

MY LONDON CONSERVATORY.

I AM a great lover of flowers, and fond of gardening in the country; so I thought when I came to live in London a few years ago, and found an empty, airy space on the staircase landing, half-way to the drawing-room door, that I should delight in making it a fragrant and bowery retreat, where I could sometimes go and read or work, surrounded by something of the pleasant atmosphere of the country, to drive away all reminders of London smoke and fog.

And I think I may say that after many difficulties and many failures, I have succeeded to a certain degree in realising my ideal, and have therefore written down my experiences in these pages, in the hope that they may be of use to many. And first let me say, it is not for the rich, or for those who can afford to go to a nurseryman or a florist, and order them to keep their conservatory always fresh and bright, that these lines are written, but for those who, like myself, have to make the most of every scrap, and who delight in the mere fact of having a bit of green, that they have had the satisfaction of growing for themselves.

A great deal of pleasure, I may assure my readers, is to be had from even a London conservatory managed in this way, mingled at times, it must be confessed, with a good deal

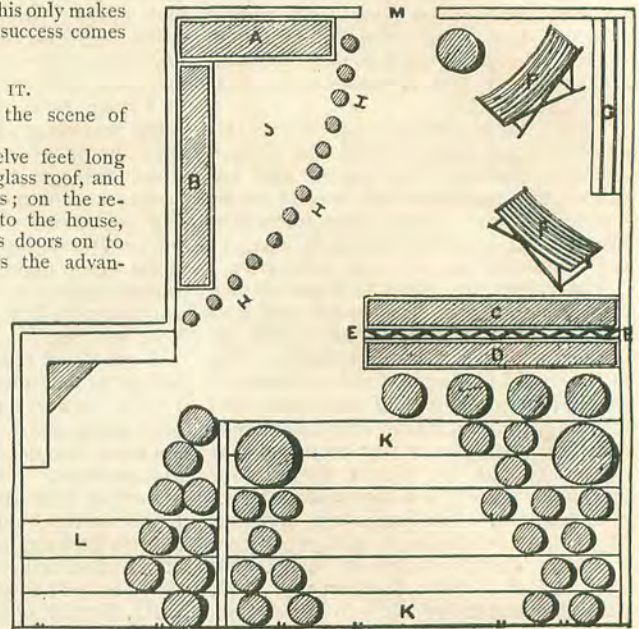
of anxiety; but perhaps this only makes the pleasure keener when success comes to crown our efforts.

THE PLAN OF IT.

First let me describe the scene of my experiences.

It is a space about twelve feet long by eight feet wide, with glass roof, and glass walls on three sides; on the remaining side it joins on to the house, and opens with wide glass doors on to the staircase. It also has the advantage of facing south and being very open to the west, and so enjoys as much sun as London atmosphere ever vouchsafes to give us.

Now of course the first object must be to present a good aspect to the staircase; and to accomplish this we must have plenty of green creepers to grow all over the roof, and hang down in trails and festoons. We must



have one side, at all events, with a thick covering of green right up to the roof to make a background for our brighter plants, and we must have a whole row of pots full of green trailing stuff, to stand on the ground in front of everything, and hide the red bareness of their own pots, as well as all others behind them, and so make an ornamental finish to the general effect.

In addition to this, in order to make the bowery retreat I always had in my mind's eye, I purchased a bit of trellis-work, which I had painted green, and put up as a kind of half wall, projecting from one side, behind which, when covered with big plants of sweet geranium and heliotrope, there was quite a snug cosy corner, where two lounging-chairs found a resting-place, and their occupants could stay unseen and unmolested as visitors or servants passed up and down the staircase.

