

## PAINTING WILD FLOWERS IN THE FIELDS.

THOSE who have never taken their sketch-books out into the fields and made studies of the flowers as they grow on the spot cannot realise how much they lose by not doing so. As soon as you take a wild flower from its natural surroundings you have robbed it of much of its characteristic beauty; you have certainly altered its appearance, for the angles it takes when growing in the field, the way the flower hangs its head, and the way the leaves fall from the stem can only be seen to full advantage by those who study them on the spot. What a beautiful sight a field is in early summer, when the white and yellow ox-eye daisies, blue crane's-bills, greyish-white cow-parsley, red sorrel, and other plants are in bloom! The decorative artist who is on

the look-out for new suggestions and fresh colour-schemes will find studying out of doors most stimulating and helpful, and those who just want to paint what is before them, realise the incident or object with all the skill they are possessed of just as it comes, should take up their position in a field and make their study on the spot. But don't sit down just anywhere. The beginner is too apt to be contented with the first thing he comes across, the first point of view that presents itself, while the older hand spends what seems to be an irritating amount of time in arranging himself and selecting his point of view. A good position whence to gain an advantageous view of a group of plants in a field is a hollow or depression with the objects to be studied in

the higher ground. If you are on a level with the plants you then look down upon them, which is not so advantageous as getting them more on a level with the eye, when their growth can be seen.

Of course, you will single out a striking group or one that is somewhat isolated, for the immense wealth of material before one must be dealt with on a systematic plan, must be simplified, for it is quite evident that everything cannot be drawn or painted. I have taken two very familiar plants, the cow-parsley, which gives fields and orchards such a delicate "lacy" appearance in the spring, and the handsome ox-eye daisy of summer, to illustrate these notes. Both subjects were rendered just as they came in the fields, and I think it will be admitted that the way Nature arranges herself is far more effective and even beautiful than any effort on our part would be. At any rate it is different, and that is something.

At first the difficulty will be to be able to fix the attention upon a few things out of the profusion before one, but this hint may be useful: don't treat the field as though it were botanical specimens. As an artist would say, suggest rather than delineate—that is, instead of mapping out, as it were, in all its minutiae the bit of nature in front of you, seize upon the general truths, the broad masses, the leading objects, and fix these down with decision. Instead of thinking of your study as an intricate mass of minute detail, half close your eyes so that you see only those features that dominate all the rest; where the mass of light is, where the half-tone and where the darks come; in short, go for mass instead of minutiae. To this end don't work too near your paper or canvas; you should be almost as far from your work as you are from the objects you are studying, for if you are unconsciously obtain "breadth," *i.e.*, simplicity. It is said that Reynolds painted with brushes four feet long, and had his canvas against his sitter while he was four or five feet off both. If you are too near your model, you see nothing but detail, and so miss breadth; while if you are too near your work, you miss simplicity of effect, because of the tendency to dwell upon individual points instead of thinking of your work as a whole. These may be the very commonplaces of art, but they are constantly being lost sight of, so one must emphasise such points where one is attempting to teach. The tyro always sees too much, and it is because he doesn't know what to leave out that his work is so ineffective. Take the grasses growing all around the daisies. It is as hopeless to think of painting them all as it is to paint every hair in a man's beard. You must therefore try to hit the general tone of the grass, and as a consequence think of it only as a background of colour. Upon this you can just indicate two or three individual grasses, and these two or three will hint at all the rest.



IN THE FIELDS.



This is where the art of suggestion comes in. And if you reason it out for a moment, it is evident that you cannot imitate what is before you; your only hope is to hint at it all or suggest it. In drawing a daisy don't think of it as so many petals, but as an angular shape, the angles being made by those petals which project in front of the others. If you get the general outline, it is easy enough to fill in the details; whereas if you begin with detail, you will invariably get the object as a whole out of proportion, and therefore badly drawn. If you were dividing up a surface into sections, it would obviously be the better plan to start by dividing the length into halves, then half these again, and so on. By trying to divide the length into sections at once, the chances are the last section will not be in proportion, if indeed any of them are, whereas by first dividing the whole into halves, and each again into other halves, the mind grapples with the difficulties piecemeal, which is the only way after all of overcoming any difficulty.

For individual studies of plants brown paper, and either body-colour (*i.e.*, Chinese white used with the colours to make them solid) or, better still, oil-colours thinned with turpentine, gives a quick and bold effect. Oil-colour is of itself possessed of more body, and when thinned with turps is a capital vehicle for rapid work. For actually painting a field of flowers those who possess oil-colours should try to use them, for water-colours are not so adapted for foreground effects owing to the fact that you cannot paint a light colour over a dark one. Many beginners are afraid of oils, thinking that the difficulties are too great to be overcome, but if they would remember

that they are using solid colours which must not be diluted as are water-colours, save only so far as is necessary to manipulate them, they would find many difficulties vanish. Those in the habit of using water-colours try to use oils in much the same way, by diluting them, whereas oils must be used more or less solidly; and as a light colour can be painted over a dark one, there is no necessity to leave the lights as in water-colours, but paint in all the dark masses and then upon this background paint on the lights.

For the decoration of a screen a field of wild flowers would be a charming *motif*, and if such a tall-growing plant as the cow-parsley

be chosen, then to indicate the distant hedge-row and coppice in simple flat tones would be an effective feature, as I have indicated in the sketch. Where a field of daisies and other low-growing plants is chosen, the lower part of the screen could be treated with the flowers life-size, and as the field retreats the eye would see only over the surface, and it would then be occupied in suggesting this surface, so that the amount of work would not be so very considerable.

Useful photographs can be taken on a still day by depressing the camera or placing it on the ground or on the same plane as the eye.

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