

British shrubberies. Its stem has usually a height of about four or five feet; its branches are slender; its thorns occur in pairs at the joints of the branches,—one thorn of each pair straight, erect, and about half an inch long, and the other bent backwards, and scarcely one quarter of an inch long; its leaves are oval, pale-green, and scarcely an inch in length; and its flowers have a yellowish colour, and make a considerable show in June and July. An old writer on forestry piously remarks, "Plants of Christ's Thorn should principally have a share in those parts of a plantation that are more peculiarly designed for religious retirement; for they will prove excellent monitors, and conduce to due reflection on, and gratitude to 'Him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.'"

All thorny plants, indeed, ought, whenever we see them, to remind us of the two great facts, that men are naturally under the curse of God's law on account of their sins; and that they can be pardoned and saved only through the merits of the shed blood of Christ. A mother, with her little ones beside a sloe-bush, a bramble-bush, a rose-bush, or a hawthorn fence, might readily speak of the Redeemer's crown of thorns, and thence of all the facts and doctrines of his atoning death.

The plants which yield the aloes of our medical shops, are a very curious and grotesque group, belonging to the same natural order as our common day lily; and the agaves or American aloes are one of the most extraordinary groups in the world,—growing for thirty or fifty or eighty years without either rising much from the ground, or producing a single blossom, or a mouthful of pleasant sap; and then suddenly soaring away to the height of twenty-five or twenty-six feet, displaying all at once hundreds or even thousands of beautiful flowers, pouring out gallons of delicious and nourishing juice, and dying abruptly and irretrievably down in the manner of mere annuals. These groups of plants are deeply interesting, and afford many illustrations of the skill and bounty of the All-benevolent; yet they have no sort of connexion with the "aloes" so repeatedly mentioned in the Word of God. I remember that, when I was a boy, I confounded the aloes of Scripture with the black, bitter, nauseous gum of the drug shops; and in consequence totally lost the meaning of the beautiful passage in which it is mentioned.

This substance is a surpassingly fragrant wood,—quite as precious, and almost as famous in our own day as in the days of Solomon; and is produced by a rare and very handsome little tree or ever-green shrub of China, Malacca, and some of the East Indian Islands. The aloe tree is called by botanists *Aquilaria Malaccensis*; and has so singular a character as not to be easily classifiable with any other plants. It somewhat resembles the olive tree in both height and form. Its timber is well known to merchants; but a living plant of it was never, till about twenty years ago, seen in Britain. Its outer wood is black, compact, and heavy, and is frequently called eagle-wood; its inner wood is dark-coloured, fragrant, shining, exceedingly light, and combustible like wax, and is usually called calambouc or calamba-wood; and its heart-wood, or that which lies next the pith, is surpassingly odoriferous, but exceedingly scarce, and is commonly called tambac. Both the tambac and the finer sorts of the calambouc are often sold in the East for their weight in gold, to be burnt in censers like incense; and even the inferior kinds of the calambouc are imported at a great price into Europe, and held in high esteem for their delicious odour, and for the making of pastiles. One most glorious passage of the Bible lifts these fragrant aloe-woods into association with the mightiest of moral and everlasting truths,—“Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre; thou lovest righteousness, and hatest iniquity: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows: all thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.”

Palm-trees are one of the grandest, most imposing, and most useful family of trees in the world. Their majestic outline beautifies many a landscape; their foliage affords a grateful shade from the scorching play of the tropical sun; their stems form houses, furniture, and utensils to man; their leaves form roofs and cordage; their sap produces wine and cooling drinks; their pith yields nourishing and delicious farina; their fruit yields food, drink, condiment, and oil; and their habits and economy afford a thousand evidences of the beneficence of Deity, and some fascinating illustrations of the sacred record. A mother, who possesses a little knowledge of palms, may charm her children with