Now by studying the accompanying little plan it will be seen that in block (J) I try to make a pretty effect towards the staircase, and my trellis screen (E) gives me my cosy corner for the two lounging-chairs. This retreat on warm sunny mornings in winter and spring, and after the sun is off in summer, makes a very pleasant resting-place. The narrow shelf (G) is most useful for bringing on flowering plants before they are ready to take their place in (J). All the boxes (A) (B) (C) (D) are planted with creepers such as greenhouse honeysuckle, vines, passiflora, also ivy-leaf and sweet-scented geranium and heliotrope, which are encouraged to grow right up to the roof and all about it. On the steps (K) leading from the staircase into the conservatory are banks of foliage plants on each side of the central passage. Now if any of my readers should contemplate starting a conservatory on something like these lines I should recommend them first of all to order the boxes to be made, and bored at the bottom with plenty of holes for drainage. The ends of the boxes should also be slightly raised off the ground so as to enable the water to get away easily. A good size for the boxes against the wall would be eighteen inches high by ten inches wide, the length according to the space they are to fill, but not exceeding three feet, as they are more easily moved if not too large. There should



are to keep the frost out in the winter. Great heat is not required; indeed, anything of a high temperature will bring many difficulties in a house where plants remain permanently; but sufficient artificial heat to preserve the temperature a few degrees above freezing is essential if you are to keep geraniums, heliotropes and other plants green and ornamental all the year round. Now how is this to be accomplished? I only give my own experience, and my readers must take it for what it is worth. I have tried many plans. Those nicely got-up little hot-water pipes heated by a paraffin-burner

which look so tempting in the shop I found a snare and delusion; the pipes did not get hot, and the smell was dreadful. Of course it may have been bad management, I daresay it was; but then good management is very difficult to attain.

Then there are those slow-combustion stoves which burn anthracite or coke; but with one of those I nearly killed all my plants, though the warmth was most satisfactory and the smell very trifling and only occasional.

No, my experience is, a lamp is best, simply a duplex lamp. It does not smell, and if you dislike to see it you may give it one of those ornamental open ironwork cases which are now sold for the purpose. Another advantage of this plan is you can double your artificial heat during severe

weather by using a second lamp, whereas the hot-water apparatus if warm enough for severe weather gives you much more heat than is advisable when the cold is less intense. You must, however, take care that your lamp or lamps hold sufficient oil to burn for at least twelve hours without replenishing, or you will probably be left without heat at the critical moment.

I find the best plan is to begin with one lamp every night in November. In December the lamp is kept going night and day, and when the sharp frosty weather begins, probably early in January, the second lamp is added, and kept going till the thaw comes. After that, the second lamp is probably seldom wanted, but at the same time, if you want to bring on your bulbs quicker, there is no harm in using a little extra heat, when once you have got through the severest part of the winter. If you begin with too much heat before this time, you force young growth, which will not be able to withstand the cold, and you will simply have your plants backward than if you had not attempted forcing.

Now there is another point on which I must say a few words, and that is watering.

You will find if your friends come and look at your little hobby, one will say: "Oh! Why do you keep your plants so dry? I should advise you to give them much more water." The next will say: "How damp your plants are! I am sure you do too much watering!"

Now I can only advise you to act according to common sense, and you will soon discover for yourself what is best.

In winter very little water is required; indeed, geraniums want hardly any. Rhododendrons, arums, ferns and all the creepers will require a certain amount, about once a week, or even a fortnight would suffice. Bulbs too require very little water until they are well

be about two inches of crock, viz., broken pots, at the bottom of the boxes and then filled up with soil. Good useful soil may be obtained at a shilling a bushel from the little carts that go about with plants, but it will probably require a good admixture of silver sand or it will be too clammy to allow the roots to grow well. Even then it would not be suitable for ferns, except the commonest, or azaleas or rhododendrons of any kind; but it would do very well for all the creepers, geraniums, bulbs and most other things. If ferns or azaleas require repotting, proper peat soil must be obtained or they will simply die.

Now having got your boxes and planted them with creepers, you must insist on a few ornamental flowering plants to make a group in (J). Your row of small pots (H) should be planted in spring with tiny cuttings of tradescantia, every bit of which will soon root, and long before the end of summer you will have your green border well established. If you buy one plant of this valuable little creeper in the spring you will probably have enough cuttings to fill your whole row of pots in a few weeks.

