

The Beauty and Character of Flowers



NE might become very metaphysical over the beauty of flowers; and it would be good for metaphysicians to observe their beauty disinterestedly for a long time before attempting to deal with aesthetic questions. "To look with the eye confounds the wisdom of ages." It gives you a respect for facts, for the thing in itself, says the London Times. It makes you cautious of theories, not from scepticism, but for fear lest they should impoverish your sense of the value of things. A disinterested love of flowers enriches that sense. For flowers, so far as we are concerned, are simply beautiful things. We cannot argue about them as we argue about works of art. Even the Senior Wrangler who wanted to know what "Paradise Lost" proved would not have made the same demand about a rose. Men make works of art, and it is open to any one to say that they might be better employed. But flowers are made by nature, just like ourselves, and if we question their right to exist, we question our own. Therefore, no one does question their right to exist, or the pleasure which they give us. It is part of the process of life. Flowers are beautiful, and we are made to enjoy their beauty, just as we are made to eat and sleep; and there is an end of it. We cannot enjoy the beauty of works of art in the same simple unquestioning way, for behind the work of art is the artist, a man like ourselves, however superior, who expresses all his character in his work, his infirmities as well as his virtues; and we like or dislike his work as we like or dislike his character. It bears the mark of his age and race and a hundred other marks of circumstances, all of which have some kind of significance and association for us, pleasant or disagreeable. And thus we are never quite just to works of art, and never can see their beauty with disinterested eyes. There is always something involved in it which affects other faculties besides our sense of beauty. Nowadays, for instance, the beauty of Italian primitive pictures is heightened for us, because we think of them as produced in the springtime of the modern world. Their promise, like the promise of crocuses and daffodils, is more delightful to us than the midsummer pomps of the high Renaissance. In the same way, the beauty of the Bologna ecclesiastics is hidden from us because it has the sickly taint of a declining age. Our historical sense interferes with our sense of beauty. We have learnt to believe that no Italian of the seventeenth century had a real faith or real emotions, and we scent unreality and pretence in all their works. Luckily, we have no historical sense about flowers. It may be that we love the flowers of spring better than those of autumn; but, unless we are morbid, we are reconciled to the succession of the seasons and can take a delight in it. It is in the nature of things that the beauty of autumn should

differ from the beauty of spring. We do not feel any human waste or perversity in the decline of the year any more than in the sunset. There is sometimes a fashion among poets to lament the autumn, but that is only because they produce melodious tears more easily than melodious laughter. There is no true analogy, as we all know, between

Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang—

and the old age of men; for spring follows winter, but age does not change into youth. It is the great merit of Keats's "Ode to Autumn" that it is full of delight in that delightful season without any hankering after another.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music, too,
While barred clouds bloom the soft dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies.

So it is too, with the flowers of autumn. They have their own beauty, and it is mere willfulness of fancy and waste of emotion to connect it with thoughts of death and irrevocable loss. In all wild flowers, there is a free gift of delight to us, with no poison in it and nothing to provoke criticism. They seem to express a happiness inherent in life to be the art of nature herself, and to show us what our own art ought to be, and would be, if we could purify it of sick fancies and disgust, and vain subtleties and ambitions, and affections.

But so soon as flowers are altered and developed by men there is something in their beauty that provokes criticism at once. For they are connected, like works of art, with men's ideas and purposes; and therefore we like or dislike them according as we like or dislike those ideas and purposes. Of course all flowers, even those which have suffered the greatest garden change, have still something of wild nature in them. They are children of the earth and only pupils of the gardener; and though they may express for us a phase of taste which we dislike, they do not express it so merely as furniture or pictures. But still they do express it; and we cannot look upon whatever beauty they may possess with disinterested eyes. There are flowers, for instance, like the prim double dahlias and ranunculuses which remind us of the blossoms on Dresden china, and which have, no doubt been developed by the same kind of taste that produced those blossoms. If we like Dresden china, we shall like these flowers; and there are a hundred subtle causes connected with our whole view and experience of life which affect our taste in such things. The artificiality of a few years ago is always distasteful to

