

of the air and the lilies of the field. Such was not the teaching of the great poet of Nature, with whose words will we close this paper:—

' Thanks to the human heart, by which we live,  
Thanks to its sympathy, its joys, its fears,  
To me the meanest flower which blows can give  
Thoughts which do often lie too deep for tears.'

S. C. OVERTON, M.A.

## A STRANGE TRADE



ERILY, one half of the world does not know how the other half lives! Never was this brought home to me more fully than one day when, walking in the Salzburg Alps, I caught up an old peasant laden with a sack, and learned from him what was his profession.

Now, the man was evidently very tired and hot with his load; but what that load was

I could not conjecture. I slackened my pace to his, and we began to talk; and I—more than half inclined to give the old fellow a help with his sack—asked what it contained.

"You would never guess," he replied.

"Potatoes?"

"No."

"A pig?"

"I wish it were."

Now I asked, before I offered to relieve him of that sack, for this reason. When I was a boy of fifteen, I was in the South of France on a roasting-hot day, and I, in like manner, caught up an old woman toiling under a sack, which hung on her back. Her grey hair was dripping with moisture, and in an access of pity I said to her, "Tiens; ma bonne mère, I will carry your sack." I threw it over my shoulder, when the sack began to wriggle, and toss, and grunt. "Wee! wee! wee!" There was a pig in it.

That is why, before offering to carry the old man's burden, I desired to know its nature.

"There is no living being in your sack?" I said to the old man.

"I did not say that. I said I was not carrying a pig."

"Not a cat?"

"No—not a cat."

I knew that when "I" went to St. Ives I met seven wives, each wife had a sack, each sack had a cat, each cat had seven kittens—that is, historical; and that nursery riddle, as well as the saying about letting a cat out of a bag, justified me in asking if there were a pussy in that sack.

"Then—you have a living animal in the bag?"

"I did not say a living animal."

"How many have you, and what are they?"

"How many—uncountable. What they are—guess."

We came to a "Schenk," a tavern, and I invited the old man in to have a rest. He put down the sack on the road at a distance from the tavern, and went in with me.

"You have no fear of any one taking your sack?"

"Oh dear, no! no one else would know what to do with my load, except he were an *Ameiser*."

"A what?"

"I will tell you while we rest."

This is what I learned, as we sat in the little inn.

The sack was full of tens of thousands of ants, black and red, along with their eggs; and the old man gained his livelihood by collecting the pupæ of ants to sell in Salzburg, Munich, and other towns, as food for cage-birds.

The business requires two; each *Ameiser* has an assistant. In the woods are mounds of the spines of fir-trees, collected by the ants, and the *Ameiser* goes in search of the ant-hills with a spade, a sack, and an assistant.

When a mound is found, then the *Ameiser* digs into it and throws it about. At once the ants swarm out, and each ant precipitates itself on one of the white eggs, or pupæ, and carries it off, and attempts to bury itself with it underground in one of the passages already bored for the dwelling of the colony. In a very few minutes every egg would disappear, unless the *Ameiser* were on the alert. He has, however, his sack of thick or rather close ticking, ready at hand, open, and whilst one man holds the sack, the other collects the pupæ, and pitches them in, as fast as he can, ants and eggs together, for the little creatures, when they have hold of an egg, will not let it go. His hands are rubbed with oil, partly as protection against the stings of the ants, partly to facilitate quick work with the eggs. The sting of an ant, especially of a red one, is not pleasant. I have myself had my hands blistered with them.

From twenty to forty thousand pupæ are got out of each ant-hill.

As soon as one ant-heap is cleared, then the *Ameiser* goes to another, till his sack is full, when he tightly secures the mouth. It is said that ants always rebuild on the same sites, so that an ant-collector knows where to go, but is careful not to revisit the same hills and disturb them a second time in a year.

In the sack an internecine war goes on. The red ants are the most irritable and pugnacious. They do not understand the situation, and they proceed to attack the black ants, as the cause of their disturbance



and imprisonment, so that when the sack is re-opened a large number of the black ants are found dead.

