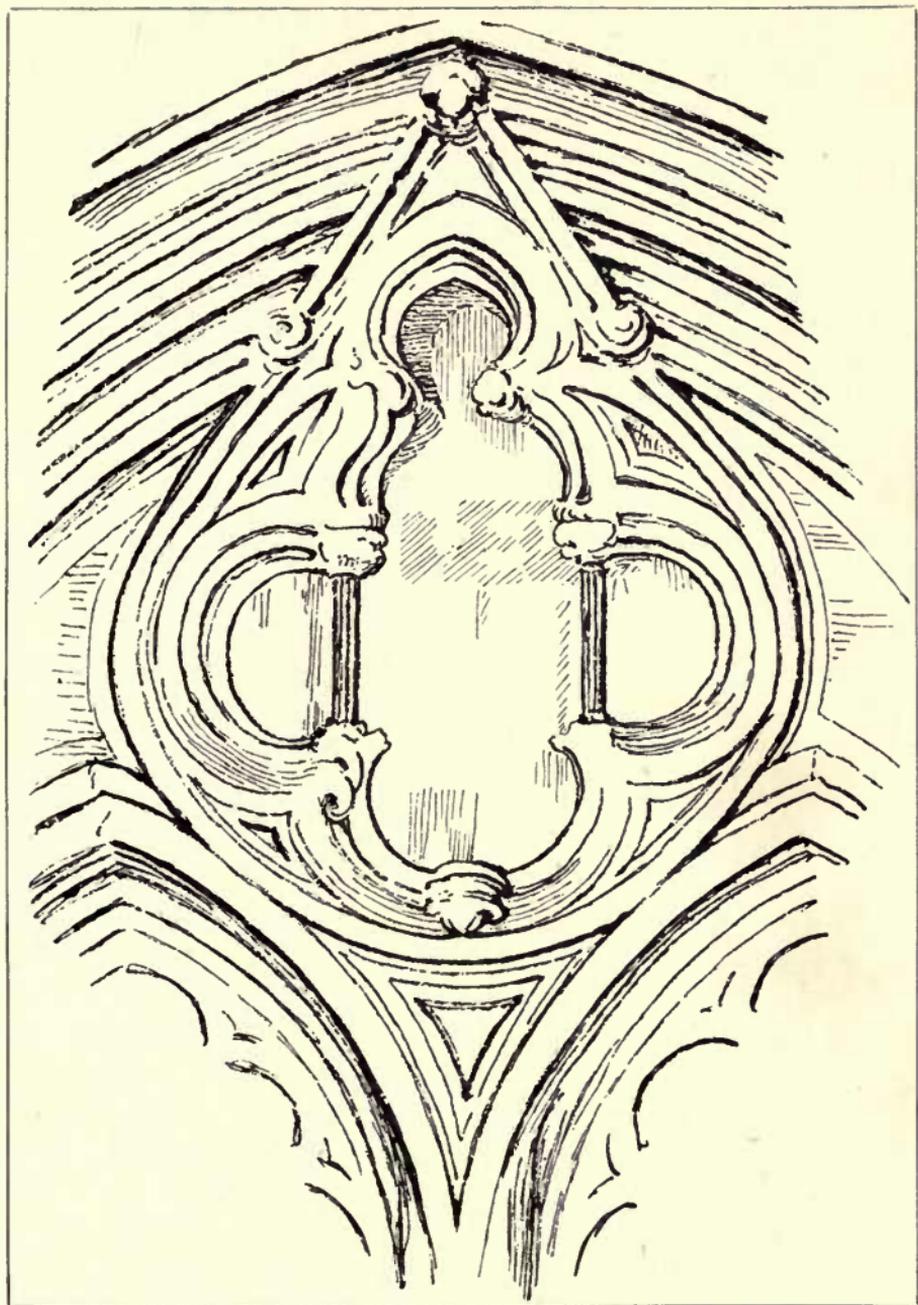
it was spoilt. The carving in the choir, the Norman work in the nave and the north-west porchway, which is early decorated, are all very well worth seeing. I made a couple of little outline sketches, one of the little canopied quatrefoil in the porch and another from the northern end of the transept, which I enclose, though I dare say you know the place well. Whilst drawing in the porchway I was much struck by the contrast of some restored mouldings to the older work; the old work had the look of being all alive and growing, whilst the other seemed as dead as the stone it was carved in. I could not convey this living look to the lines of my sketch try all I knew, though I think I could have given something of it if I had taken a week over it with colour and brushes.

The coast scenery in this neighbourhood must have been wonderfully fine before the public found out Bournemouth; sandy gorse-clad cliffs and chines of the most picturesque character, as good as Hampstead Heath in the



North Transept, Christchurch.

days of our youth, backed up by pine-woods with undergrowth of bracken and brambles.



*[To face page 218.]*

FROM THE NORTH PORCH, CHRISTCHURCH.



