

THE ALPINE ROSE.

(With coloured plate of *Rhododendron Chamæcistus*.)

THE general notion of an "alpine plant" is a procumbent herbaceous tuft, more or less moss-like in texture, and with not a semblance of wood anywhere about it. This erroneous idea arises from the custom of limiting the ordinary selection of so-called alpine plants to such as grow well on rockeries of the ordinary type, and in common herbaceous borders. In the higher alpine regions grow many arborescent plants, and in fact the true alpine flora comprises trees and shrubs, as well as herbaceous subjects. They all agree, however, in a cushion-like growth; the trees do not become trees, but spread out and keep close to the ground, and incline rather to form a mat of branches touching the stones than a spreading head borne on a distinct stem, as a proper tree would grow upon the plains. Two very pretty examples of the higher alpine timber may be easily obtained and grown in any garden. These are the polar willows, *Salix reticulata* and *S. herbacea*, which are true trees, though they spread on the surface of the ground, and never show the slightest indication of a tendency to the formation of a stem or a head, or any other features by which usually a tree is recognized and distinguished as such. The first-named of these polar willows will make hard, woody shoots, as thick as a black-lead pencil, and these shoots run upon the surface and emit roots and leaves as they go. The other is of a more wiry and herbaceous habit, but when closely observed, is found to be a genuine tree like the other.

It may be worthy of observation, that between trees properly so-called, and herbaceous plants properly so-called, the differences are easily determined, and yet we can find a number of plants that occupy a midway place between them; and these teach us that the differences that appear so decisive at the first consideration are differences of degree only, and not of kind. Let us ask, for example, to what class are the perennial iberis and the yellow alyssum to be assigned. We call them herbaceous plants, but they make hard wood, and have the habit of dwarf shrubs, and in fact are shrubs; that is to say, miniature trees. What can be more decidedly herbaceous than a clove pink, when regarded in its babyhood? yet, if we leave a clove in the ground for ten years, and it happens to enjoy health all that time, it will form woody stems as thick as a man's thumb, and as hard as any one would desire for a walking-stick. Thus, modes of classification that appear to us sufficient to mark out dividing lines in the kingdom of nature, shrink away when confronted with facts, or at least retire out of view, to remain until wanted for purposes of temporary convenience, when it may happen that a faulty classification is better than no classification at all.

But what has all this to do with the alpine rose? Not much, perhaps, but we were led into the little disquisition by calling to mind how many of the alpine herbs approach to the tree-like in habit and

texture, and many of the alpine trees resemble herbaceous plants in some of the more prominent of their characteristics.

The Alpine Rose is the *Rhododendron chamæcistus*, of which a life-like portrait is herewith presented. It grows from four to six inches high, branches freely, and is densely clothed with small leaves of thick texture, which are of a lively green in early summer, and acquire delicate hues of red and bronze in the later days of summer, the season of the plant being short, like the season of its native Tyrolean hills. The flowering of this plant is always an event for the earnest cultivator of alpinists, for although it flowers on the mountains as freely as the pretty ling does on our gritstone moors, it is shy to flower when under cultivation. Those who have seen it "at home," densely dotted with its delicious *Kalmia*-like flowers, would barely recognize it in the rock garden, where it is usually seen in an attenuated state of growth, producing but few flowers or none at all.

The alpine rose is not a difficult plant to manage, if we begin with it in the right way. Those who are familiar with the acres of double flowering heaths that may be found on the chalk downs above Findon Pass, and around the conspicuous ring of Chanctonbury, in Sussex, will not be startled when we tell them that this rhododendron requires a limestone soil, and is really found growing wild, with its roots deep seated in crevices of calcareous rocks. It is generally understood that calcareous matters are poisonous to ericaceous plants, and to a very great extent this is true. But there are exceptions, and just as the lovely double and pink and blush and white varieties of *Calluna vulgaris* and *Erica tetralix* grow luxuriantly on the chalk downs of south Sussex, so, on its native hills, *Rhododendron chamæcistus* usually attains its finest form when rooted deep in the limestone.