And now let me say strongly, the spring is the time to begin your gardening, and especially to buy any plants that must be bought. It is no use buying plants in the autumn or winter, when they probably come out of a much greater heat than you can give them, and they will only drag on a miserable life and die after all your efforts to preserve them. But in spring everything is trying to grow, and the warmth of your conservatory is every day increasing, so that the plants learn to thrive and get acclimatised to their new home before the winter.

And this brings me to one special difficulty we have to contend with, and that is how we



advanced towards blooming. But in spring, when the days grow longer and brighter, everything will require more water, and in the hottest summer days, twice watering in the twenty-four hours is not too much for many things.

If you go in for spireas, or Polygalum Japonicum, pray let me advise you to keep the plant standing in saucers always full of water, whatever your friends may say against it. It is not, I know, the orthodox plan, and if you have a gardener who can go round constantly to give water when needed, it is, I daresay, not the best plan; but you will probably not wish to be busy with your gardening after the morning, however fond you may be of it, and if the afternoon is very hot, you would find your plants dreadfully flagging next morning.

There are various artificial manures sold which are useful; but besides these, I find it a good plan to keep a large bottle of pure ammonia, and to add about a couple of tea-spoonfuls to a small watering-can, which holds about half a gallon, and to give this to all plants coming into bloom.

If you are now starting your conservatory, I should advise you to take possession of every discarded old plant that has done its duty in your friends' drawing-rooms, and you will find a use for all.

Some plants will be useful in themselves, and revive with the additional light and air that you give them. Others, such as daffodils and crocus, you can make use of as they are, to plant your cuttings of tradescantia. They will not interfere with each other, and next year the bulbs will come up in their carpets of green, which will set them off to great advantage. Hyacinths are of no use treated in this way. They must be taken up and kept dry; but even thus, the pots and soil will be very valuable when you are taking cuttings or increasing your stock by dividing some of your plants.

Outside my conservatory there is a little space on the leads where I keep an old box full of soil and all the spare pots, and very useful I find this little corner.

Now as to plants.

First and foremost for a London conservatory I consider Polygalum Japonicum. It is perfectly hardy, and dies down to the roots in winter, but in early spring it begins to shoot up, and attains a height of eight or ten feet of beautiful fresh green foliage. The only attention it requires is plenty of water; and as it naturally grows in shady places, the amount of sun it gets in London suits it well.

Then rhododendrons are invaluable. They

always make a good background, and in the blooming season are more effective than almost any other plant. Arums too (*Calla Ethiopica*) I can recommend. Their foliage is very handsome, even when they do not bloom, and for this I do not find they can be depended on, although they very frequently do so. A few aspidistras I find indispensable for filling up gaps, and taking the place of more perishable subjects.

Then, of course, ferns must not be forgotten, they answer well for shady corners. You can soon get a show of them if you buy the common kinds at a penny or twopence the root, before they have begun to sprout in the spring. Lilacs and laburnums, and genistas are all useful to make tall green backgrounds. Palms I do not recommend. Your temperature will not be sufficiently high to keep them growing, and they will not prove satisfactory.

For your few-bright plants in front (and you will find that the more green groundwork you have, the fewer of these will be required to produce an effect) there is nothing so good and so lasting as geraniums. Double red and double pink are best of all, as they do not drop their blooms so much as the single kinds. These, too, you can easily increase by cuttings. You may reckon to have your own grown geraniums bloom from the beginning of June right up to December. Then for the spring, a few bulbs will keep you gay from some time in February. December, January and February are of course the worst months for flowers, and even if you had them then you would hardly enjoy them, as the temperature of your house will not be genial; but still flowers can be had even then, but it must be by buying. Heaths and primulas are best and last very well if you can keep the thermometer a few degrees above freezing; but if it should come very severe weather I fear you would find the primulas suffer.

Chrysanthemums are invaluable for late autumn if you can have them well attended to during August and September, when they are making vigorous growth and require much water and stimulant of some kind to help them on. But if they are neglected at this time it is useless to expect any good from them.