One or two patches, here and there, still remain, but the rest has been badly raddled by villas, huge hotels, lodging-houses, rows of shops, roads, lamp-posts and corporation gardens—buildings of one sort and another extending along the coast for more than seven miles of what must have been its prettiest part. Every villa, large or small, rejoices in some fine-sounding name, and has from one to a great number of the indigenous pine-trees still standing in its garden or grounds. To me it seems very sad, but I suppose it cannot be helped. The beach and bathing are splendid, however, and my children, who I am glad to say are all strong swimmers, enjoyed themselves immensely.

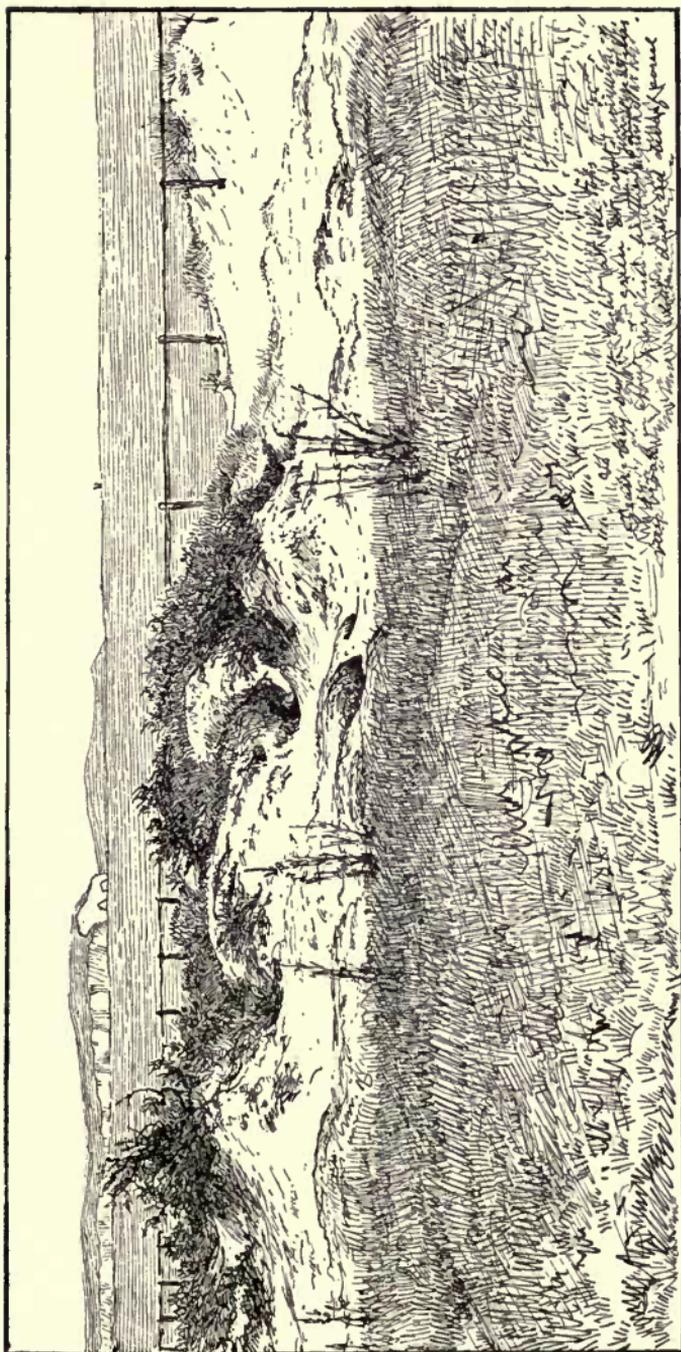
In my last letter I wrote about the wych elm as essentially Gainsborough's tree, some fine young sweet chestnuts that I noticed in this neighbourhood reminded me that this may truly be considered Titian's tree, for it is the one he most frequently introduces in his backgrounds. These trees, I am told, flourish

abundantly in the vicinity of his birthplace, and thus, as in Gainsborough's case, the tree familiar to Titian as a boy became the favourite one throughout his long life. He is especially fond of representing this tree in its picturesque old age as a gnarled stump from which shoot out a lusty young growth of branch and foliage ; a habit of rejuvenescence which is one of the great charms of the sweet chestnut. Titian loved the tree, as well for its grand and laurel-like foliage, its massive yet graceful form, the lustre and richness of the colour of its leaves, and the swing and curves of its branches. Here, in England, we ought to have many more of these trees than we do, in our parks and plantations. They are abundant in parts of Kent. I recollect some very fine ones in a park near Brenchley, and numbers are grown as saplings in the coppices and woods in the vicinity of the hop-districts, for these chestnuts make the best of hop-poles, lasting longer, I was told, than those made from hazel or any other

tree. The foliage, especially when the fruit begins to show, is beautiful from any point of view, but as seen against a deep blue sky, with a white cloud or two on it, the effect is perfectly glorious; both Titian and Paul Veronese often so introduced it into their pictures. The foliage of this tree will not stand any scamping or sketchy treatment, it demands great mastery of drawing and vigorous colouring, or the effect of its grandeur is lost. One seldom sees it represented in the works of the modern impressionist school of landscape painters, who prefer trees such as the willow or poplar, that can be fairly well suggested by smudges of tone with dabs of light behind them. The Spanish chestnut cannot be *suggested*, it can only be rendered in its massive dignity by the patience of true genius.

