than I can explain to you now." And asking for the address of the poor widow, she determined if possible to be of some help.

Early the next morning—a clear, bright, frosty February morning, the trees and hedges silvered with hoar frost—the two cousins were seen walking briskly along the road leading to Ferndale, baskets in hand, laden with provisions for the invalid. Arrived at the town, their first visit was to Miss Smithers. The busy little woman met them full of lamentations.

"I never was so annoyed in my life. I can assure you I did all I could. I turned the young person away at once!"

"Yes, Miss Smithers, so I hear; but I have come to ask you to try her again."

"Try her again, my dear Miss Walsingham!" cried Miss Smithers, holding up her hands. "*Im*possible. Very kind of you—exceedingly kind; but my credit is at stake. I cannot afford to keep on a *careless* young person, and Rhoda Burns has made one or two mistakes latterly." And the little dressmaker gave her head a jerk, and partly closed her black eyes.

"I ask it, Miss Smithers, as a personal favour," pleaded Elsie. "At any rate, try her for a time."

"Really," began Miss Smithers.

"Just to oblige me," continued Elsie. "I'm going to call on her now. Let me take the good news—that she may return."

"Going to see her," thought the dressmaker; that alters the case. If she is a *protegée* of Miss Walsingham's I may do myself more harm by refusing than by consenting.

"Well, Miss Walsingham, I suppose I must give in; but tell her, please, she owes it entirely to your great kindness."

"Oh, I'll say enough about that," said Elsie, laughing, rising to leave.

"You have said nothing about your dress, Miss Walsingham."

"No, that will do another day. Good morning."

And they hastened away. Soon reaching the house in which Mrs. Burns lived, they were directed by the landlady to the top floor, and knocking at the door of the attic, it was opened by a little girl. Entering, they found it a good-sized room, but with sloping roof and small windows, from which nothing but a dingy parapet could be seen. In one corner of the room was a small bed, upon which the invalid was lying; in another corner a mattress and rug rolled together, forming evidently at night a bed for the daughters. Very little furniture besides was there in the room, but all was scrupulously clean. Rhoda was on her knees in front of the scanty fire, stirring something she had in a saucepan, but rose to meet the young ladies as they came in. Elsie soon explained, in her own winning way, how Dr. Falconer had spoken of them, and that they had brought some little nourishment they hoped might be useful. On the mention of the Doctor's name Mrs. Burns tried to sit up in the bed, and putting out her thin hand to take Elsie's, she began to speak the praises of her benefactor.

"He has been more kind than words can tell," said she, in broken accents; "and he knows we cannot pay him. But for his goodness I should not have been here. I don't know why I should want to live, though; but my poor children, I can't bear to think of them," and she burst into tears.

Elsie soothed her with gentle words, telling her of One whose love was tenderer even than a mother's, and, giving her a restorative, she turned to tell Rhoda of Miss Smithers's consent that she should resume her place in the workroom.

The poor girl, who before had looked almost like a statue, broke down with the joyful tidings, and, weeping her thanks, she told how, in passing the fireplace with the dress over her arm ready to pack, she turned dizzy and fell, and the skirt had caught fire.

Having completed their errand of mercy, the cousins left, with promises to renew their visit. Turning the corner of the street, they heard footsteps hastening behind them.

"Good morning," said a voice, one of them at any rate easily recognised. "Is it possible you have been already to see my poor patient? How very kind. That basket tells a tale of benevolence."

"It is full of emptiness," cried Minnie, giving it a swing.

"It was only a piece of justice for *me* to go," said Elsie.

"Justice?" said the doctor, looking puzzled.

Elsie did not exactly like telling him the tale, so Minnie had to come to the rescue and enlighten him.

"Now, you know," she said "what a loss you sustained. Had you seen Elsie in that dress you would have had a delightful memory for the rest of your life; that is, if you believe 'a thing of beauty is a joy for ever.'"

"I need no more delightful memory than I now have," said he, in a low voice, as he took Elsie's hand, which he held perhaps longer than was strictly necessary for the purpose of bidding her "good-bye."