us. We have just escaped from it and see only its absurdities. But the artificiality of a remoter past often has some romance for us, half pathetic and half amusing; and when we are sated with one kind of an article we turn with relief to another that is less familiar. We are inclined just now to be sated with flowers that are loose and floppy and fantastic in shape and hectic or over-refined in color, flowers like some of the tree peonies and tea-roses, and tuberous begonias; and therefore we have a kindlier feeling for the old prim flowers which at least did not look exhausted by their efforts to be beautiful, which bore themselves with some reserve, and were not dishevelled by any violence of wind and rain. In all these cases it is the human element in the flower that provokes reactions and changes of fashion. The gardener exaggerates its natural qualities in one direction or another to suit his own taste; and its beauty at once becomes subject to the insecurities of taste which affect all beautiful things made by men. But the beauty of flowers unchanged by men is not subject to these insecurities, or subject to them only when the flowers are grown in unnatural conditions. Wild flowers have developed in their own world and seem to be as perfectly fitted to it as stars to the sky. One can no more see the true beauty of houseleeks or stonecrops when they are forced into the pattern of a carpet bed than one can see the true beauty of wild animals in a cage at the Zoo. There is a mystery of fitness in all beauty, and the way to be sure of it is to study the beauty of wild flowers, of wood-ruff on a shady bank, or bluebells under wild cherry blossom in a wood, or daffodils about a stream in an open meadow. Take these away from their surroundings and they are still beautiful; but they have lost almost as much of their beauty as the columbines in the Bacchus and Ariadne would lose if they were cut out of the canvas.

The best kind of gardening is based upon a sense of the beauty, not merely of individual flowers, but of flowers growing in natural conditions; yet gardening, like all art, must do something more than imitate nature. We cannot even pretend to provide many of our finest garden plants with natural conditions. They are like domesticated animals that in this country need constant human care if they are to thrive. And then we have to remember that nature is often content to make a particular spot beautiful, with flowers for only two or three weeks in the year. During these weeks that spot may be the despair of the gardener, but at other times it is only overgrown with weeds. Nature makes no compromises, but the gardener must be always making them. And, yet, like other artists, while he modifies nature to suit his own purposes, he must still keep a respect for her modesty and a love of her beauty in his heart. He should never be a mere virtuoso and do violence to nature just to show how clever he is. Flowers are the facts of a garden, and they must not be distorted or exaggerated or

wrongly related to each other, for they are facts beautiful in themselves and introduced only for that reason; and they all have a certain character in their beauty which can be strengthened or weakened by the manner in which they are treated. There are, for instance, broad differences of character between monocotyledonous and dicotyledonous flowers, between irises and lilies and tulips and narcissi on the one hand, and roses and pinks and campanulas on the other. The beauty of the monocotyledons is both simpler and more mysterious than the beauty of the dicotyledons. The dicotyledons are usually inferior in purity both of color and of form; and yet we are apt to love them better, because with less perfection they seem in their greater complexity to be nearer to human beings. There is something strange and remote even in so familiar a flower as the German iris. Its beauty beside that of the rose is like the beauty of the sea compared with the beauty of the earth. Everything about it seems mutable and unsubstantial, as if it had been made by enchantment and might vanish by the same means. Iris colors are liquid or cloudy. It has got its very name from a beauty of the sky. But the colors of the rose, though less pure, seem to be more fixed. One cannot think of them as flushing and then fading again like a rainbow; and the whole plant looks as if it were firmly rooted in the earth and had grown slowly out of it by a natural process, not by any enchantment. The iris, leaf and flower, seems to be all of a piece and created as a stroke; so do the tulip and the narcissus and the lily. There is a much stronger difference in the parts of a rose, and much more wayward variety of growth. In the flowers of monocotyledons there is often an unfathomable complexity of color, as on the surface of the sea; but in dicotyledons there seems to be a greater complexity of nature and purpose, as in the earth; and therefore they look more at home upon the earth, and as if they were its inhabitants and not passing visitors from an unknown state of being.

These may seem fanciful distinctions, but they can be applied to some purpose in the arrangement of flowers. It is certain that the beauty of monocotyledons is of one kind and the beauty of dicotyledons of another, and also that these different beauties are enhanced by intermixture and contrast. "A number of tulips or daffodils or Spanish irises grown" by themselves are apt to look monotonous and unsubstantial. Their true character is revealed only when they are mingled with plants of another nature, when they seem to have sprung up among them by chance, giving a last touch of strangeness and wonder to the beauty of the whole. Any formality of arrangement is contrary to their nature. They should look as if they had alit among the leafage of other plants like a flight of glittering birds. Then our pleasure in them is not troubled by the thought that they will so

soon be withered. Their fugitive brilliance is at its best when contrasted with the more quiet and enduring beauty of other plants, and especially of shrubs, such as rosemary or some of the veronicas which never look dishevelled or exhausted with flowering. These give the sense of permanence that is needed in all garden design, and the same kind of foil that nature provides for her momentary splendours.