I noticed one day last week a number of sand-martins hawking over the sea, some distance from the shore, just as they do over our river. I was puzzled to know what they

could be after ; I went out in a boat afterwards with my boys, and we noticed a number of little winged ants flying over the waves, some fallen into the water too. The wind was from off the shore and it was a very hot day, and no doubt there must have been some ant-swarmling going on amongst the sandy pine-woods from which these winged ants had got carried out to sea. The sand-martins every now and then took dips in the water ; I at first thought that they did this to clean themselves from vermin, preparatory to their long flight, but I am convinced now that they were really after the little flies which they snapped up from the surface at times.



THE ISLE OF WIGHT, FROM BOSCOMBE.

[To face page 222.]



## LETTER XXIX

Vagaries of Plants owing to Warm Autumn—Glowworms—Visit to Langford—The Church—A Vested Crucifix—Restorations—The Parvise—Old Michaelmas Day—“Flitting”—Apples—The Quince—Marmalade—Recipe from Gerard—Late Songs of Birds.

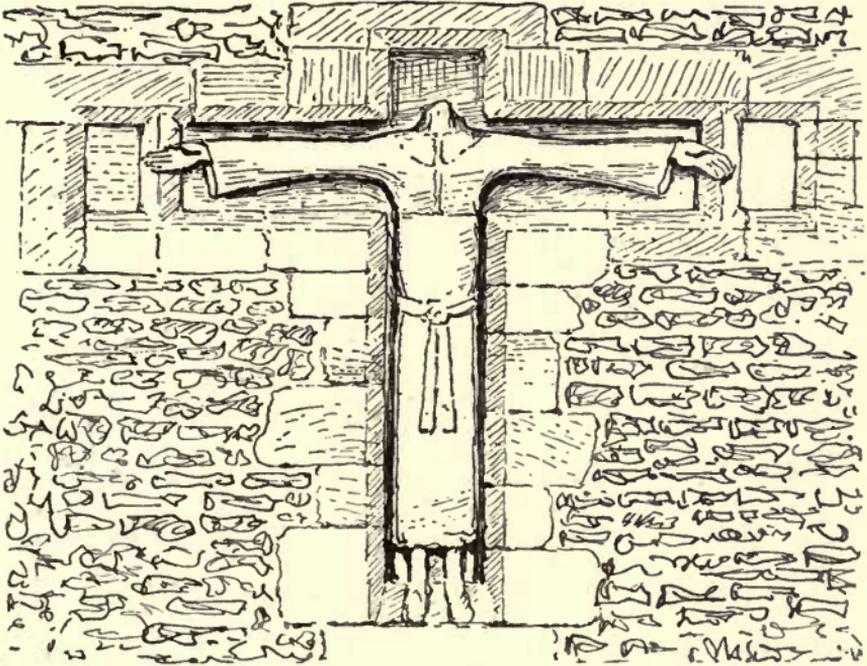
14<sup>th</sup> October, 1895.

DEAR MARCO—Many letters have appeared in the papers giving accounts of the vagaries of plant life which have taken place in consequence of the extraordinary warmth which prevailed during the last month. I noticed some such phenomenal events in our garden, as, for instance, an apple-tree with ripe fruit and fresh blossom on it, a second crop of raspberries, and a laburnum with patches of blossom and young leaves here and there, whilst the seed-pods were still hanging on it.

This lovely autumn recalls to my mind the fortnight in October that you and I spent at Wargrave years ago. I remember the number of glow-worms that we saw then ; they are just as plentiful in this neighbourhood at present. My daughter brought one home yesterday, as well as one of those luminous centipedes about which I wrote in Letter VIII. (former series). I put both these creatures into the garden, they seemed very lively and well, but I hardly think that we shall see them any more, judging from the failure of former similar experiments.

My wife and I paid a short visit last week to some friends residing at Langford, a small village in the south-west corner of Oxfordshire, not very far from W. Morris's house at Kelmscot. The church at Langford is an extremely interesting one, parts of the structure being possibly of Saxon work, or at any rate very early Norman. Its chief curiosity is a "vested" crucifix, which is on the outside of the east wall of the porch. The figure is sunken in a sort of panel, the bounding stones

of which are evidently as old as the figure itself, for several of them are of that pinky-coloured stone so commonly seen in the old



Vested Crucifix at Langford Church.