Six months have passed, and again Sunnyband is in a state of delightful confusion, preparations once more going on for a festive occasion on the morrow. The two cousins are busy cutting shining white satin ribbon into lengths, unpacking small parcels of stationery, and Minnie laughingly holds before Elsie's eyes the name "Mrs. Falconer" traced in fair silver letters. The grey eyes have perhaps just the shadow of a tear in them as Elsie remembers that leaving the old name behind involves leaving also the old home; but the future bids fair to be a bright one for her.

"YOUR dress!" says Minnie, as the maid ushers in Rhoda Burns, who is determined to be the bearer of the precious robe.

As the rich folds are spread to view, dainty sprigs of orange blossom reveal themselves, and Minnie, throwing her arms around Mrs. Walsingham, who stands looking on with smiles and tears—

"Was I not a true prophet, auntie?" she says, "and are you not glad that Aunt Mary's present has proved to be our Elsie's wedding-dress?"

HOW TO SKELETONISE LEAVES.

"This is an art
Which does not mend nature; change it rather,
But the art itself is nature."

THE art of reducing leaves and plants to skeletons has fallen somewhat into disuse in England, although not many years ago it was rather a fashionable amusement.

It was discovered in the 17th century by a Neapolitan surgeon, but he kept the process a secret, and it died with him.

Happily, nearly one hundred years later, a similar discovery was made by Ruysch, the Dutch naturalist, who, more generous than his predecessor, made known the means by which the perfect skeleton of a plant, leaf, flower, fruit, and root might be obtained. These two were not quite the first to practise the art, however, though I believe them to have been the first Europeans who did so.

Long before their time the Chinese were familiar with the process, and had brought it nearly to perfection. They also turned it to account by sometimes making large leaves, thus prepared, the groundwork for those exquisitely delicate paintings for which they are famous, some specimens of which may be seen in one of the museums at Kew Gardens.

Whether the growth of the pigtail has a stimulating effect upon the brain is a question too profound for discussion here, but certainly the inventive faculties in the Chinese were, in many instances, developed long before those of our shock-headed Saxon races.

The various methods of skeletonising all aim at the same object, that of dissolving or decomposing the fleshy parts, leaving only the fibre and filaments.

The season for collecting objects for this purpose is August and September, just the height of summer. The readers who may be following out the advice of a former paper for ornamenting their rooms from the wayside and hedges cannot do better than take up this branch of the same subject, collecting for it in the interval which must elapse after the early summer flowers and grasses, and before autumn brings her store of fruits and richly-coloured foliage.

Amongst the leaves which most readily and perfectly become skeletons are the holly, laurel, walnut, and willow, and any others of a similar texture. They must not be worm-eaten, faded, or crushed in any way, nor should they be gathered whilst wet with rain. In a word, the perfect, mature leaf is what must be sought.

The old-fashioned method of leaving them slowly to decompose in water is, perhaps, the safest, and may be highly recommended for the exercise it necessitates of that desirable virtue, patience.

The leaves are to be laid in a sufficiently-large open vessel filled with rain-water. This must be left out-of-doors, exposed to the air and sun, and no further attention is required beyond that of occasionally adding more water to make up for what is lost by evaporation.

In about a month the specimens should be examined, and those from which the green pulp separates easily with a slight rub are ready for the next process. The others will require to soak some time longer, according to their texture. Then take each leaf which is ready and plunge it into a basin of clean cold water, gently rubbing it between the finger and thumb *under* the water, detaching the membrane from the fibre. The delicate specimens should be cleared from any tiny morsels of green which remain with a needle or fine brush, either in the water or spread upon a sheet of paper.

The skeletons will now probably be of a dirty-white colour, and to remove this defect a solution should be prepared of a large teaspoonful of chloride of lime to a quart of water, adding a few drops of vinegar. The leaves require to be left *about* fifteen minutes in this mixture, though the length of time differs according to the size and toughness of the leaf; but they will become exceedingly brittle if left in too long, so that they should be taken out directly they are sufficiently bleached.

After this, each leaf is laid between sheets of blotting-paper, under a gentle pressure, for a few hours to prevent their curling up. Perhaps the less patient experimentors will prefer a more expeditious method of skeletonising, and by bringing chemistry to their aid they can hasten the process of decomposition.

