



'FAIRY THIMBLES.'

FLOWER-PAINTING FROM NATURE.

A TALK WITH MRS. SOPHIA
MILLER.

"I SAT four hours this morning in a torrent of rain opposite a bunch of white heather!" Only a gentle lament, this, of one of the most enthusiastic of living flower-painters. Certainly, the late season did not on the whole prove an ideal one for outdoor sketching and painting; but, happily, every true artist is not only born with, but learns to cultivate, a truly philosophical spirit respecting one of life's most trying conditions, namely, the weather. Croquet, lawn tennis, and even cricket enthusiasts are permitted to dismiss the weather as "abominable," but the lover of outdoor sketching, whether professional or amateur, surmounts the weather difficulty among the earliest of his or her artistic trials and difficulties. No such thing as a real complaint ever does, or shall we say, ever should escape the lips of the art-worker dependent upon the weather for results. Of course, in addition to this serene disposition, mackintoshes, most dependable umbrellas, stout boots, warm clothing, good appetite, sound constitution, and, above all, a strong heart, and heaps of perseverance under the most trying conditions, are as necessary to the student of flower-painting as the most complete paraphernalia of paints and brushes, particularly if that best of all work, open-air art, is to be mastered. There is also another essential factor.

Flower-painting has need of patience and infinite care. "Order is heaven's first law." Nowhere do we see that principle more faithfully carried out than in the birth, life, and death of our hedgerow plants. They come and go to give place to others, finding for themselves a shady nook or sunny spot as suits them best. Another point. There is beauty in every inch of God's earth if we will but look for it, from the tiny blade of grass, with its feathery head, to the bramble, with its pink spikes, crowned with wreaths of honeysuckles, and clasped by the tendrils of the bryony, whose green berries will soon replace the fragrance of the former flower by gorgeous red.

Anthony Trollope in his many books found time to say not a few pithy things. One of them, if we forget not, was that "true genius was the length of time a man could sit." Every student of music, and everyone essaying a living with, say, the pen, brush, or needle, will echo the truth of this expression. Wrapped in a nutshell, or spoken in one word, it means patience. Look at one of the mediæval manuscripts, or an early page of Greek Gospel or Missal parchment, carefully preserved in the cases of our museums. The impression they first convey is the



"ABOVE EVERYTHING WHITE LILIES."

marvellous patience, apart from any question of talent, which must have been exercised by those to whom we are indebted for these treasures of mind and pen. Flower-painting, we repeat, has need of the same quality—patience and unlimited care. “We women,” says Mrs. Miller, “have the advantage in this matter. It is our nature to be quiet and contemplative. I would urge all girls to draw and paint flowers, even if they do not succeed to perfection. It will make them better women. There is a world of untold beauty in our ditches and lanes—

“We love first, when we see them painted,
Things we have passed a thousand times
Nor cared to see.”

Here is a rule, a golden one, which this talented floral expressionist would lay before everyone taking up the study of flower-painting either as a profession or amusement. “Above all,” Mrs. Miller says emphatically, “I would urge the plant being painted as it grows. Do not cut the flower off ruthlessly to place it in a vase for the studio desk or table, but go out into the fields and lanes and sketch from Nature. Take your drawing-block to the coppice or wood, there select your plant—say a primrose, with its mossy background. The dark ivy-leaf contrasting with the vivid tender green of the plant, or it may be a fallen acorn in the foreground—all will tend to make up a picture of surpassing beauty, because it will be one of Nature’s own ordering, her own blending, her own colouring. Then there are other material points, without due attention to which no full measure of success will be attained, Mrs. Miller kindly tells us what these are. The chief secret of successful flower-painting depends upon three important conditions. She says, “Aim particularly at getting the growth of the plant; secure the splendid grace of the stem; also see that nothing is left undone to reproduce the perfect form and colour of the blossom. Then one must study carefully the relative colours throughout. All this rightly and lovingly accomplished, the result must make a good picture. You will have a full reward—the remembrance of a happy few hours, the record of an honest effort.”