Another excellent flower is nicotiana affinis (the tobacco plant). It flourishes well in London air, and keeps on throwing up great spikes of handsome and deliciously sweet white flowers all through the summer, and the foliage remains fresh and green through the winter. It may also be increased to any extent by dividing the roots in the spring.

A more expensive but very delightful addition to your list would be a bulb of liliun auratum, the handsomest of all the lilies and deliciously fragrant. Other lilies I have tried have been simply a mass of green fly, but this special lily answers well.

There is just one more hint I might mention with regard to shading.

I find the best plan is to have the roof whitewashed outside about the beginning of June. This will shelter from the hot sun of the next few months, and with the beginning of the autumn rains it will wash off, so that by the winter, when you require all the light you can get, you again have a clear glass roof.

I have recommended you to have a few aspidistras. These must be kept clean, as their handsome leaves are very ornamental when glossy and bright, but quite the reverse if allowed to become coated with dust and soot, though so long-suffering are these plants that even thus they go on growing and flourishing. The easiest way, however, of keeping them clean is to rub the leaves occasionally with a dry duster; you can do this in gloves, which prevents the very disagreeable black hands that a sponging of the leaves would result in. An occasional sponge though would be beneficial, using a little soft soap to kill any insects.

A great assistance to the decoration while your conservatory is still rather unfledged and empty, would be to purchase some of those large red earthenware pans (bread pans I think they are) and get the artist of your family to paint them with wreaths of flowers or Etruscan patterns. A draining tile twenty-three inches high when painted makes a capital stand for a specimen plant. There is one to be seen in the little sketch holding the large single plant. It was so arranged in order to screen the windows of the opposite houses, which of course are not very far away, and is a most important object as seen from the staircase.

I think now I have told the chief results of my experience, and I have no doubt that many could improve much on the results I have obtained. But I have put down these few ideas in the hope they may be of use to many who are quite ignorant about gardening matters, and yet would be very glad to make their conservatory nice if they knew a little how to set about it. If anyone is able to reap profit and interest from following the hints set down in these pages, they will not have been written in vain.

WINIFRED'S WARDROBE.

By JOSEPHA CRANE.

CHAPTER VI.

"WELL, what do you think of my hat?" inquired May. "I could never have afforded it for myself, but uncle John said that he had got an unexpected bonus, whatever that may be, upon some money, and he gave us all a present. He gave Eva just the loveliest invalid table, a new kind, and the boys some money, and for me he got this. He took me to Madame A—, in Regent Street, and said I might get what I liked. I wanted a cheaper hat, and the rest of the money, but uncle John did not wish me to do that, and I saw he had set his heart upon the hat."

Winifred took the hat up in her hand. It was a large picture hat, with dark brown ostrich feathers on it, and an aigrette in it

which was a real one, and had adorned a heron at some time or another.

"I think it is a lovely hat, all but that osprey," said Winifred, using the word by which egrets are often called.

"Why, that's the loveliest part of it, I do like an osprey so much," said May. "It is so delicate and graceful."

"Yes, but it is so cruel. May, I was reading about egrets lately; I do wish you would let me go in and get the paper," said Winifred quite excitedly.

"What is cruel? the spray is made out of common white feathers."

"Indeed it is not, May. Osprey is the other name for sea-eagle or ossifrage; it is called osprey no one knows why, excepting that when made up into an aigrette it is a kind of spray.

This spray is really a tuft that grows on the egret's back."

"Supposing it is, why should it not be worn?" said May.

"May, I will get you the paper—I had rather read you what I read, and I know the statements are facts." And Winifred went in and got a paper, from which she read the following:

"The egret is a most lovely bird: its entire plumage is of a whiteness surpassing that of other kinds, so that when viewed side by side with it, the swan and wood-ibis and stork look dull and earthy by comparison. In allusion to this excessive whiteness, different species have received the scientific names of alba, immaculata, candidissima; but no words can give an idea of how white the egret really is. It is as if the