There are some flowers which seem to keep a wild beauty however familiar they are to our gardens, and others which look as if they could never grow wild anywhere, but must have been created for the garden. Nearly all the campanulas look wild wherever they are, and as if they ought to be in the woods or on the mountains. The crane's-bill is always a wild-looking plant, whereas its near relation the zonal pelargonium, commonly called the geranium, is the tamest of flowers. Tame flowers are not, however, to be condemned for their tameness. They might look out of place in a hedgerow, but they often look beautiful enough in a garden. Sometimes they look tame because they have been developed by the gardener. Thus garden roses are often the tamest of flowers, and wild roses the wildest. But some flowers look tame only because they come from some far country with a flora utterly unlike our own, and because therefore we can think of them only as growing in gardens. Liliun auratum grows wild in Japan, but for us it is entirely a garden flower, since there is nothing at all like it among our wild flowers; whereas many even of the most exotic campanulas remind us of our own harebell or some other native species. It is well to bear in mind the wildness or tameness of different flowers when planning their arrangement. One must not be too subtle in such matters; but, where there is a large garden with some parts of it wilder than others, it is easy to make some separation between the wilder and tamer looking plants; not to put bluebells, for instance, in the same kind of position as garden hyacinths, or to mix the natural species of roses with hybrid perpetuals. It is in wild gardening that a sense of the character of flowers is most needed, for plants such as dahlias, kniphofias, double peonies, or garden pinks look most distasteful out of place in any imitation of a wilderness. It is the same with a rock garden. There the single mountain pinks look their best and the double garden pinks are as inappropriate as weeds. But place a mountain pink in the border, and even if it thrives, half its beauty is lost. The mountain pink is a wild flower, the garden pink is a tame one; and, if we can, we should treat each accordingly. All beauty has a character of its own, and the character of flowers is most clearly shown when they are placed in conditions that suit that character—in artificial conditions if the character is artificial, in natural conditions if it is natural. It is only by studying the character of flowers and having regard to it that the gardener can achieve those subtleties of beauty which look as if they had come by chance, but which really are the last triumphs of his art.

our mother, when he was soldier friend of his. Then out, and tell us all sorts to us. But it must have for her. I used to greet ere were lumps in my port to say, 'You'd better eat it, ing else the day!'"

Mr. Thomson's mem- ble women whose heroism tale of Bettie Burns' birth, than Burns' own lyric e noted that they who sub- bie's faults than any other im. After that, does there inence about the strictures ralis! When he had fin- on showed some precious r treasures, lovingly pre- parlor or "ben."

rait of his mother—Bettie as an oil painting by John showed, in an old-fashioned ously pretty woman with lustrous eyes, full of intel- er and humor, but with a about the slightly pursed lacked. Can this have been a "golden-locked Anna"? ty lived, anyhow, to be 84, she must have been. There es, too—a scrap of Robbie's familiar, bold, clear, char- ing, pictures of scenes from Mr. Thomson by friends, ings, and what not.

however, as a repository of Thomson has proved him- son of Robbie Burns. In he is a grandson of whom proud—full of racy humor one who "keenly feels the far as the 'softer flame'" is never married, having spent touching devotion to his pt, and with whom he lived until her death.

as stayed on alone, "coud- d canty with mair," a well ure, respected by all who failing eyesight forbids him sion as an engraver, he can hies a day and pump on a ng, and is a great player of ed, indeed, that throughout been "just wearying" for a too, Mr. Thomson could and "Duncan Gray" from icht" was always a great

y surviving grandson, Mr. course the only grandchild, ters still survive—Mrs. s (a natural daughter of and Mrs. Hutchinson and t Burns, of Cheltenham, s Glencairn Burns.

CABLEWAYS

mountain districts of Ar- gally in the north, there ex- ering, enormous mineral bundance that the country ct, almost without rival. At is is still almost untouched, ction of 1 per cent having account. The inaccessible- al regions, and labor diffi- rendered the development ources almost impracticable. istricts of Argentina, where n a natural boundary on the are not only extensive fields re exist also large deposits last but not least important, ch were known and worked hili from very early times. Engineering, been the en- ery government of the Ar- o open out these northern y the La Rioja district, and of communication between s, on the precipitous moun- railway system, which for nds to Chilicito. Beyond nds at an elevation of some e walls of the Andes, ris- height of more than 22, l know that this range of particularly rugged charac- on of establishing communi- interior and the outer world broad could be entertained, intersected by wild, irregu- vine-like valleys, shut in by sides, and it soon became ct being seriously consid- y possible solution of the sension cableway, a system circumstances, has several The ascent to the mines to three days, and the trans- ore from the mines to the ps. After the completion of p, an English company took of the mines from the gov- ndition that the state under- a cableway connection be- d the Famatina mining dis- ction became necessary, the station at Chilicito to nus is actually 21.5 miles, d the difference of level be- ons is 11,500 feet. The cal- acity of the line is 40 tons d 4 tons for the up journey.