Mrs. Philip Miller is an Irishwoman—the youngest daughter of the late Rev. J. P. Holmes of Corbey House, King’s County, and Rector of Gallen. As a girl she evinced no special aptitude for art, and while being educated at Alexandra College, Dublin, followed only the ordinary educational lines, without regard to any particular use of the brush or pencil. “It was quite by chance,” relates Mrs. Miller, “that I took to flower-painting. It all turned upon a visit to a beautiful house owned by Colonel Meadows Taylor. One day I found him engaged on a beautiful drawing that quite woke within me the desire to add something similarly beautiful to the world, so I fixed on flower-painting.” “Colonel Taylor,” adds Mrs. Miller, “showed me the picture, and having examined it attentively, I suddenly said, ‘Daddy, I think I can do that.’ He encouraged me to try, and I painted some flowers for him, with the result that he called on my mother in the hope of inducing her to allow me to study drawing. At first she resisted—she could not believe that I had any talent for it. ‘There was no special taste for it,’ she said, ‘in our family, either on her side, or on my father’s.’ Finally, however, she gave in, and I got my grounding in art under Mr. Herbert Cowper. Later on I attended the Dublin School of Art.”

The progress of Miss Sophia Holmes, as she then was, was very marked, due, no doubt, to her remarkable powers of perception, and intimate acquaintance with rural life. “I lived so much among country surroundings,” Mrs. Miller has told us, “that details unnoticed by the ordinary observer rarely ever escape me.” And so it must be, we concluded, or why such extreme care in placing that dead bee on yonder strip of white heather? “Bees,” said

Mrs. Miller, “reverse their wings in death, and as I do not want to paint this bee dead, but as alive, I must take care that the wings are kept properly relaxed.”

“You are a scrupulous adherent to nature, then?”

“Yes,” emphatically responds this gifted lady. “Too often one sees inartistic misrepresentations, but both painter and public being alike ignorant of what ought to be, these pass without censure. In painting, as in literature, few go direct to nature, the fountain-head of inspiration; the rest reproduce the ideas, often the errors, of others, or try to think in certain situations what this or that great writer or artist would have thought, instead of giving their own fresh, vigorous experiences.”

After her Dublin art tuition, the subject of our article went to Paris, and there studied under Messieurs Victor Le Claire and Divoire, acquiring much of their light touch and peculiar grace of air which must always be an essential factor in successful floral delineation. Delicacy is the “open sesame” of all good work—whether it be editing a journal, pianoforte-playing, or pastry-making; the heavy hand spells mischief to everything it touches, and to nothing more than flower-painting. From the studios of the famous French artists, whose spirit she has so well caught, Miss Holmes passed to, and benefited largely by, a course of study in Sir James Linton’s studio, soon after which she entered the lists of professional workers.

The quick succession of pictures by Miss Holmes were to be found in such exhibitions as the Royal Hibernian Academy, Irish Fine Art Society, Dublin Sketching Club, Dublin Art Club, the Water Colour Society of Ireland, Messrs. Rodman’s, and others, until finally London was reached, where choice specimens of her delightful art were met with at the Royal Water Colour Institute, the Fine Arts Society, and the Royal Academy, her “Pansies” and “Peonies” attracting much attention among the ’90 and ’94 pictures of the latter institution.

It was in August, 1891, that Miss Holmes changed her maiden name, marrying Mr. Philip H. Miller, A.R.H.A., whose fine portraiture work, especially that in red chalk which has come under our notice, is hardly less unique than Mrs. Miller’s charming flower-paintings. From that time Mrs. Miller, with her husband, settled in London, the former opening classes for flower-painting study. These gatherings were at once a success, a number of young ladies, well known in society, soon flocking to some cosy Kensington studio to have the advantage of Mrs. Miller’s instruction and influence. Among several may be mentioned Miss Peel, now Hon. Mrs. Goldmann, daughter of the late Speaker of the House of Commons, Miss Ida Chamberlain, daughter of the present Colonial Secretary, the Countess A. de Bylandt, and the Hon. Mrs. Mallet, formerly Maid of Honour to the Queen.

A dignitary of the Church, not less genial than scholarly, once remarked to the writer that he could imagine no more delightful occupation than the study of music for the purpose of writing about it; but, with all his wide observation, this good kind soul had probably forgotten the kingdom of flowers, and those who work therein. It would be difficult in a degree, as we judge, to select an environment more congenial than that of flaming peonies, snowy regal camellias, cream and purple chrysanthemums, blue bells of spicy hyacinths, wreaths of orange-blossoms, scarlet and gold orchids, heliotrope, tube rose, mignonette, and a thousand more, all which must come under the observation of the flower-painter.

