

now almost universally used as a fatigue cap by soldiers, has many advantages for either summer or winter wear. Being made of the best wool, it is cool or warm, as the case may be, and it never blows off.

I have before given my opinion as to shoes and stockings. Both ought to be strong, but not so much so as to render the feet damp, for this is unwholesome. Goloshes for the same reason should be avoided.

The neck should never be too much covered in those who are healthy. But if driving against the wind, by all means let a woollen comforter be worn.

The best of all storm coverings or top coats is a Highland plaid. Unfortunately it is not fashionable in England, but stick to it, O Scotland! and defy every cold blast that can blow. For travelling by train nothing beats an ulster or Inverness cape for either lady or gentleman.

Although it does not strictly belong to my subject, I may be forgiven for reminding my readers that illness may be caused or weakness induced by lying in the cold nights of winter under too great a top hamper of clothes. The blankets should be light and warm; even night-dresses and sheets should be of wool, but nothing should be so thick as to cause sweating. The insensible perspiration goes on at night, but the visible should not. Infants and children often have their constitutions quite ruined from the over-zealousness of the mother, who errs in half smothering them in bed-clothes.

The greatest mistake, I think, that women make in their winter dress is one of over-weight. What a sermon one could preach on this terrible evil! Let it suffice to say that over-weight in clothing results in over-fatigue, prostration, and debility, and opens the door to a hundred ailments which might have been avoided.

But the greatest error that *young* ladies can possibly make is that of over-pressure, especially of the chest. The female body grows in strength, shape, and contour till the twenty-third or even twenty-fifth year. Surely, therefore, it ought to be left free from restraint. Apart from this, serious injury is caused by pressure to the most vital internal organs. It is not by tight-fitting corsets alone that the evil is created, but by the bands of skirts, &c., being drawn too much in. Constraint of this kind makes healthful exercise all but impossible, either in summer or winter.

Can we wonder then that a girl, subject to such unwholesome pressure of garments during her earlier years, should grow up delicate, weak in heart and lungs, and subject to all sorts of ailments, not the least of which is dyspepsia?

In conclusion, let me recommend winter dress to be donned even before winter makes its appearance, and that winter clothing should be chiefly of wool. So shall we be healthful even amid the vicissitudes of our changing climate.

---

## IN LAVENDER LAND.

---



"GROUPS OF SLATTERNLY PLAITERS."

in the latter that the present paper will speak.

If the journey to Hitchin is made by rail from the south, there are several places *en route* that sorely tempt the traveller to tarry before reaching his destination. Such is Hatfield, with its historic home of

HERE are two very distinct districts of England to which the term "Lavender Land" is applicable. The one is Mitcham, in Surrey; the other is Hitchin and its neighbourhood, hard upon the northern borders of the fine corn-growing county of Hertford—a shire dear by reason of boyish associations to Charles Lamb, and uniformly lauded by Elia of the silver pen for its sylvan beauties and its hearty homeliness. It is of a ram-

bleship; such is Knebworth, identified with the name and the fame of the Lyttons; such are simple, rural, delightful Welwyn—the typical English village—with its memories of Izaak Walton and Edward Young, and Stevenage, in the close vicinity of which lived for a considerable term of years Lucas, the hermit, who was brought into very wide notoriety through Dickens's Christmas story of "Tom Tiddler's Ground." But resisting these persuasions to descend into Bypath Meadow, enough is revealed by the passing panorama to make it clear that praise of Hertfordshire for its pastoral beauty is abundantly deserved. It is a county smiling in summer time with the fruits of the earth, a county of rolling, verdurous slopes, of pleasant trees most happily massed, of quaint old-world farms and hamlets, where, surely, Rip van Winkle might have slept. Let us not, however, sheathe anything even remotely resembling a jeer in our compliment. The reference is merely to the ancient houses that abound, and to the idyllic peace that prevails. The spirit of the age is here. You shall see agricultural machines of newest pattern—and newest, startling colours, too—in frequent use. And the distinctive modern villa, in all its aggressive crudity, is planted like an exotic here and there.





A LAVENDER-STILL—REDUCING THE STALKS.

