

freely, and is altogether in better order after it has been dug than if done while wet, and the labour will certainly be lighter. The first care necessary is in the digging up of the shrub. As far as possible, retain all the fibres of the roots: a shrub got up roughly, and hurriedly torn away from its native soil, will run a good chance of failing after its removal. And next, dig the hole for the reception of your shrub sufficiently large to admit of these roots and fibres being *spread out*. A common error also is to have the hole deepest in the *centre*. This is wrong. Have all the soil at the bottom of your hole thoroughly pulverised, and instead of having it deepest in the centre, have rather a little cone of pulverised earth rising in the centre. And another thing to be remembered is that nothing is so injurious as deep planting. See, therefore, that what we will call the collar of the shrub is exactly on the same level with the soil as it was before removal. Indeed, planting too deeply is a fatal mistake. When in the act of transplanting, hold your shrub or plant in its proper position, and carefully spread the roots out and around. As you throw in the pulverised mould and soil, gently move the head of your plant backwards and forwards, so as to facilitate the working of the earth into and among all the fibrous roots; and if the soil does not readily fall among the roots, have a blunt stick in one hand with which you can poke the earth carefully among the fibres. When a fair quantity of earth has been thrown in, you can tread it in *gently*, but it will be at once apparent that if you begin *treading* in too soon you will break off many of the fibres; when all the soil has been filled in, you can tread a little more boldly. Lastly, your shrub or plant, more particularly if a tall one, should have some support, in the shape of two, or even three, sticks placed in an angular position against the stem to prevent it from swaying about in the wind and thus endangering the snapping of the more delicate of the fibrous roots. Of course, low or very dwarf shrubs will hardly, except in very rough weather, require any support at all. Thus much then with regard to our evergreen transplanting. In putting in many of them on a bed or embankment, see that the tallest are

in the back row, and necessarily the short ones in front.

And now to mention some evergreens in particular which, coming as they do from all parts of the globe, give us a large and varied choice of habits, textures, and shade of colouring in their foliage. First we must bear in mind they vary much in their rate of growth; cedars are slow growers, but firs grow quickly; while laurels are also faster growers than holly. The laurustinus is of great value to us as a flowering shrub, for early in winter it begins to bloom, and we prize much its snowy blossoms, which, with some of the gayer and paler though variegated laurel-leaves, and a mere handful of flowers from our greenhouse, make really a very gay table-decoration, at a time when flowers are very generally scarce with most of us who cannot boast of all the varieties of forcing-houses. And then the arbutus is a very obliging evergreen; for in winter it favours us with a greenish-white flower, followed afterwards by its pendent and scarlet berries. A large choice, too, we have among the golden yew, juniper, aucubas and euonymus, while, as we have before hinted, many dwarf shrubs that give us gay berries we can readily obtain in pots, which we plunge, pot and all, into our flower-beds, taking care not to disturb any of the bulbs that we put in last October. The rhododendron of course does not give us its blossom in winter; still it is an evergreen, but, being of a dark colour, it is as well to have near it some brighter shrub of the laurel kind, for the sake of variety. A little ingenuity then, and device, will take away largely from the dreariness and desolation which otherwise in the winter months overshadows our flower garden. Palms again are noble objects as evergreens, but unhappily they are nearly all stove-plants, and only thrive well in a moist atmosphere and in a very high temperature, while the height to which they grow necessitates of course a house of proportionate altitude. While young they can be grown in large pots, but very soon a tub must be substituted for the pot. The soil that best suits them is a rich loam made up of lumps of turf and enriched with a little manure, while a few rough lumps of charcoal are also a good addition.

DOBSON'S PLOTS.



LET not the reader suppose that my title refers to any dark conspiracies of which my friend Dobson was the instigator. No; his plots were as harmless as himself, which is saying a great deal, for a more good-natured, easy-going fellow than Dobson never breathed. The fact is, I wished to write a story, and the only obstacle in my path was the want of a plot. In vain I cudgelled my brains for something original in the way of love affairs, highway robberies, mysterious disappearances and discoveries; there was nothing new to be turned up by

me in that direction. The subject of madmen engaged my attention for a time; but I could think of no fresh combination of circumstances in connection with them. Happening one day in despair to mention my difficulty to Dobson, I was surprised at the sudden illumination of his countenance, which, sooth to say, was not generally of the brightest.

"Hard up for a plot, are you, old man?" he ejaculated. "Well, you've come to the right quarter for one. My brain literally teems with plots, and if I only had time I would write the most original and amusing stories you ever read. But, as it is, dear boy, you shall have them all, and welcome."