Norman churches of Oxfordshire and Berkshire. The figure is life-size, the head missing, the body clothed in a long tunic with a girdle round the loins. The arms are perfectly horizontal, the feet separate and straight, and there are no nails or wounds in

either the hands or feet. I do not think that this figure has always been in the place where it is now, most probably it was originally on an inner wall of the church itself; the present porch appears to be of comparatively modern date, perhaps built in the time of Queen Elizabeth when the church was restored; the crucifix itself was in all likelihood carved in the seventh century. This vested crucifix is unique in our islands; there are several in France and Italy, and a few in Germany. No crucifix *at all* is known earlier than the sixth century, and up to the end of the seventh century the figure was always entirely clothed, as this one is. Sometimes a crown (not of thorns) is seen on the head, and rich embroidery on the vestment. After the seventh century the vestment was shortened, and in time a sort of kilt remained as the only clothing. The realistic treatment of the crucifix is, comparatively, quite a modern idea, the figure never having been represented as hanging from the nailed hands, or crowned with thorns, until the thirteenth cen-

tury. Up to that time the arms were horizontal, the feet separate, and the loins amply clothed.

On the front of the porch, over the entrance, is another crucifix, also empanelled, of a later period than the other. It bears unmistakable evidence of having been removed at some time, as the arms of our Lord and the figures of St. John and the Virgin have been reversed, the left hand stones having taken the place of those on the right, and *vice versâ*, which gives the arms a very ugly appearance, whilst the figures below look away from the cross instead of towards it. Over this porch, or a much older one, there has been a *parvise* or priest's room, the entrance to which, with the steps of ascent, are still plainly visible on the wall inside the church. On the tower, which is very old and massive, there are the remains of a sundial with two little figures supporting it; these figures look to me very like some of those in the Bayeux tapestry.

I went, on my friend's tricycle, to see another old church not very far off, which, though cruelly restored, has a lovely stone spire and a decorated Norman porch of highly elaborated design. It was old Michaelmas Day, and all the country people were, as is the custom, on the move. They call this day here "Flitting Day." I remember that in Denmark there is also such a day, which is called "Flit Dag." I met in every direction those large picturesque farm wains, which are yellow and red in colour, and beautiful in line and curve; the farmers goodnaturedly lend these to the moving cottagers, who pile them up with their household goods; one such wain, with sometimes a two-wheeled cart, holding the whole family possessions comfortably. The goods were of a curiously mixed description: chests of drawers, fire-irons, bundles of bedding, faggots, tubs of cabbage plants and flowers; generally a magpie or a blackbird in a cage, with women and children on the top of all. The entire day is given up to

this flitting business, little or no work going on in the fields ; the cottagers who are not themselves moving, stand about gossiping at their garden gates and chaffing the passing flitters. I am told that old Michaelmas Day is " Flit Day " for agricultural cottagers all over England, but I have never noticed the occurrence myself before.

It has been a wonderful season for apples and pears ; ours have been very fine and plentiful. I am not sure but that I admire an apple-tree in fruit almost as much as one in blossom, there is a solidity in the glory of the fruit which is very satisfactory ; and the contrast it affords when seen against a deep blue sky is even more beautiful than that of the blossom. More beautiful still than even the apple-tree when seen thus, is a quince-tree with its handsome foliage and magnificent golden fruit ; such a one grows in the Rev. C. Wodehouse's garden at Langford, on the lawn ; I can give you no idea how splendid it looked in the autumn sunshine. The colour of the fruit is a delicious mixture

of gold and lemon, overladen here and there with the dusky grey *down* which is so characteristic of the quince, and which gives it its Latin and Italian names of *Malus Cotonea* and *Mele cotogne* (Gerard).

What good jelly and marmalade quinces make! Alice has this year made a quantity from the quinces off my own tree, which is only a small one at present, but when its roots get down to the level of the brook by which it is planted it will grow rapidly. The smell of quinces, when gathered, is rather overpowering in a room, but on a sunny day the scent from a tree with ripe fruit on it is most delicious as you pass it by. By the way, true *marmalade* is made of quinces, what we generally know as such ought to be called "*orange marmalade*"; I found this out from Gerard, who gives the Spanish names for the quince, *Membrillos* and *Marmellos*. He gives also the following good recipe: "Take faire Quinces, pare them, cut them in peeces, and cast away the core, then put unto every pound of Quinces a

pound of Sugar, and to every pound of sugar a pint of water: these must be boiled together over a still fire untill they be very soft, then let it be strained or rather rubbed through a strainer, or an hairie sieve which is better, and then set it over the fire to boile againe, untill it be stiffe, and so boxe it up, and as it cooleth put thereto a little rose water, and a few grains of muske, well mingled together, which will give a goodly taste unto the Cotiniat. This is the way to make Marmalade."

A few martins still hawk over the river, and the starlings and robins make the garden cheerful, the first with the wonderful "variety entertainment" which they give every morning, and the second with their sweet little autumnal songs. I never recollect seeing such numbers of gnats as during the last fortnight, but, I am happy to say, they do not come into the house very much.