“Naturalness” appears to be the keynote of all Mrs. Miller’s charming work. Rhododendrons, peonies, chrysanthemums, are veritably all “a-flower” in their frames, furnishing a feast of floral colour and harmony such as is seldom seen out of the garden. So delicate and true, too, is Mrs. Miller’s touch, that some of her drawings seem



MRS. SOPHIA MILLER.

verily to breathe their native perfume. It is qualities such as these that so fascinate every lover and student of the beautiful, whether in nature or art. This realism particularly is what the student should aim at. So many painted flowers of the day are too painfully perfect. Where Nature has left a ragged bit, Mrs. Miller invariably repeats it, for she paints her flowers as they grow in the garden or in the ditches—living practically an outdoor life, and working at all hours to catch them in due season. We have seen her depiction of a superb and delicate bloom which Mrs. Miller found growing in a garden at Weybridge, getting up at four in the morning to paint it while she might, for as the day advanced this feeble flower retired within itself from the gaudy light.

Now for a few practical hints for the benefit of those who may be tempted to essay this delightful pursuit. They come direct from Mrs. Miller in her studio. Some preliminary studies must be gone through at the South Kensington Schools. Then the student will need the simplest materials—an H.B. pencil, india-rubber, and Whatman's drawing-paper—not surface paper. With these go out into the ditchways and highways and draw continually, at all times, from nature, taking pains always to make a careful outline. Simple single flowers should be first attempted, such as primroses, violets, dahlias, Japanese anemones, etc. Don't

touch daisies, the snare of most young flower-painters; their petals are manifold, and require experience and skill to secure satisfactory results. In regard to colours, a student will require a water-colour box with the following colours—Yellows: yellow ochre, Indian yellow, aureolin, cadium, yellow madder. Blues: cobalt and French blues. Browns: Vandyke brown, brown madder, raw amber, raw sienna, burnt sienna, and ivory black. Reds: rose madder, carmine, vermilion, and light red. Greens: terra vert, emerald green, and transparent oxide of chromium.

"Yes," answers Mrs. Miller, "everything that is good in the shape of flower-painting sells well. There are splendid openings for flower pictures, floral designs, wall-paper decoration of all kinds, book illustrations, Christmas cards, needlework—in fact the field is limitless."

"What is the most difficult flower to paint?" the writer asked Mrs. Miller.

"Well, I think the rose. I have waited for years to paint roses, feeling that one should not caricature such beautiful flowers. They have a fleeting look that must be expressed to do them justice, with endless variety and shades. A rose must be painted on the spot, and not worried in any way."



MARGARET HETHERTON.

CHAPTER XI.



LET us just visit one of my favourite haunts before we go back," Margaret said one afternoon a day or two later, after a ramble through the pretty town with the doctor.

"Willingly."

"It is the pretty little cemetery. It is a little way out of the town, but not very far. The French prisoners who died here after the war are buried there."

They wandered up the dusty road in comparative silence. Such a peaceful quiet was over all, it seemed as though they too must be quiet in sympathy. When they reached the little wicket Margaret turned, and, pointing eagerly to the beautiful landscape before them, exclaimed with quiet enthusiasm—

"Look, Dr. Milworth, isn't it beautiful?"

Before them stretched green fields, beyond these lay a calm blue lake with an irregular border of dark trees, overhead there was the sunny sky, in the distance a soft haze.

"Very," Dr. Milworth returned, "but I cannot see so far as you, Margaret, even with my glasses."

"Ah, no, I forgot," the girl said regretfully.

They entered the little cemetery and bent their steps to a rustic seat almost hidden by trees. As they sat down Dr. Milworth took off his spectacles as he often did when their use was not absolutely necessary. Margaret looked at him. Now that the glasses were

gone she remarked that he had handsome brown eyes, a fact she had never noticed before. His brow was both high and broad, a thoughtful, noble brow it was, already somewhat deeply marked by horizontal lines, the hair was brown, streaked with grey, yet, taken as a whole, the face was not so old as she had imagined. Frau von Kowitz was probably right, he could not be forty years old.

"You are examining me carefully, Margaret," said Dr. Milworth with a smile, turning towards her. "I felt your eyes upon me although I was not looking. Come, tell me, are you satisfied with the investigation?"

Margaret blushed and felt much embarrassed.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said hurriedly. "I forgot that I was looking. I was just thinking—"

"That is precisely what I should like to know, Margaret," said Dr. Milworth mischievously as she stopped suddenly.

"Oh, I would rather not say," the girl answered, while her cheeks grew hotter; "it was really nothing."

"The 'nothing' must have been something very bad, I am afraid, if you cannot tell me," Dr. Milworth replied in a tone of great gravity, but with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes which Margaret in her embarrassment never saw.