There are two other so-called alpine roses, namely, *Rhododendron hirsutum* and *R. ferrugineum*, which are of more robust habit than the alpine rose proper, but agree with it in loving limestone. And it would be no violation of bad taste in this connection, to think of the "Rock Rose," *Helianthemum vulgare*, for that loves the soil and aspect that suit our pretty little rhododendron. It may be that some of our readers have never seen the rock rose growing wild, but they may easily do so when its season returns. In Bonsal Dale, one of the loveliest of many lovely dales in northern Derby, and in the dales that open out therefrom, may be seen miles of the helianthemum in the month of July, the flowers surpassing the finest of buttercups in beauty, and the plant making the close, dense, tufted, and refined growth peculiar to the race we call "alpinists." Here it thrives on the mountain limestone, keeping company with the lily of the valley, of which there is any quantity in this dale of dales, which has for its principal ornament a waterfall not so wide as a man could stretch with his arms, that falls as straight as a tightened cord for 200 feet, and is as cold and pure as newly melted mountain snow.

For this class of plants—for, indeed, all the alpine shrubs—a rockery should be formed of large blocks of limestone, put together

so as to allow a large body of soil between, and this should consist of peat and broken stone and sand in about equal proportions. Mere crevices that the hand could explore are of no use at all; they should be deep enough to hold a man by the leg if his foot slipped into one, and should open below into beds of broken stone and peat and sand, and be filled with the same sort of mixture. Having made a good rockery with a northern aspect for coolness, it will be desirable to ensure a regular dribbling of water all over it from May to August, not indeed to keep it flooded or boggy, for the drainage should be perfect, and the dribbling constant, but to keep the whole mass of rock and soil moist, for the roots of these shrubs are never dry in their own mountain gardens. We cannot create an alpine climate, and the more we see of alpine plants under cultivation, the more thoroughly convinced we are that the question of climate is of comparatively little consequence; but we can shut out from them the meridian beams of the midsummer sun, and ensure to their roots, all the summer long, the kindly moisture which is so essential to their well-doing.

The following is a list of alpine shrubs that require the same treatment as the alpine rose, and are worthy to be associated with it as gems of "purest ray serene." To plant them on a little rockery would be murder—they want light, and space, and air, and a good body of peaty soil. *Andromeda tetragona*, *Azalea amena*, *Calluna vulgaris* fl. pl., *Cotoneaster thymifolia*, *Cytisus sessilifolius*, *Daphne alpina*, *Empetrum nigrum*, *Genista tinctoria* fl. pl., *Helianthemum vulgare* in variety, they do well in shade, but better in the fullest sunshine; *Menziesia polifolia*, *Polygala chamæbuxus*, *Ruscus hypoglossum*, *Salix reticulata*, *Vaccinium amœnum*, *V. ovatum*, and *V. stamineum*.

S. H.

RHODODENDRON VENUSTA.—EARLY FLOWERING RHODODENDRONS.



YOU ask for information respecting the *Rhododendron Venusta*. I believe it to be a distinct species; and I am acquainted with two varieties. I first saw the *Venusta* flowering in a friend's drawing-room in March, 1845. It had been purchased from Messrs. Lucombe & Pince, near Exeter; and from their nursery was immediately procured the parent plant now growing at Ashbury. The foliage is of a dull green, the underside brown, and often curled back at the edges. The flower opens rose-colour, and turns paler in a day or two. The time of flowering varies with the season, and is very protracted—some years beginning in November, and ending early in May. I have known it in full beauty at Christmas, and any time through January and February, generally with the snowdrops. It is often spoilt with a single night's frost; yet, even after continuous frost and snow, a few days' thaw is sufficient to bring forth the buds fit for cutting and opening in water.

November.

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HECOTHEORON CHAMÆCISTUS.