## LETTER XXX

Frost—Weeds—Drawing of Farringdon Street by G. P. Boyce—  
Grass—Over the Smoking-Room at the Athenæum Club—  
Twitch Grass—Running Grass—Gull and Carrion Crow—Berry  
of Lily-of-the-Valley.

*26th November, 1895.*

DEAR MARCO—The wind has nipped everything in my garden, so that it is absolutely flowerless now. The previous cold snap, on the 26th and 27th of last month, had, however, already finished off most things ; my favourite China roses suffered especially, in spite of the mild weather that followed. I have not picked a bud from them since ; often in other years I have gathered lovely bunches in December. My wild chrysanthemums in the glasshouse come in very usefully this year, they are

wonderfully full of bloom ; I have gathered again and again, literally, armfuls, and still quantities remain : these and the pyracantha berries are nearly the only things we have for indoor decoration.

There is very little work for me in the flower borders at present, except tidying up and weeding, and even that is now stopped by the bitter wind, it is so strong that it even prevents me from enjoying the delicious perfume of the bonfires, which at this season are continually burning, but which require a calm, still, misty day for their true appreciation. As to weeds, I have come to the conclusion that the only way to keep the borders free from them is to allow no space for them to grow in ; to have every inch of the ground covered with cultivated plants ; no bare spaces of mould showing anywhere, at any rate during the spring and summer. It is astonishing how soon nature clothes with vegetation all bare places even in the most unlikely spots. In that beautiful water-colour

drawing which I have, by G. P. Boyce, (a view of Farringdon Street and Smithfield, taken at the time when enormous blocks of houses were removed to make room for the underground railway), there is a great heap of sandy earth and rubbish in the foreground over which delicate young grass and weeds have already spread themselves. It was, I am convinced, the sight of this effort of nature to reassert herself, as much as anything else, that caused the artist to select this curious scene for his subject. These poor little weeds could only have had one season in which to establish themselves and make the best of it amidst the ruins. When we consider the miles of houses and chimney-pots with which the place was surrounded, it is difficult to imagine how the seeds could have so quickly reached it.

Grass is a strange and perverse thing, growing only too freely where it is little wanted or expected, whilst it frequently perishes on lawns and places in which it is

desired. It is one of the worst of all the weeds that trouble my flower borders, persistently getting into the clumps of crocuses and carpeting plants, from whence it is extremely difficult of extraction without disturbing the whole spot. In weeding I collect all the grass with its roots in a basket by itself, and use it to patch bare places on the lawn, but I am sorry to say with only partial success. In seasons of drought my lawns, owing to the porous subsoil, look very shabby, and I am much humiliated on coming to town to see the grass that grows on the roof of the smoking-room at the Athenæum Club, looking far healthier and greener than any that I have here. Perhaps the warmth of the room below has something to do with it, or possibly the artificial watering which it receives from the hose may be the secret, at any rate I have seldom seen healthier-looking grass.

Of all grasses the twitch, or couch, as a weed is the worst ; next to this is the fine-leaved creeping or running grass, of which I

have a great abundance. I have drawn out, at times, lengths of six or seven feet of this grass from yew hedges and shrubs, amongst which it had grown up ; it does not seem to mind meeting with no earth in which to root itself during its upward growth, but stretches up and up towards the light. Sometimes, as in the case of some lavender bushes I have, it spreads itself so thickly amongst the branches as to nearly choke the shrub.

About a fortnight ago we saw a solitary gull, a small one with a white head (I will not venture on a name this time) hawking over the river, near Mougewell. We watched it flying up and down for some time, until suddenly a carrion crow flew after it, seeming bent on either killing it or driving it away. It attacked the gull persistently, and though the latter flew swiftly and easily, apparently taking little heed of its enemy, I was anxious about it ; the crow seemed to fly quite as quickly, and made repeated dabs at it with its beak, so, when they were both rather near

me, I waved my stick and shouted as loud as I could, which alarmed the crow and he made off, and soon afterwards the gull went in another direction.

Carrion crows are not very common about here, they can easily be mistaken for rooks; they are, however, a trifle smaller, and if anything more glossy, and have not the whitish excrescence over their beaks which characterises the rook; they are generally seen in pairs and haunt some particular locality. The one in question was one of a pair that had their nest in a horse-chestnut tree close by the spot where the attack on the gull took place; I have noticed this pair repeatedly at that part of the river, usually seeing them feeding on the banks, I should say on dead fish or mussels.

In shape the bird greatly resembles a raven, and its note is more like a raven's croak than a rook's caw. I am told that they are very fierce birds, and that they often attack other birds, sometimes pecking out their eyes, and

that they are reported to do the same to rabbits and even sheep.