Sir R. Giffen on "The Necessity for a National War Chest"

BEFORE a meeting of the Royal United Service Institution, Sir R. Giffen delivered a lecture on "The Necessity of a War Chest in this Country or a greatly increased Gold Reserve," says the London Times.

Sir Felix Schuster (member of the Council of India and president and chairman of the Council of the Institute of Bankers) occupied the chair, and among those present were Admiral Sir Charles Campbell, Brigadier-General Sir Henry Rawlinson, Colonel the Hon. O. Lumley, Colonel Maude, Col. St. Clair Pemberton, Dr. Miller Maguire, Major Stuart-Murray, Colonel G. Aston, Sir John Macdonell, Mr. Spenser Wilkinson, Colonel D. M. Murray, Mr. Saxton Noble, Colonel the Hon. T. Fremantle, and Lieutenant-Colonel A. Leatham (the secretary of the council).

Sir R. Giffen observed that what had been in his mind in taking up this subject was not the whole question of war chests, which belonged strictly to the domain of the military and naval expert—namely, what kind of chest to provide for particular operations, and how? He desired also to avoid the subject of a special cash reserve, to be used in carrying on some war in which the state might be engaged, such as was instituted in Prussia, and which still existed in some form. What he desired to bring before them was something different; the difficulty that might and must arise among the leading states should they become engaged in war with each other in a measure that jeopardized the mechanism of credit in the states affected, and throughout the commercial world generally. It appeared to him that this was a formidable possibility of the international credit system that had never been adequately considered. And it had not been considered for the simple reason that, as a matter of fact, since this system became developed in its modern proportions there had been no war in which the leading nations most important to the system had been mutually involved. What would happen if, for instance, France and Germany, with their allies, were to be again at war, or if the United States and Japan, plus a great European power, were to be embroiled? Or if, absent omen, this country were itself to be engaged with Germany, or the United States, or Russia, with perhaps one or

two more states joining in as our allies or enemies? Such a war, it seemed to him, would bring upon us, as well as upon the whole community of civilized states to which the system of international credit extended, quite unprecedented calamities and dangers. This would result from the breakdown of the credit system itself and the interruption of international commerce.

After—"to make the impression more difficult"—classifying the mischiefs to be anticipated from the outbreak of great wars affecting the leading civilized states, he observed that, broadly speaking, the main facts as to our cash reserves were these:—(1) The liabilities of our banking system might be put at £910,000,000 at least, this being the total of the deposits in the banks of the United Kingdom, including the Bank of England (2) Against this vast liability there was almost literally no provision except the banking reserve of the Bank of England—about £20,000,000 to £25,000,000 in recent times. Practically, it might be admitted that the whole stock of bullion in the Bank of England, the amount held against the note issues as well as the banking reserve proper, might be available as a reserve, which would raise the figure to about £40,000,000; but there was hardly anything else, except, possibly, the £12,000,000 or £15,000,000 held in Scotland and Ireland against the note issues of the Scotch and Irish banks. In the recent panic in America the banks started with about £200,000,000 cash (specie and legal tenders), against £2,500,000,000 liabilities, or about 8 per cent., and how speedily they were "bowled over" we all know. Even in this country, he supposed, the Black Friday of Overends in 1866 was not quite forgotten, when the reserve of the Bank of England, as large in proportion then as now, was all but emptied in a day. More recently, in 1878, the circulation of the Bank of England, owing to the drain of money to the country caused by discredit, increased about £15,000,000 in two months; and still more recently, at the time of the Baring crisis in 1890, special measures were needed to prevent the outbreak of panic. A fortiori, then, should a great war break out and business be widely interrupted, the demands upon English banks, quite apart from panic at first, might easily become over-

