

A VISIT TO SWANLEY COLLEGE.

SWANLEY COLLEGE OF HORTICULTURE was the pioneer in providing instruction in gardening for women, and in the last six years has progressed and developed by leaps and bounds, for from one female student its numbers have increased to sixty, and now applications are received from all parts of the country for head gardeners of the softer sex.

Having a strong desire to see the surroundings of these lady horticulturists and to watch them at their work, I took the train to Swanley Junction, seventeen and a half miles from London, and then found that a mile and a half of country lay between me and the object of my visit. Nothing daunted. I trudged along an inhospitable road which provided no footpath for the determined pedestrian, and arrived at the residence of the Lady Superintendent, who furnishes a home for thirty-five of the students. Under her escort I was soon at the gate of the College—a fine country house built by Sir Edward Reed for his own residence and which fronts upon a magnificent avenue of limes. Here M. Eason Wilkinson, B.A., the Principal of the College, resides with twenty male students and the Professors of botany and chemistry.

The lecture hall has a most interesting history, for originally it formed the saloon of the Bessamer steamer which was designed by Sir Edward Reed and was expected to be so steady as to make sea-sickness impossible; unfortunately it did not prove a success, therefore the saloon, with its finely-painted panels and its white and gold decorations, was placed in the house intact, and used as the ball-room. Now, as lecture hall, it communicates with a thoroughly equipped and commodious chemical laboratory, where the analyses of soils and experiments, etc., are made.

I saw ladies pruning fruit-trees with such formidable knives as to suggest cuts and abrasions to fingers as well as trees; others were busy in the conservatories, where there was a fine show of chrysanthemums, and three were hard at work removing barrow-loads of soil from a flower-bed which had been condemned as a detrimental, and although this was undoubtedly a stiff job, yet the ladies appeared to be enjoying the exercise and to accomplish it without undue strain. All looked bright, rosy, healthy, and contented, and their short cloth skirts, two inches above the tops of their strong boots, suggested practical common-sense and utility.

The College grounds are forty-four acres in extent, and include vegetable plots, fruit orchards, a rose garden designed by Dean Hole, a large amount of glass, both for fruit and flowers, several vineries, and, what particularly interested me, the individual plots belonging to each student, measuring about thirty feet square, where they



exercise their special taste either for experiment or artistic design.

At this time of the year some of the students are at work in the glass houses at 8 A.M., but the majority do not begin until 9 A.M. There is a recess from 1 to 2.30 P.M. for the midday meal, and then work is resumed until 5 P.M., with lectures in the evening. In summer the students are busily at work in the gardens at 6.30 A.M., revelling, no doubt, in the delicious freshness of the morning air.

Besides the cultivation of fruit and flowers, trees and shrubs, the two years' course of study includes practical instruction in bee-keeping, poultry-rearing, and dairy-work as far as milking and making butter.

I was informed that past lady students at the College are now holding positions as gardeners at Lady Henry Somerset's Temperance Home for Women, at Duxhurst, in Surrey, at the Clapham and Wycombe Abbey High Schools, where horticulture forms part of the curriculum, at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Edinburgh and Dublin, and at a great number of private residences, and the salaries average £60 per annum with board and residence.

At the commencement of this year a similar College of Horticulture was opened near Edinburgh by two former students at Swanley, the Misses Barker and Morrison. It is in connection with the Shiells Park Nursery, Inveresk, where the students will have the privilege of working in one hundred and forty-one acres of market garden ground, and where they will have exceptional opportunities of studying outdoor vegetable culture with a thorough insight into the latest methods of growing and packing market produce.

This will be the first college of the kind in the North.

F. R. HORNER.