The following is a good recipe:—Dissolve four ounces of common washing soda in a quart of boiling water, then add two ounces of slaked quicklime, and boil for a quarter of an hour. Let it cool, and then pour off the clear liquor into a clean saucepan (leaving all the sediment in the first one). Keep the mixture on the fire, and when it boils put in the leaves, &c., and boil them for an hour, adding water occasionally to make up for what evaporates. I may suggest that pipkins or gallipots do just as well for the purpose as saucepans, and cost only two or three pence each, instead of as many shillings. If any of the leaves do not appear to be ready they may be put back into the pot and boiled a little longer. After the boiling the leaves are treated in exactly the same way as described for the slower method of skeletonising.

In spite of the greatest care, some of the fibres will be found broken, and frequently the sides are torn away from the mid-rib. If they are successful in other respects they are worth mending, but will require very delicate handling in the process. A very little clear gum should be employed, and the repaired parts will hardly be visible if neatly done. The stalks may be strengthened or renewed by mounting them on fine wire.

Many kinds of seed-pods and even fruits may be treated in the same way as leaves and flowers; the only difference being that, as their shape will not allow of their being rubbed between the finger and thumb, the pulp must be entirely removed by means of a needle or camel's-hair brush. Kidney beans, being very fibrous, are usually successful. The pod must be cut open first at one side, and the beans removed. Poppy-heads, and similar seed-vessels, form beautiful objects, and are a pleasing variety amongst the leaves.

If the specimens are to be formed into a group they will all require mounting on wire; or, what has a more natural effect, each leaf or flower may be re-stalked by gumming it on to a dry grass-stalk, such as may be found in a wisp of hay. Trails of ivy and other creeping plants may be made up in the same way, by substituting an artificial stalk and fastening the leaves on with clear gum.

When all this is finished there only remains the important work of their arrangement. We cannot admire the stiff bunches one sometimes sees treasured up as a household god beneath a glass shade, which no sacrilegious hand is permitted to lift. They give us the idea that their arranger is extremely proud of her performance. A tastefully-arranged group, with a background of dark velvet, *uncovered* by a shade, is as effective an arrangement as can be made. The delicate varieties of fern and leaf may be fastened, in a flat wreath, on a background of satin or velvet, forming an exquisite frame for a photograph or picture. Every fibre and line of tracery is shown up to perfection. The larger leaves may be introduced with great advantage amongst groups of dried ferns and grapes, and serve to brighten up their effect considerably.

Another way of displaying the specimens is to get a shallow box, of any material, line it with dark velvet, removing the lid, and hang it up against the wall. Inside the box is arranged the group of leaves, and as they are, as it were, surrounded by velvet, they are said to show with great effect. The outside of the box is to be covered in any way that may commend itself to the reader.

A method of crystallizing grass may be fitly described here, as being a kindred subject to skeleton leaves. It is a truism that "all is not gold that glitters," but without boasting or exaggeration we may claim to be able to cover our grasses with crystals that will scintillate and sparkle like the purest diamonds, and a great deal more than gold would do.

To work the transformation, take 1lb. of alum, dissolve it in a quart of rain water, and heat it. Have ready a bunch, tied loosely, of all kinds of flowering, feathery grasses, the long graceful heads of wild rye, bearded wheat, and Norway oats, and many other varieties, should be secured. Suspend the bunch over a tub, and as soon as the alum and water be scalding hot, pour it very slowly over the grasses, taking care that the solution reaches every part of the bunch and thoroughly saturates it. Leave it hanging all night, without moving or touching it, and next morning every point will be adorned with a shining crystal, and sparkling as though it had been touched by Jack Frost's magic finger. Should this happy result be but imperfectly attained, and the crystals are few and far between, it proves that the amount of alum was not large enough for the quantity of water, a fault easily remedied, and the next application will be more successful.

BITS ABOUT ANIMALS.