I was somewhat surprised, never having suspected Dobson's talents to lie in that direction. But then how likely we are to be mistaken even in those whom we think we know best! How often does a simple, dull exterior conceal the smouldering fire of genius! and, with a pang of self-reproach for the slight regard in which I had hitherto held my old friend's capabilities, I grasped him warmly by the hand, and thanked him for his generosity.

"Can you let me have one of them immediately?" I asked, being anxious to start my story without any further loss of time.

I fancied Dobson seemed slightly taken aback. He rubbed his hand hard over his forehead as he answered slowly, "I can't at this moment recall one, but"—here he brightened up again—"just look me up to-night, and I'll have one ready for you."

That evening accordingly found me, all expectation, at Dobson's lodgings. No sooner had he caught sight of me than, with a violent clap on my back—"I've got one for you!" he cried. "Just the thing!"

I begged him to come out with it at once.

"Well," began Dobson, in his most dramatic manner, "you must have a fine old country house—picture-galleries, and all that sort of thing. You'll have to work it up, you know. You're on a visit there, and they put you into a splendid room—oak-panellings, large four-poster hung with silken curtains, and so on. You'll know how to describe it."

"Yes; go on with the story, please," I urged.

"Well," pursued Dobson, with a confident air, and lowering his voice for the sake of effect, "*that room is haunted*. Do you catch on?"

"Yes?" said I, with breathless eagerness.

"At about midnight you wake up suddenly with a sort of all-overish feeling, you know, as if some one were in the room; and there"—Dobson stretched out his hand, and mechanically I followed its direction, half expecting to behold some spectral apparition—"gliding up to your bedside in the moonlight is the figure of a beautiful young lady, hair all wet and streaming, wringing her hands together as if in anguish."

"And what did she do?" I inquired, as he came to a dead stop.

The question seemed to irritate Dobson.

"Do! It was a *ghost*," he explained, with some show of condescension.

"Oh!" I meekly returned, though I certainly had suspected the appearance to have been of that nature; and Dobson took up his parable with renewed spirit.

"The next morning you come downstairs to breakfast, pale and a little flurried. Your host asks you what's up, and you come out with what you have seen. Your host turns livid, mutters something under his breath, and asks you to follow him. He takes you to the picture-gallery: stops before the portrait of a beautiful young lady. But you're not listening."

"Yes, indeed, I'm all attention," I assured him, recalling my wandering thoughts.

"Well," resumed Dobson, fixing me with his pale grey eye, and speaking in his most impressive manner, "that portrait was the very *fac-simile* of the young

lady who had visited your room the night before. Her lover had proved false, and she had drowned herself in the moat, more than two hundred years ago. That accounted for her dripping hair, you understand."

The thought occurred to me that the young lady might have managed to get her hair dry in two hundred years, but I kept it to myself.

"Very good," I said; "very striking, really; but do you know, Dobson, I almost think I've seen something of the kind in print."

"Impossible!" cried Dobson, with a touch of resentment in his tone. "I've never told it to a soul before."

"Don't be offended," I said, smothering my disappointment as best I could, "but I fancy ghosts are rather played out. Has nothing curious ever happened in your own experience?"

Dobson evidently withdrew his thoughts with difficulty from the subject of the haunted house, but he made an effort to fall in with my wishes, and, after a few moments' reflection, exclaimed with an ecstatic expression which at once revived my hopes, "I have it! An aunt of mine—I've often heard her tell the story—was travelling in the night mail to Scotland. There was only one other passenger in the carriage with her—a man of dark, dare-devil aspect. Well, after they had gone a little way, he begged my aunt to look away for a moment, as he had one or two changes to make in his toilet. My aunt was a very decorous old lady—spinster, you know—and she was rather alarmed at the request, though the young man's manner was perfectly civil. In about ten minutes he told her his toilet was complete. She looked round, but where was the young man gone? I've heard my aunt say it gave her quite a turn, for in the corner of the carriage where he had been sitting was a most dignified-looking old gentleman—fine broadcloth, gold spectacles, snow-white hair, and all that. She could hardly believe her eyes; but he was reading quietly, and took no notice of her. A few minutes afterwards they reached their station, and then my aunt discovered that she had been travelling with one of the most notorious robbers that was ever heard of, who had made his escape in that disguise."

I had a vague recollection of having met with something very like this before, but as Dobson argued that it was impossible two people should have passed through such a curious experience, and that his aunt was undeniably the heroine of the story he had just told, I could only conclude that the old lady must have published it herself, and took my leave, promising to think it over. It is needless to say I never made use of this plot; in fact, my confidence in Dobson's ability to furnish me with what I required was considerably lessened by the evening's experience.