It was mid-August when the writer, bound for Lavender Land, crossed this golden belt of the central shires. Coming but lately from the bare grassy slopes and scanty leafage of Dumfriesshire, the contrast was one in which the eye simply revelled. It is no wonder that a well-known literary man, a native of the bare and rugged north, coming casually into the midst of this prodigal profusion of foliage, developed an enthusiasm as prodigious in its way as the size of many a Hertfordshire tree, and declared this without exception "the pleasantest of counties."

Hitchin is entered through a deep chalk cutting. Few highways can change in character so completely in so short a space as the one which gives access from the railway station to the town. At first it is fresh, trim, and inviting—Welcome in its mien. To the right equally alluring side streets open out. But treachery is ahead. Appearances seem to show that to keep straight on is most conveniently to approach the goal. And now the road curves to a shady hill-top, there is a curious pillar-supported thatched house at a corner, and Hitchin is in sight. So squalid and poor and dismal a town—with beetle-browed buildings, and grimy shops, and unkempt children, and groups of slatternly plaiters—is far from being the bourn of our expectation. But the sense of humour is not absent. "Which is the principal street in Hitchin?" we ask, a little perplexed, of one whose home seems to be fixed in this slum-like neighbourhood. "This is, ain't it?" the man addressed inquires in turn, stolidly

enough, of a second *habitué*. "Yes," is the unflinching answer, given with not so much as a twinkle in the eye. Incredulous yet, we strike off at an angle and follow the next turning, into a very different *quartier*. Here are fine open streets, comfortable and prosperous business thoroughfares, a spacious market square. The town redeems its character when once we have succeeded in penetrating to its heart.

Hitchin has a history and antiquities upon which, in this place, we can but lightly touch. It lies very near to the famous old Roman road, the Icknield Way, and some have tried to solve the enigma of its name by supposing a corruption from Ickening to Hitchin. But Norden's "Hertfordshire," speaking with reason as well as with the authority of age, says on the latter point:—

"Hitching, or Hitchine, more rightly Hitch-End, because it lyeth at the end of a famous wood called 'Hitch,' of which also the Hundred of Hitch takes its name. It cannot be 'Hitching,' which soundeth *de-fratis*, unless it be in the sense, as *lucus* is, a thick wood, *de-lucendo* of yielding light, being altogether dark, so Hitching of meadow ground because it hath no meadows, and yet standeth in a valley between the hills."

The derivation seems to rest betwixt the one favoured in this extract—*i.e.*, from a wood called Hitch—and one from the name of the river which flows through the town. To the Saxons the place was known as Hiche, or Hicce, which perhaps would tend to bear out the former theory. King Offa of Mercia kept his court here during the building of the great palace which has left the monarch's name behind it at the neighbouring village of Offley. One annalist says that in this king's time Hitchin was the



STRIPPING THE STEMS.



equal in splendour and importance of St. Albans. Offa's son Egfrith dedicated here, about 792, a religious house of very considerable dimensions. Stow tells us in his "Chronicles" that "in the year 1525 Henry VIII. visited Hitchin, and stayed several days a hawking." And bluff King Harry bestowed the crown manor of Hitchin upon two of his Queens in succession—to wit, upon Katherine of Arragon and Anne Boleyn. King James I. followed suit by granting the manor to his consort, Queen Anne, with reversion to Charles, Prince of Wales. Stray vestiges yet remaining of conventual buildings show that at one date ecclesiasticism flourished here. Henry VIII., in his warfare with the monasteries, suppressed at Hitchin a Priory of White Carmelites and a Priory of Gilbertine Nuns.

To proceed into Lavender Land proper. Again

ductiveness, and with no other tint to break the broad, level, rich blue-grey blaze. The sight is striking indeed when the lights and shadows of a day of mingled sunshine and cloud flit over the fields, and deliver it most completely, by the wonderful effects of varying intensity of hue so occasioned, from any possible charge of sameness.

