

Hawthorn or "May."

BY MRS. C. S. NOURSE.

HAWTHORN, the very name has the breath of spring in it. What pictures rise up before the mind's eye at the sound—of soft, delicate fragrance, of lovely blossoms thrown out upon the shining background of foliage with lavish profusion of beauty, as though they enjoyed the luxury of giving delight to every sense. Who has not watched the clouds of snowy petals floating out upon the air, and descending in slow undulating lines to the green grass below, thick set with violets and buttercups? Who that delights in woodland wanderings has not been delighted to come, among the tender greens of the early spring foliage, suddenly upon a hawthorn in full bloom, its abundant blossoms scenting the air with the rare sweetness of the trailing arbutus and the freshness of the briar rose. Yes, we think we know it well, and we love it, but our English cousins have little faith in our knowing the loveliness of the "May," as it has been called in England from the times of Chaucer. Our climate does not suit it well, and it does not attain with us the thrifty and vigorous growth that it has in that country, where it grows in wild luxuriance, and often attains to the height of a tree.

The genus *Crataegus* includes many species; some make it over sixty in England alone.

The *Crataegus oxyacantha* is the "May" of England, and our common hawthorn. Other species are found distributed from latitude 60 north to Palestine, in the east, and Mexico in the western hemisphere.

None of the genus are found farther south than this. Many varieties are highly ornamental evergreen shrubs, and all are adorned with fruit which succeeds the corymbs of flowers, in rich clusters of purple, orange, or brilliant scarlet berries.

Except one or two Italian varieties, which are pleasant to the taste, and used for food, ornament seems to be their only use for man; but where they are plentiful birds feast upon them, and they form a great part of the provision of those hardy songsters who remain through the winter months in northern climes. For the embellishment of parks, nothing can be finer than this whole family of plants, which exhibits such variety of attraction, flowering profusely in the spring, and graced by abundance of gay-colored fruit in

the autumn, which often endures until the severe winter frosts, having handsome foliage, which in some species may be almost said to vie with the holly in brilliancy.

The Glastonbury thorn, growing in the neighborhood of the abbey from which it takes its name, flowers twice a year, early in May and just before Christmas. We can readily imagine what beautiful pious legends would once have been woven upon the basis of this kindly freak of nature. The abbey ought to have been credited with the beautiful miracle of the "May" blooming at Christmas.

The English poets, and indeed for that matter the prose writers likewise, seem never weary of singing the praise of the lovely White Thorn and the charm which it gives to the hedge-rows of their native land. Mary Howit, whose exquisite appreciation of natural beauty never suffered her to pass the lowliest blossom unnoticed, revels in exuberant description of the hawthorn, its picturesque effects upon the landscape, and its lavish wealth of fragrance.

The pleasant and ancient customs of May-day cluster about it. It was the chief ornament of the Maypole, and was gathered by youths and maidens at early dawn while still laden with night dews, and borne into the

thriving. They grew sparsely, and showed more thorns than flowers, and most unfortunately for the beauty of our rural homes, brought hedge planting into disrepute without any good reason, and substituted the rigid fence of white wood for the delightful hedge, with its mysteries of hidden nests and flowery tangle full of the merry haunts of bird and bee.

But it is yet to be hoped that the hedge will be a feature of an American landscape, and there is no reason why it may not be of hawthorn. The Evergreen, or Pyracanth thorn, a native of the south of Europe, has been introduced into this country, and thrives well as far south as Maryland and Virginia, and an accidental variety from this has been found to be perfectly hardy near New York. It is, as is not unfrequently the case, stronger and healthier than its type, and can be raised with ease from cuttings. The hawthorn is, however, generally obtained from seed, which are buried in a heap of earth mixed with well rotted manure and left there for an entire year before they germinate.

The Catspur Thorn (*Crataegus Crus galli*) is a native of our own country, and grows under favorable circumstances to a tree from ten to twenty feet high. The branches grow horizon-

tally, and the tree forms a round top resembling a young apple; its thorns are from two to four inches long. The flowers grow close to the branch upon short spurs, shorter than the thorns. The fruit is about half an inch in diameter. The thorns are beautifully polished, and add much to the picturesque character of the shrub.

The wood is of slow growth, and very hard, and for this reason is used by cabinet-makers for the purposes to which it is adapted, and because it is capable of receiving a high polish it is valued for ornament.

It attains great age, and many individual plants or trees have become noted on this account. One in England is said to be two hundred years old.

The leaves are simple and often lobed, and the flowers vary from ivory-white to a bright pink, and in one instance deepen to scarlet.

Where the plant flourishes, it forms a strong and formidable hedge by the size and strength of its sharp thorns, and on account of its great beauty, both in summer and winter; it is most desirable that it be successfully introduced in this country as a hedge-plant.



COCKSPUR THORN.

towns to wreath the door of every house for the merry festival, and so it gained the name of "May" or "Mai," as the old poets have it.

When the English settlers came to our shores, they naturally desired to perpetuate in New England the charming hedge-rows of their native land, but the harsh climate, and mayhap the chill condemnation of all May-day festivities, prevented the hedges from