In weeding the other day I came upon a thing of great beauty, namely,—a berry of the lily-of-the-valley; this well-known favourite seldom seeds, though in the spring its flowers are much beset by bees; I have been told that it is seldom known to have more than one berry on a stem. The berry I found was the only one in quite a large patch of faded plants, but it was most lovely, I really think for exquisite colouring more beautiful than any berry I ever saw. Chinese vermilion, I should say, approximates nearest to its tint; it had a delicate bloom on its surface, was large and elegant in shape, and gained very much by the contrast of its pure colour with the neutral tints which surrounded it. There it hung complete and spotless amidst the *débris* of decaying leaves. You will, I dare say, laugh at me for my sentimentality, but I cannot tell you what inexpressible pleasure a thing of this sort gives me.

## LETTER XXXI

Extracts from Correspondents—Sir George Grove—The Blackbird Vindicated—Its Song described—F. Smallfield R.W.S., The Tulip Tree—Derivation of “Dwale”—The Rev. Canon Ella-combe—The Velvet Rose—Yellow Crocus—Swallows—Snails—Crown Imperial—Leaves Absorbing Moisture—Toads—R. Scot Skirving, Esq.—Mushrooms—*Dictamnus Fraxinella*—Nurserymen’s Shortcomings—Mrs. Hawkins—Starlings and Vermin—Anecdote of Wounded Starling—Rooks—The Rev. Theo. Mayo—Seed of the Tulip Tree—Light in Animals’ Eyes—Miss Jekyll—*Ornithogalum Nutans* described.

January 20th, 1896.

DEAR MARCO—The following extracts, which I have selected from some of the many letters that came to me after the publication of my former volume, are far too interesting to be consigned to the limbo of an appendix, so I incorporate them in a final letter to you. They mostly take the shape

of emendation and correction, and I gladly avail myself of the opportunity, which the kindness and courtesy of these correspondents has afforded me, of setting right certain blunders which I made through ignorance.

Alluding to some rather disparaging remarks of mine as to the character of the song of the blackbird Sir George Grove writes thus:—

“Are you quite right in what you say about the blackbird? He is a very old friend of mine, and unless I have been wrong for thirty years it is the thrush and not he that is to blame for the ‘reiteration in his song.’ The thrush gets

a short phrase, such as  of two or three notes,

and then gives it over and over again six or seven times—very brilliantly, but merely over and over; whereas the blackbird is quite different, he selects a spot where he is within hearing of a comrade; and then he begins quite at leisure (not all in a hurry like

the thrush) a regular conversation—‘And how are you? Isn’t this a fine day? Let us have a nice talk,’ &c. &c. He is answered in the same strain, and then replies, and so on. Nothing more thoughtful, more refined, more feeling, can be conceived. Iteration is the last thing to be objected to in his song.

“Am I wrong (I think I can’t be), or have you mistaken the thrush for the blackbird? Pardon me for all this, but tell me if I am right or wrong.”

Sir George is quite right, and when I answered his kind letter I owned up my error manfully. His letter continues:—

“As to his ‘chuck-chuck-chuck,’ that, I suppose, is what gave us Tennyson’s lines in the ‘Early Spring,’

‘Till at thy chuckled note,  
Thou twinkling bird,’

by which that great observer of nature has well expressed not only the alarm-call but the swift way in which the bird flits past while he calls.”

In another letter Sir George writes :—

“I love the robins in autumn as much as you do. To me they always say ‘Why is the summer gone and the cold weather coming on?’ I love them, but they fill a much smaller part than the blackbird does in my heart. To hear the blackbird talking to his mate a field off, with deliberate, refined conversation, the very acme of grace and courtesy, is perfectly splendid. The thrush is more intense, but he falls below the other.”

I have received many letters in which an error I made as to the blossoming of the tulip tree is alluded to and corrected. I had thought that these trees only bloomed in our country in very hot seasons, the real fact being that, after the tree has attained a good age, it blooms every year. I select the correction of this error that came in a letter from my friend F. Smallfield, R.W.S., as it is perhaps the most explicit and interesting.

“The footnote, p. 202, tempts me to a bit of reminiscence. In my native village,

which I did not finally quit until I was twelve years old, there grew a splendid tulip tree ; for eight of these twelve years I was capable of noticing the tree (my father was a great tree-planter, and taught us to look at flowering trees) and it blossomed every year most luxuriantly. The tree was a mass of orange and green lyre-shaped cups between June and July. This tree flourished much nearer London than your remembered tree in Cashiobury Park. There is a superb specimen in the garden of Taplow House, Taplow ; it is stated to be the oldest specimen in England ; but that kind of reputation is much like the fable as to the rarity of the Judas tree, or centenarianism in the human being. In the garden at Taplow House there is a Judas tree, as one also at Salt Hill, Slough, in a garden opposite the Windmill Inn. Doubtless there are scores more to be seen, if we look and inquire, of Judas trees, as of the Catalpa, another lovely flowering tree, which you must have noticed in the

garden at Dulwich College when going there to choose works for the R.A. students, or for the 'Old Masters' shows.' My father planted a Catalpa which was one of the summer glories of our garden. Taplow House, now inhabited by Mr. Walter Barron and his family, was formerly the residence of the Marquis of Thomond; I can fancy Sir Joshua's niece plucking armfuls of tulip tree blossoms, as I have seen the little Barron girls, from the branches that sweep the lawn. Theophila Palmer in a white gown, and laden with branches of tulip tree in flower, would have made a good portrait-model for her uncle.