Great is the amount of forethought, care, and pains which goes to the culture of the plants and to preparation of the yearly harvest. The method of propagation is from cuttings. When these have proved their vitality by a year's life and growth, they are divided into two at the young root. The embryo plants are then set in a kind of field nursery at distances of half a yard apart. From this, a year later, they are planted out for stock purposes, and begin to yield. As every other plant is simply taken up and re-set on



LAVENDER LAND, HITCHIN.

threading a succession of narrow by-ways, we come out upon the open hill-side. There is exhilarating width and not a little beauty in the view. In the fair valley lies, amidst its friendly trees, the heterogeneous cluster of multi-shaped, many-coloured roofs that make up almost anywhere the presentment of an English town seen from an eminence. To the north the horizon widens even to Sandy; and wave-like undulations of rich and fruitful land, crowned on every rise with the dark green of trees, roll into the distance on either hand, while immediately at our feet are fields literally one mass of glorious colour. There is nothing like it in the ordinary landscape. The charm is that of strange and alien beauty, for the lavender plant is not indigenous to Great Britain. It is said to have been introduced here in the reign of Elizabeth—an innovating period, which brought Englishmen also the potato and the dried leaves of tea and of tobacco. Its native home is amongst the hills of Southern Europe. And even there the impression could never be produced upon the observer which is made by coming suddenly upon a great expanse clothed with the lavender in full blossom, the plants set in serrated ranks, cultivated to the extreme height of floral pro-

vacant land, the labour at this point is reduced to a minimum. The plants when thus finally left for flower-bearing are isolated from each other by exactly a yard—just double the previous distance; and nine thousand plants go to the acre. With the second year cropping begins; plants are considered at their best in the third year; at the expiration of the fifth year they have grown very bulky—running rapidly to wood—but are usually voted past service, and, being grubbed up, are consigned to the flames. This sacrifice is an annual thing, and so Brobdignian are the bonfires, and so powerful is the aromatic fragrance given thus to the winds, that Hitchin is to its last court and alley for days together a town of sweet smells. It is generally a November experience.

The plants whose time is not yet are subject in the Hitchin fields to an operation termed "clipping in"—that is to say, the spare growth is very largely reduced, the pruning being believed to improve the prospects of the next season's yield. All this implies a large employment of industry; and during winter and spring the fields are never neglected for long together. Hoe and fork are often at work.

The cultivation of lavender for commercial purposes



in Hertfordshire began in the year of Waterloo, and for nearly half a century its history was one of steady and quiet development, subject to no special peril; but about 1860 a formidable disease made its appearance, not unlike the potato disease which had produced so much mischief and misery in the sister isle; and from thence onward there has been a hard and persistent warfare with this treacherous enemy. Planting out on entirely new soil is found the best preservative. The disease comes with a whitish-green appearance, spreads stealthily if not at once checked, and kills off the plants at the very centre.

It is a pretty scene when (as on the occasion of our visit) the reaping has begun, and men are in the fields with sickle and rope, cutting and binding into tight, compact sheaves the odorous swathes of lavender. The flowers require to be at the acme of their development, and yet not over-ripe. If put into the still in an immature condition the result would be an inferior product in the receiver; and, on the other hand, shedding might be the consequence of leaving the crop too long in the fields.

Sent into the distillery, the sheaves are opened, arranged uniformly, and lose something over a foot of stalk through the agency of a powerful cutting tool. Any flowers that remain in secondary blossoms on the severed portions are picked out by a merry brigade of Hitchin youngsters, and in due course find their way likewise into the still. Although, so far as we can learn, no use is made of the discarded lavender stalks at the present time, it would certainly seem that from their undoubted aromatic properties they might be made of worth and service. Why should they not be packed in bundles and sold for fumigating purposes?

About forty sheaves suffice to fill the still, the capacity of which is 550 gallons. Three times a day a still will absorb this quantity, and the manipulation of

an entire harvest will take at least three weeks. An untrained eye would, perhaps, observe little or no difference in the character of the contents of a still, even if by any possibility a sample of two several years' produce could be exhibited side by side. Nevertheless, there is variation as wide as from thirty to fifty per cent. in value, as estimated by the yield of essential oil.