A few days later, as I was walking homewards, Dobson and his plots far from my thoughts, I heard his voice behind me. "Hallo, Brown, old man! Have you got your story off yet?"

"No," I replied; "I've been rather busy of late."

"Well, it's all for the best," said Dobson. "I've

been considering your case, and I really think I've got a plot that will satisfy you now."

"Indeed!" I asked, I fear without much interest in my tone.

"Yes," he rejoined; "just the other night such an odd thing happened—something out of the common, don't you know?"

"What was it?" I demanded, with awakening interest.

"Well, you know," he went on glibly, "the other evening I was calling on the Smiths. Smith was out, but his daughters were all at home—he has seven, you know. I was asked in, and the strange thing is that there were only ladies in the room, fully a dozen, I should think." Here he stopped, as if expecting me to say something.

"Where's the plot?" I said, growing slightly impatient.

"The plot!" echoed Dobson; "why, don't you see? That's just it—one gentleman amongst a dozen ladies! You could work a capital story out of it," and he gleefully rubbed his hands together, as if he saw before him the unfolding of a romance beside which the wildest situations of Dumas, the most intricate involvements of Wilkie Collins would show tame and feeble.

"Isn't it rather bald?" I brutally suggested.

"Bald!" retorted Dobson, somewhat crestfallen. "No; I don't see anything bald about it. None of the ladies were bald," he went on, taking refuge in what took the place with him of choice *badinage*, "and I've still got some hair left," passing his hand meditatively over his sparsely covered pate.

I was turning wearily away when, with recovered equanimity, for Dobson is of a buoyant disposition, he stopped me. "You're awfully hard to please, but here's another, and you can't say it has no point. Founded on fact, too, which would make it all the more taking. Just listen," he persisted, ignoring my efforts at escape. "Do you remember how smitten I was with that McTavish girl? Well, this is a thing I've never confided to any one. I had fully made up my mind to give her the chance of becoming Mrs. Dobson, and had actually called at her house for the express purpose of popping the question. She was standing in front of the mirror when I was shown in, and, as I hastened towards her, I caught sight of the reflection of her face. 'Pon my word, her mouth was all twisted to one side in the glass, quite altering her expression. I was thrown completely off my balance, and the occasion went by—never to return. Ha! ha! very good, ain't it? Just work it up, and you'll make a name for yourself."

"Very amusing, Dobson, but I should hardly feel justified in bringing such a delicate affair before the public. Besides, I've almost given up the idea of writing a story."

"Don't say that," protested Dobson, in genuine anxiety. "I'll find you a good plot yet."

From that hour Dobson became the torment of my life. I could never meet him without having one or more of his plots thrust down my throat, for the poorer they became the more lavishly he bestowed them on me. "Hallo, Brown!" he would exclaim on the most inopportune occasions, "I've got another plot for you." And then I would be compelled to listen perhaps to the mad bull story, related by Dobson with all the spontaneous gusto of an improvisatore; or else to the experience of that incorrigible noodle of a young lady who gets periodically overtaken by the tide, for the express purpose, so far as I can see, of inveigling some young man into wetting his feet in fishing her out.

Once it was the blood-curdling story of a doctor finding himself in the power of a madman, who, in the suavest manner possible, and with no intent of malice, but only in the interest of science, had set himself the task of abstracting the doctor's heart, that he might perform certain long-cherished experiments on it.

Another time the idea to be worked out would be that of a heroine of an extinct dynasty reappearing on the drama of modern life, and working strange charms, through her possession of some secret, unsuspected power, by which she was enabled to keep both decay and death at bay.

And again, the suggested nucleus of a story would be that venerable device of a missing will, turning up just in time to frustrate the machinations of some evil-disposed party, and to consummate the happiness of two mercenary young lovers.

If it were not one of these antediluvian acquaintances it would be some inane production of Dobson's own, or else the account of any trivial occurrence which might have befallen him in his unusually humdrum existence, and which he would detail as something altogether remarkable, and bid me "work it up." This mania of his at last attained to such a pitch, his brain meanwhile becoming more and more exhausted, that he could scarcely see a cab-horse fall down, or a policeman running a small boy in, but he would eagerly suggest the incident to me as the foundation for a story.

I am certain, however, that Dobson—he is such a good-natured fellow, despite his foible—will be really pleased to see that his plots have proved of some use to me after all.

DAVID C. ROOSE.