When the Ameiser has got a supply, then he seeks a solitary nook in a forest where he may let the ants run away. He may not do this on an alp, or near a cottage or pasture, because the escaped ants injure the grass, and overrun a human habitation. So he takes care to select a spot far from the haunts of men, and also dry, and otherwise suitable for the habitation of ants, for those allowed to escape he reckons will colonise where they are discharged, and in two years' time have formed a flourishing community.

Moreover, the release of the ants is always made in hot sunshine, so that the little creatures may take readily to the new locality, but also, of course, that there may be plenty of light thrown on them, lest they should skip off carrying pupæ with them. A sheet is spread on the ground, and the Ameiser has ready a vessel in which to measure the amount of eggs obtained. He has generally a good number of assistants, for those who suffer from weak chests believe that to inhale the fragrance that issues from the opened sack prevents decline. In collecting the eggs a good deal of sweet gum is also turned out from the swarms, the resinous droppings of the pines that the ants collect either for food, or to keep their habitations healthy and fragrant.

The sack is opened over the sheet, and what a scampering there is! Out the ants pour, red and black, with eggs and gum and fir-spines, and the poor little insects, seeing the green grass, rush over the white linen to reach it, and yet, conscientiously, do not like to desert the eggs. Sometimes, in the first transport of delight at their release, off they go, unburdened, then halt, hesitate, and turn back in quest of an egg. Each ant seizes a pupa, the nearest to her; a red ant staggers along hugging a great black ant pupa, and a great black ant scampers off slightly impeded with the smaller egg of her red sister and persecutor. The red ants are always the most expeditious, and would get away before the others, but that the Ameiser sits keeping watch on the frontiers of the sheet, and arrests those who are carrying off the white seed-like

pupæ. He takes these, and fills his measures with them, till all the eggs are collected, clear of the ants, and then the little creatures, after running hither and thither in search of more pupæ, and finding none, desert the sheet, and find for themselves a home in the new district, where, as already said, they will in two years have formed a flourishing colony.

The eggs are sent to town, and sold in the market as food for singing-birds, and the grains of fragrant gums also are disposed of. Nightingales are specially supposed to delight in ant-eggs. In England we give them to pheasants.

There is another way of separating the ants from the pupæ, and that is to make a hole in the ground, well shaded, and to put twigs over it, and leading into it. Then the ants rush off with the eggs, and drop them or deposit them in the shade of this hole, and run back for more, and so by degrees fill the hole with eggs, when the Ameiser clears the pit out into his measuring-bowls, and leaves the poor little insects to consider about building again. As is well known, the ant-workers are devoted to the care of these helpless babies, and carry them about in the hills, according to the temperature, to the top to get warm when the sun shines, down into the deeper galleries when the nights are cold.

In Germany there are ant-baths, but these are supplied, not from the pupæ, but from the actual ants. The baths are hot, and the formic acid from the ants, strongly diluted, is supposed to have a good effect on the skin in certain cutaneous disorders.

Formic acid is what occurs in the sting-nettle, and is also found in decaying pine-wood through the oxidation of oil of turpentine. It was formerly made from ants, but can now be manufactured chemically with greater cheapness. On account of its readiness to reduce the oxides of superior metals, it is used in photography, in the place of pyrogallic acid.

Formic spirit is made by the distillation of ten parts of ants, fifteen parts of spirit, and fifteen of water. It is generally manufactured by pouring spirits on a number of wretched ants in a bottle, and is used for skin application, as an irritant.

S. BARING-GOULD.

## ORCHIDS, AND HOW TO GROW THEM.

THE GARDEN IN APRIL.

**W**HILE we are basking in the spring sunshine and luxuriating in the prospect of another fast-approaching summer, we amateur gardeners naturally find ourselves, more especially at this season of the year, devoting our attention for awhile to one or another favourite class of flower, and perhaps resolving to cultivate it with a little more persevering care.

And this little common-place observation is yet further suggestive of a resolution to take up some branch of gardening that *does* require a little more

than ordinary care. Still it is a very erroneous idea to get into our head that our old and familiar friends can any of them thrive properly if left entirely to shift for themselves. Gardens so treated are, however, occasionally to be seen, but their very wilderness and overgrown appearance at once tells us that they are under the indifferent care of a half-hearted or idle gardener. On the other hand, there is, of course, no gainsaying the fact that the dear old homely currant and gooseberry bushes *do* require less attention than that wonderful orchidaceous tribe about which we are