descriptions of oriental scenery, with accounts of sago, dates, cocoa-nuts, palm-oil, and other common exotic commodities of our markets,—with hundreds of startling and brilliant instances of the skill and loveliness of God's physical works,—and with explanations of some of the most significant of the Bible's emblems of constancy, patience, prosperity, and triumph. Palms inhabit the warm and happy regions which combine tropical light and heat with the streams of fountains, and a profusion of dews. Most love the margins of rivers; a few flourish in the oases of the wilderness, or on the tops of tropical mountains; and some collect in large forests, while others grow singly or in clumps among woods or on the plains. Few species extend beyond a very limited range of territory; and probably so many as a thousand different species are in existence. The stem of most is lofty and majestic, and that of all is unbranched and perfectly erect; their wood consists of longitudinal fibres, and is soft and pulpy in the centre, but as hard as horn at the circumference; their leaves or fronds rise in a plated bundle out of the crown of the stem, and spread magnificently out like a vast umbrella cut into pinnae or stiff and regular shreds; their flowers are produced in club-like masses, and burst suddenly out with an evolution of the most fragrant odours; and their fruit is a drupe, with either a fibrous or a fleshy coat, the mass of its kernel consisting of oily albumen, soft enough in the cocoa-nut to be eaten, but as hard in almost all the other species as the hardest portion of the wood.

Though the date-palm and the cocoa-nut tree are probably the most interesting of the palms, yet since they are also the best known, I shall select as a fine specimen of the whole family, the Palmyra-tree, or fan-leaved Palmyra, called by botanists *Borassus flabelliformis*. It abounds in many parts of both the islands and continent of India, and was introduced about seventy-five years ago to the palm-houses of British gardens. Its stem, in its native country, is from twenty to forty feet high; its leaf or frond is about four feet long, situated on a spiry leaf-stalk of about the same length, and divided into seventy or eighty ragged rays; and its fruit is somewhat triangular, is as large as a child's head, has a thick, fibrous, sappy rind, and contains three seeds, each about the size of a goose-egg. Young plants of the palmyra-tree, are used by the people of India as pot vegetables; in some districts, they are dried and pounded into a sort of meal; and in most, they are boiled and eaten with a little of the kernel of the cocoa-nut. The leaves of the full-grown trees are used for house-thatch, fans, baskets, hats, mats, umbrellas, buckets, temporary huts, and a substitute for writing-paper; and when employed for the last of these purposes, they are written upon with an instrument of steel. The outer wood is brown, very hard, capable of longitudinal division, and susceptible of a fine polish; and it is frequently employed for making bows. The wood of a particular variety, usually procured in other parts of India from Jaffnapatam, is hard, close-grained, and dark-coloured, and is considered a valuable timber for house-buildings and other purposes. A clear, gelatinous, pleasant-tasted pulp, is obtained from the half-grown fruit, and used as a condimental food; and a very copious sap is drawn from the whole plant, and either manufactured into a cooling and aperient wine, or evaporated into agreeable and nourishing syrups and sugar. Behold the emblem of a true Christian! "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree." Everything about him is of value. All the varieties of his moral produce—not the fruit only, but the fibres, the sap, and the foliage—are of service to the world. He is not an upas tree, shaking poison from his branches,—he is not even a mere fruit-tree, yielding good produce only of one kind, and only in autumn,—but he is a palmyra-tree, or a date-tree,—all productive, in all his constitution,—all the year through, in youth and in age,—and "the more he is oppressed, the more he flourisheth, the higher he grows, the stronger and broader is his top;" and the longer he lives, the more abundantly does he yield fruits of faith and love, for the multiplying of "trees of righteousness," that God may be glorified.

#### PROGRESS OF THE BRITISH NATION.

It is only from the commencement of the present century that anything like correct population returns have been received. The increase in the first half of last century was—omitting fractions—not more than 17 per cent.; in the second half it rose to 52 per cent. The number added to the population of the kingdom from 1801 to 1841, was 10,700,000, but in 1846 this had