

THE GOETHE PLANT.



MAY I be allowed to draw the attention of your town readers to a very interesting and graceful plant, that has now for some years past been much employed for indoor decoration in Germany, and which is at present beginning to attract the attention of English amateurs. I mean the *Clorophytum Sternbergianum*, or Goethe Plant as it is called on the Continent.

A description is given of it by Goethe in a letter dated Weimar, 1828, which is quoted by Miss Hope in a most interesting article in the *Gardener's Chronicle* of January 11th, 1873, to which I beg to refer your more scientific readers.

Goethe says he found it in the Grand Ducal Gardens at Belvedere near Weimar; but it seems to have been first described by Count Sternberg, after whom it receives its name.

It is an Anthericum, and therefore of the lily tribe, and is supposed to be a native of the Cape of Good Hope.

In appearance it is a graceful, grassy-looking plant, not unlike in foliage to the Day Lily, though on a much smaller scale. A large plant of it would be perhaps best described by imagining tufts of the common wild ribbon-grass strung together at intervals of a foot apart between the tufts. These hanging down, and trailing in all directions, make a tangle of a lovely, soft green that is most refreshing to eyes wearied with the heat and dust of a London summer. A drawing is published with the above-named article, taken from a photograph of the plant in Miss Hope's possession, but it gives no idea of the great beauty of the *Clorophytum Sternbergianum* when it has attained its full growth and vigour, and is really a good specimen plant.

It grows in the way of strawberries and the *Saxifraga sarmentosa*, viz., a parent plant with an endless number of runners, these in their turn having offshoots again springing out of them. The finest specimen I have ever seen was placed in the corner of a drawing-room in Germany, and drooped over a wire stand of about four feet high; the parent plant stood in a good-sized pot on the topmost tier of the stand, all of which was quite hidden by the green cascade of plantlets trailing to the floor. The effect of the whole, with its small, feathery blossoms, was extremely beautiful. Now, the great advantage of the Goethe Plant to amateurs lies in the fact that it flourishes with very little light, and really seems to prefer want of air; in fact, most people kill their plants by putting them out in the wind. Mine thrived admirably in London *till put out*; it was originally a little offset given me in Germany by the lady who owned the large plant just mentioned, and it had cheerfully travelled about with me for weeks, with an occasional airing, just wrapped in a piece of damp flannel. When at last it arrived in town, though the outer leaves were damping off and it looked suspicious about the crown; still it was not dead, and when gently planted in a mixture of leaf-mould and sandy loam it soon picked up its looks. At first it was kept rather dry till it was established and showed unmistak-

able signs of growing, then I made the common mistake of putting it near a constantly opened window; but here it was not happy and did not do well; then, as it was found to be in the way in this place, it was removed to a side table, where it had very little direct light, and was half forgotten; with this treatment it began to thrive splendidly, and grew into a really good plant.

Now came the season for leaving town, and I soon heard that "the lily" had been taken downstairs for safe keeping. This news was not reassuring; but still, if left alone upstairs, it seemed probable the poor plant might suffer from neglect. Then I heard to my dismay that "the lily" having begun to grow sickly, though carefully given all the air they could, had at last been put out altogether for its greater well-being, and before I could come to its rescue my poor plant, my little hero of a hundred fights, was dead.

The editor of the *Gardener's Chronicle*, in a note appended to Miss Hope's article, says the Goethe plant is common in the nurseries. I have never myself been able to meet with it, no doubt owing to my not having known its scientific name; but let me urge any of your readers who are in the habit of making a kind of friend of their plants to try the *Clorophytum Sterbergianum*, for as a cheery example of ever-varying interest it is certainly unequalled. Only let beginners beware of cutting off the shabby, awkward-looking stems that will crop up in all directions as soon as the plant is well established; *on these the young plants grow*. As far as I can recollect, there comes first a sort of scaly or sheathlike leaflet, then little warty-looking rootlets underneath, these grow into small fleshy aerial roots as the leaves grow to a tuft above them, and weigh down the stem into its proper place; should, however, the little plant touch soil anywhere and begin to strike into it, the fleshy aerial roots change their character and become fibrous. Every now and then the plant should be sprinkled overhead with a brush dipped in water, while the roots should be kept moderately damp; watering must depend on the temperature of the room, and in frosty weather it is dangerous to let it get wet, otherwise it is not all particular as to its treatment, always excepting draught or wind.

The flowers, although interesting and adding much to the general beauty of the plant, do not attract much attention. They are rather tall, feathery, and insignificant as to size and colour, but still give a lightness and grace to the whole.

The Goethe plant would be beautiful on the stage of a conservatory by allowing the runners to trail amongst and hide the pots of other subjects, and it has a fine effect indoors mixed with ferns, tulips, and other spring bulbs, giving them the appearance of growing out of grass. These, later in the season, could be changed for gladioli, etc., which also have a fine effect. However arranged as to detail, the grand charm of the Goethe plant will always be its adaptability for drawing-room decoration.

H. R.

[Having grown this plant many years under the name of *Cordyline vivipara*, we can testify that it loves a partial light and a still atmosphere, and, consequently, is well-adapted for growing in a room; but we cannot agree with Miss Hope or her friend H. R. in their praise of its beauty, and the figure in the *Chronicle* does not say much for it.—ED. F. W.]