The work of distilling demands incessant watchfulness. Pressed into the very shoulder of the still, the lavender must not be allowed to rise, even as it swells, an inch beyond. If it does, what is known as the "black liquor"—the crude oil—will be forced through the worm, and enter the receiver, instead of the purified essence. After the flowers are covered with water the head of the still is cemented on with a composition of linseed-meal—a veritable poultice. This is to prevent the steam from escaping. In a vast tub adjoining the worm is coiled, and by a cunning contrivance the water—as warmed by contact with the hot tube—is continually drawn away, and its place taken by a stream cooled over a refrigerator.

A boiler of seven horse-power generates the current of steam which passes underneath and around the contents of the still. As this fulfils its task in the jacket a thin stream of about the size of a pipe-stem begins to fall into the receiver; it is essential oil of lavender, and it floats lightly on the surface of the water with which the receiver is two-thirds filled.

After each operation the still is emptied by means of bent forks and thoroughly cleansed. No trouble is deemed too great to ensure absolute purity of the product.

The stages that remain are simple, if tedious. After a few days the result of the distiller's efforts and anxieties is filtered, and the trifling quantity of water



CUTTING LAVENDER, MOUNT PLEASANT.



which may have settled at the bottom of each vessel is patiently eliminated. Then for three months more it is stored in *uncorked* glass bottles to divest it of the strong empyrematic odour, colloquially spoken

of as the "still smell." It is now fit for manufactured lavender water by the addition of spirit at a ratio of from twenty to forty times its own bulk, or for sale as essential oil of lavender.

W. J. LACEY.



MARKET-PLACE, HITCHIN.

## A VERY STRANGE AFFAIR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "WHO IS SYLVIA?" "MISS HILARY'S SUITORS," ETC. ETC.

### CHAPTER THE FIRST.



NOON was just two hours past, one bleak November day, when in the luncheon-room of a West End club much favoured by University men, sat a gentleman, impatiently tattooing on the arm of his Chippendale chair as he carelessly scanned a daily paper.

Once he rose, strolled to the door, and told the porter—a new man, he noticed—that he, Mr. Francis, was there, if asked for. Then returning to the fireside, "Careless fellow," he commenced mentally; "lunch at two sharp, and he not here. We shall have no time for gossip first," and he watched enviously sundry punctual members at the other end of the room discussing their chops slowly and silently.

The door opened—only to admit disappointment: A stranger, who, glancing round, took the table next to Mr. Francis, and requested a soda and lemon.

The modest order attracted the first-comer's attention. He looked at the speaker, a man of forty, full habit, tawny moustache. "Wise," thought he, approving professionally, for he was a doctor, "just what I'd prescribe him; although," smiling, "I shan't treat Nugent the same way. Hang it, how I do wish—oh! here he comes. Why, old fellow, what makes you late?"

"Late! Please pardon me, Francis," said the last arrival. "I," dropping wearily into a chair, "wouldn't have kept you, but I had a world of things to do this morning. A choir-lad broke his thigh, and wanted me——"

"Ugh!" grunted the doctor. "I'd have suited him better."

"Then I'd lost your post-card, and couldn't remember what time you fixed."

"Ah!" laughed the other man, "you high-pressure curates never have a moment to spare for your own concerns. But now, as lunch will be on in five minutes, what's the news I've come to hear? Out with it, quick!"

Thus urged, Gilbert Nugent—he and Francis had been of the same year, pulling in the same boat at Oxford—leaned forward, his spare frame all aquiver with suppressed excitement.

"Why, this is it," his voice clear though low: "I've actually had a good living given me. I'm going to be married the day after to-morrow, and I want you to come down and see me through."

"Whew!" whistled John Francis softly. "There's a budget! Why, I'm as pleased as if a thousand pounds had dropped into my pocket. What must you be?"

"Dazed," confessed the curate, his pale face kindling with emotion. "It has come with such a rush, I don't know what to make of it. Why, I thought so much of writing to you about it that when I did sit down, pen in hand, 'No,' thought I, 'I must have written all this to Francis before now.' And I puzzled ten minutes to get sure of the point. Funny, wasn't it?"

"Overdone," said the doctor. "You've been going the pace, young man! I've heard of you with classes and services and schools, and all work and no play, and I've said often to myself, 'If he won't slacken speed, that person will come to a full stop *volens*