ELEPHANT ROPE DANCING.—The ease with which the elephant is taught to perform the most agile and difficult feats forms a remarkable contrast to its huge unwieldiness of size. Aristotle tells us that in ancient times elephants were taught by their keepers to throw stones at a mark, to cast up arms in the air, and catch them again on their fall; and to dance not merely on the earth, but on the rope. The first, according to Suetonius, who exhibited elephant rope dancers, was Galba at Rome. The manner of teaching them to dance on the ground was simple enough (by the association of music and a hot floor); but we are not informed how they were taught to skip the rope, or whether it was the tight or the slack rope, or how high the rope might be. The silence of history on these points is fortunate for the figurantes of the present day; since, but for this, their fame might have been utterly eclipsed.

CALCULATING CROW.—A Scotch newspaper of the year 1816 states that a carrion crow, perceiving a brood of fourteen chickens under the care of a parent-hen, on a lawn, picked up one; but on a young lady opening the window and giving an alarm, the robber dropped his prey. In the course of the day, however, the plunderer returned, accompanied by thirteen other crows, when every one seized his bird, and carried off the whole brood at once.

WATCH DOG.—A thief, who had broke into the shop of Cellini, the Florentine artist, and was breaking open the caskets, in order to come at some jewels, was arrested in his progress by a dog, against whom he found it a difficult matter to defend himself with a sword. The faithful animal ran to the room where the journeymen slept; but as they did not seem to hear him barking, he drew away the bed clothes, and pulling them alternately by the arms, forcibly awaked them; then barking very loud, he showed the way to the thieves, and went on before; but the men would not follow him, and at last locked their door. The dog having lost all hopes of the assistance of these men, undertook the task alone, and ran down stairs; he could not find the villain in the shop, but immediately rushing into the street, came up with him, and tearing off his cloak, would have treated him according to his deserts, if the fellow had not called to some tailors in the neighbourhood, and begged they would assist him against a mad dog; the tailors believing him, came to his assistance, and compelled the poor animal to retire.

SINGULAR INTERPOSITION. — A lady had a tame bird which she was in the habit of letting out of its cage every day. One morning, as it was picking crumbs of bread off the carpet, her cat, who always before showed great kindness for the bird, seized it on a sudden, and jumped with it in her mouth upon a table. The lady was much alarmed for the fate of her favourite, but on turning about, instantly discerned the cause. The door had been left open, and a strange cat had just come into the room! After turning it out, her own cat came down from her place of safety, and dropped the bird without having done it the slightest injury.

DYING OF JOY. — One of the strongest instances of affection in dogs is related in the *Memoires du Marquess Langallery*. The marquess had been two years in the army, when returning home, a favourite dog which had been left came to meet him in the court yard, and recognising him as if he had only been absent two days, leaped upon his neck, and died of joy at having found him again.

SENSE OF RIDICULE.—Persons who have the management of elephants have often observed that they know very well when any one is ridiculing them, and that they very often revenge themselves when they have an opportunity. A painter wished to draw an elephant in the menagerie at Paris in an extraordinary attitude, which was with his trunk lifted up, and his mouth open. An attendant on the painter, to make the elephant preserve the position, threw fruits into his mouth, and often pretended to throw them without doing so. The animal became irritated, and, as if knowing that the painter was to blame rather than his servant, turned to him, and dashed a quantity of water from his trunk over the paper on which the painter was sketching his distorted portrait.

REVENGEFUL SWALLOW. — A gentleman of Brenchley having shot a hen-swallow which was skimming in the air, accompanied by her mate, the enraged partner immediately flew at the fowler, and, as if to revenge the loss it had sustained, struck him in the face with its wing, and continued flying around him with every appearance of determined anger. For several weeks after the fatal shot, the bird continued to annoy the gentleman whenever it met with him, except on Sundays, when it did not recognise him, in consequence of his change of dress.

TORTOISE.—It is a disputed point whether animals are fond of music or not. A lady writes from her country-house in France—"I have a little tortoise always inhabiting the garden. When I call 'Tortue, tortue,' he answers to his name, otherwise he never shows himself—he might be a hundred miles off, for all we ever see of him; excepting sometimes when my sister comes down from Paris to pay me a visit. When she plays on the piano, he at once responds, and finds his way up to her, traversing the lawn and the outer room; he then puts out his small head and appears to be intent on listening, and to enjoy the harmony of sweet sounds. When she accompanies the air with her voice, it seems to afford the mysterious little hard-coated creature still more pleasure. The music ended, he retires again to the garden.—K."