"It is curious how we live with certain plants almost under our eyes and do not notice them. *You* say you never but once before had seen the tulip tree blossom; until last summer *I* had never seen the water violet. My daughter and self walking in a lane near the 'Welsh Harp' came upon a pond filled with the plant—which we at

first mistook for the bog-bean—a mass of flowers. I carried some to a lady botanical professor, in order to obtain the name. There is a purple-flowered variety of the tulip tree I am told.”

Mr. Smallfield also sets me right as to the proper derivation of the name “Dwale” for the deadly nightshade, sending me the following extract from Halliwell's *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words*:—

“Dwale. The nightshade (Anglo-Saxon). It is highly narcotic, and hence used to express a lethargic disease. See *Relig. Antiq.*, i. 324, for a curious receipt in which it is mentioned. There was a sleeping potion so called, made of hemlock and other materials, which is alluded to by Chaucer, and was given formerly to patients on whom surgical operations were to be performed.

“*To dwale*, to mutter deliriously; a Devonshire verb, which seems to be connected with other times,

When as Joseph had told this tale,  
 Thei fel as thei had drunken *dwale*,  
 Grovelynge doun on erthe flat.

Cursor Mundi.  
 M. S. Coll. Trin., Cantab.

For I wel knowe be thy tale,  
 That thou hast drunken of the *dwale*.

Gower.  
 M. S., Soc. Ant.

“The same book also gives *Dwain* as an adj., meaning ‘faint, sickly’; and as a noun, meaning a ‘swoon or fainting fit’: and *Dwallowed* as meaning ‘withered.’”

In Jameson’s *Dictionary of the Scottish Language* the following words are found which also seem to have their origin from *Dwale*.

“Dualm, Dwalm, Dwaum, *s.* 1. A swoon. 2. A sudden fit of sickness.

“Dualmyng, Dwauming, *s.* 1. A swoon. 2. Metaph: The fall of the evening.

“To Dwaum, *v.a.* To fade: to decline in health. “It is still said in this sense, ‘He dwaum’d away.’” (Jameson’s *Diction-*

*ary of the Scottish Language.* Nimmo, London and Edinburgh. 1885.)

Canon Ellacombe, writing from Bitton Vicarage, sent me some extremely interesting notes and corrections. Referring to my remarks on "the velvet rose" he writes:—

"For many years I have collected and grown the old roses—I am pleased to hear that you have Gerard's velvet rose; it, however, is surely wretchedly drawn by Gerard—Parkinson's plate is a little better. I have grown it for many years, having found it in a Devonshire garden. It is known as the Tuscany rose, and as that was described and figured in the *Bot. Reg.* of 1820. It is one of the darkest roses I know and very velvety."

This on the yellow crocus, p. 30, of *Letters to Marco*.

"In confirmation of what you say, I have been told that pale yellow is now considered a better protection against sun than white—the photographers have found that out for us."

On swallows, p. 35.

“It is not quite correct to say that swallows are allied to humming birds—swifts are and have been removed from the Hirundines in consequence.”

On snails, p. 56.

“Snails, &c., eating decaying plants. Is not that exactly what we do? and hang our meat for the purpose? Ripe fruit is really fruit beginning to decay. The Persians eat the peach *green*.”

On the Crown Imperial, p. 74.

“—‘Like a mace.’—It is so, but it gets its name from the top of the seed-vessel being the exact representation of the old Imperial Crown of the Eastern and other kings.”

On leaves and raindrops, p. 78.

“I believe you will find almost a consensus of botanists that no leaf can imbibe moisture. It gives out moisture, but gets all it wants *ab intra* and not *ab extra*—just like moist skin.”

On the venom of toads, p. 93.

“The best authorities, such as Bell’s *British Reptiles*, deny the poisonous character of the toad’s exudation ; it is acrid, and that is all.”

Canon Ellacombe further corrects me for stating that “robins do not pack,” for he says that they do when they migrate.

I am sure all lovers of gardens must be, as I am, grateful to Canon Ellacombe for the delightful book he has just written on his Gloucestershire garden.

Mr. R. Scot Skirving, Edinburgh, referring to the statement of the farmer that rams pastured in a meadow caused mushrooms to grow in it, writes :

“Every book I have read on the artificial growth of mushrooms contains some sentence like this: ‘Use horse-dung for manure, strange to say that of entire horses is said to be the best.’ This is easily explained. Entire horses are much more highly fed than other horses, and therefore their dung is

*richer*. The same may be said of rams used for breeding, but I should think it would require the meadow to be *small* and the rams *numerous* to produce any effect."