whelming, and the paltry £25,000,000 or £40,000,000, or say £50,000,000, which was all we had to show, would dwindle to nothing in a day or two. The conclusion from these facts was that the banking position in this country was one of real danger in the event of a great war—a war, that was, with unlimited liability. The question was, of course, primarily for the banking community itself, and for the chief customers associated with them, who would act wisely in taking an active interest in the subject; yet, if the government could do anything by way of co-operation or otherwise, surely there was occasion for its intervention. Great economic disorders at the outbreak of a war or when war was threatened, might hamper the political and diplomatic action of the government and impede the direction of our naval and military forces. Instead of attending to the business of the war itself, the government might have its hands tied by questions of unemployment and civil tumults, and might have to face all at once and with no preparation the dilemma of issuing inconvertible paper. What, then, could the government do? and what ought it to do in time of peace, when the matter could be quietly taken in hand? One suggestion that occurred to him must, he believed, be put aside. That was that the government should itself accumulate a considerable sum in cash for a rainy day, which could be used to assist in preserving credit at the outbreak of a great war. The difficulty would be that any such sum under the immediate control of the government of the day, before it could be of service, would have to be placed in the hands of bankers and lent out, and there might be political and even military objections to such a course—objections based upon considerations of the same nature as those which induced the government in 1797 to restrict the Bank of England from paying in specie.

What the government, it seemed to him, could do was perhaps to take such measures with its own banking arrangements as would enable the Bank of England in time of peace and quiet to add to its normal reserve. The government even now, he was inclined to believe, considering the amount of its transactions and the various privileges it conferred on the Bank of England, kept with that institution what any ordinary bank would deem an ade-

quate cash balance. But in spite of this favorable showing for the government, tried by ordinary tests, what had to be considered was the public advantage, and in this view what he suggested was that the government should not look on itself as a customer in the ordinary way, but should take advantage of its special relation with the Bank of England to encourage and strengthen that institution in the task of maintaining a banking reserve. The question of the banking reserve ought to be regarded as of the essence of the whole contract between the government and the bank. His own impression was that the result of any study of the question from this point of view would be that the government would either increase its payment to the Bank for services rendered or would forgo part of the sum it now received for the privilege of note issue; but in return the bank would undertake to keep a larger reserve—say, ten million pounds more than was now kept on the average—for emergencies. A hard and fast written contract on this head was not in question, seeing that the reserve had occasionally to be used. But both the government and the Bank of England could be trusted in such a matter, the principle being once accepted, to establish and maintain an honorable understanding after the fashion which the guarantee of the various banks to the Bank of England, which was said not to be legally binding, was given and adhered to at the time of the Baring crisis. Once the Bank of England had come to such an understanding with the government, it would be in a position, on the other side, to negotiate with the joint stock and private banks on the same subject. Apart from any action which the government, the Bank of England, and other banks might take, it was to be hoped that the general discussion of the subject would not be without its uses. The root of the evil appeared on analysis to be largely individual, and an abuse of the theory on which deposit banking was founded. The problems of our banking system would certainly be easier if it were the habit of everybody as well as bankers to keep a larger proportion of their means in liquid form than they did. We should be lucky if the lesson was learnt without the great war which would surely bring it home. (Cheers.)

Mr. Spenser Wilkinson said that in calling attention to the importance of our having a larger gold reserve in the circumstances mentioned Sir Robert Giffen had rendered a great service. He thought that the lecturer's suggestions were on absolutely the right lines, and unless attention were paid to them the country would be in a great difficulty. If a serious war were to break out and we had not the command of the sea, there would, he thought, at the outset be a panic. The soundest precaution against such a state of things was to take care that the administration, organization, discipline, and training of the navy should be as good as they possibly could be. (Cheers.)

Sir Felix Schuster, in proposing a vote of thanks to the lecturer, which was carried by acclamation, expressed a hope that the important paper which they had all had the pleasure of hearing that afternoon would have its influence with our rulers. He thought that the question of the gold reserves was one which the authorities at the Treasury and the War Office ought to have in mind, as he supposed—speaking as a civilian—they had in mind reserves of men, ammunition, guns, and horses. If a serious war were to break out, and our credit system were to collapse, and we could not pay in gold what we had undertaken to pay in gold, the people would be in a distressing position very shortly after the beginning of hostilities. He quite agreed with Mr. Spenser Wilkinson in the absolute importance of our having a thoroughly efficient navy, but with an inadequate gold reserve difficulties could arise on the outbreak of a serious war before the first shot was fired. The time had arrived when the question should be seriously considered. No reference had been made to the subject of the Post Office and Trustees Savings Banks deposits, amounting together to £209,000,000, all of which was invested in Consols or other government securities. In his opinion—although he knew that it was not the official view—the government should keep a considerable reserve in gold against these deposits. The state owed the Bank of England £11,000,000; if that amount were repaid and notes were issued against gold and not against credit, a great improvement would take place in the position of the question under discussion, and at no very great cost to the country.