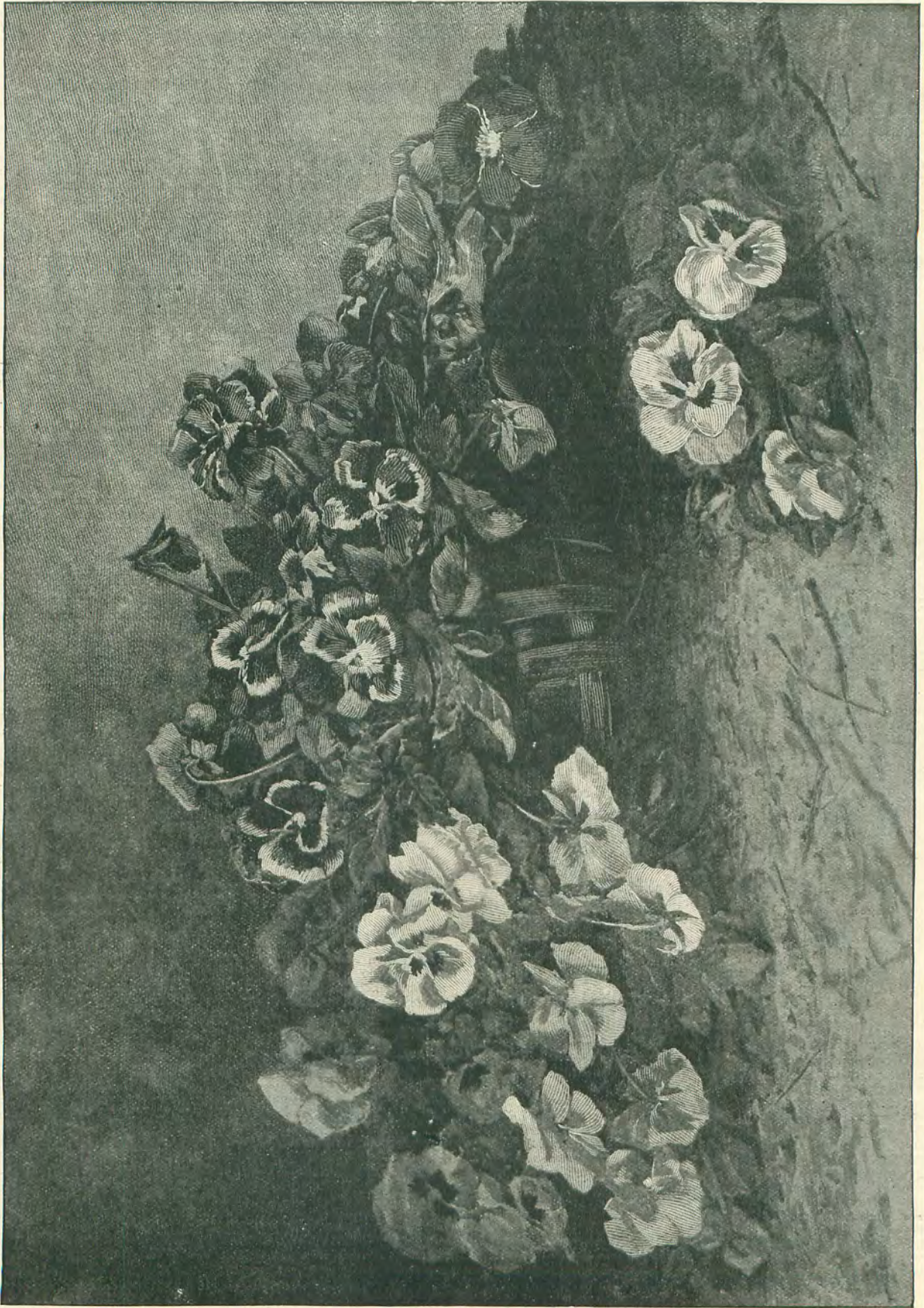
"How should I think anything bad of you, Dr. Milworth? I shall tell you what it was," she went on in her straightforward, childlike way. "I was wondering how old you were; Frau von Kowitz asked me last night."

"And you said?"

"I said forty," Margaret answered a little timidly.

Was she mistaken, or did a look of sadness pass over his face? She must be mistaken, she thought, for the next instant he laughed.

"That was something too much, Margaret. But I am not surprised," he concluded with sudden soberness.



“THREE FACES UNDER A HOOD.”

[From the painting by Mrs. Sophia Miller.]