Mr. Skirving also asks me a question about my plant *Dictamnus fraxinella*. This plant is supposed to emit from its blossom when fully out a certain gas which ignites on a flame being put to it; and I had said that I should anxiously look forward to the blooming period so as to try the experiment myself. I am sorry I cannot satisfy Mr. Skirving's curiosity, for my root of *D. frax.* was but a tiny scrap of a thing when I obtained it from the nurseryman; it was badly eaten by a slug the first year, since then it has grown very little and, in spite of the great care I have taken of it, has not yet bloomed. The plant is a proverbially slow grower; mine dies down to the very ground every year in the most alarming manner, but comes up again the following spring. It looks healthy, but is still quite small. I hope to live to see it

bloom and to try the experiment.\* I was led to great expectations by the representation given of the plant in the nurseryman's catalogue. The illustrations in these catalogues must always be regarded with extreme caution or disappointment will frequently ensue : then again, nurserymen have a way of sending you such tiny specimens of the plants you order, that unless great care is taken, they perish soon after you have planted them. The fine clumps of good things that I have had given me from time to time by generous friends have never failed to prosper.

Mrs. Hawkins, of Ilfracombe, to whom I am indebted for some bee stories given in Letter XII., also sent me the following interesting notes on starlings and rooks :—

“You say the starling is infested with vermin, so also is the house-martin to an alarming degree. The martin, unlike

\* In a letter that I received quite recently, Mr. Skirving informs me that he has since verified for himself, in the Botanical Gardens at Edinburgh, the curious property that this plant possesses of emitting inflammable gas.

the puffin, has no general spring cleaning. The puffin gets several of her species to assist in clearing out her nest, previous to laying her one egg, while, as the house-swallow generally has three successive broods in a season, her one nest gets filled with vermin. I should like to give you an anecdote of the starling which came under my own observation. In the winter of 1888, while visiting in Wiltshire, there were about 300 of these saucy birds pecking about on the snow-covered meadow, when suddenly the son of my host shot into them, wounding however only one, which struggled painfully alone on the snow, but not for long, for back flew one of its mates to perch beside it, and comfort it as best it could in its own bird language.

“ I used to like to watch the rooks in our rookery in the building season. They always leave a sentinel or two behind to guard the half-formed nests in the home trees, and occasionally the naughty sentinel

robs a stick from his neighbour's nest for his own; but the returning rook instantly detects the theft and summons another to assist in administering a good pecking as punishment for the offence."

The Rev. Theodore Mayo, Quatford House, Bridgnorth, in an obliging note in which he refers to my mistake about the tulip tree, adds: "About two months ago I went to call at a house in this neighbourhood where its present inhabitants have lived for thirteen or fourteen years. The lady took me into the garden and said: 'We are watching our tulip tree with great interest to see the flowers—you see it is in bud.' I answered, 'I am sorry to disappoint you, those are not buds but seed-vessels.' I broke one and showed her that it was a seed-vessel and drew her attention to the peculiar aromatic smell. I believe the flowers are frequently overlooked, as they have been in this case. They are not conspicuous, and look very much like leaves prematurely dead.

“With regard to that curious light in animals’ eyes I have seen it more often in dogs’ eyes than in cats’. I think I may say that I have seen it in the case of each companion dog that I have had during my life. I have also seen it in certain human eyes. I mean in the eyes of certain individuals, but I think in those of children only. It does not seem to be a reflection of light, for I have more frequently seen it when the light has been behind the child or animal. I remember seeing it in a girl’s eyes when I was in the light and she in a rather dark passage. She is now grown up; when I have an opportunity I will try to look for it again.”

About a week ago I noticed this effect of light, very distinctly, in my youngest daughter’s eyes. She was between some curtains, surrounded by shade, but the light shone from a lamp on to her face, and I was between her and the lamp. It was only by moving my head about carefully that every now and then the necessary

point of vision was obtained from which the light in the eyes could be seen. The light was of an intensely bright red character. The experiment took place at tea-time and *eating* was going on, but I can hardly think in this case that it had much to do with it.

In looking through these letters from my former readers I came upon one from my friend Miss Jekyll, which reminded me that I had never said anything to Marco about a flower in my garden that I admire above measure for its delicate loveliness, namely *Ornithogalum nutans*, a bulb, of the "Star of Bethlehem" tribe. It throws up in the spring a fine strong stalk something after the manner of a wood hyacinth but with large greenish white flowers, the character and quality of which are quite, as far as I know, unique. It is very hardy. Mr. Robinson even cautioned me about it, telling me that it was apt to spread inconveniently, though at present I have not found it do so. Miss Jekyll writes of it: "Did you ever notice

how much *Ornithogalum nutans* improves when gathered and placed in water? The flowers open and stand up and become much more delicate and satin-silvery."

"Satin-silvery" is a most happy expression as applied to this exquisite flower. I have been told that at Gatehampton, near Streatley, this plant has been found in quantities, wild, evidently an escape from some garden.

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THE END





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