

A FEW WORDS ABOUT SKELETON LEAVES.

THERE are so many necessary instructions to be given concerning these, that I feel obliged to divide them into four parts; therefore give me your whole attention, please, and we will dive into the subject at once without any preliminary conversation about it. Our first thought shall be what leaves to choose; our second, when to collect them; our third, how to obtain skeletons of them; our last, where to place them when ready for exhibition.

I. You must know that the leaves of certain trees are very refractory, and refuse to put off their coats, and this conduct is not the only piece of ill-nature on their part, for if put with leaves which are good-natured in this respect, they prevent *them* from doffing their garments of green. I warn you, therefore, against leaves of oak, chestnut, walnut, elm, and hazel, and I will explain why they are in bad repute. The leaves of these trees possess a vegetable acid, known as tannin, and the presence of tannin prevents decomposition, and therefore these leaves will not become airy fairy skeletons, and if any of them are put with other kinds they prevent them from doing what we wish.

The list of those which may be chosen is sufficiently lengthy to satisfy the most greedy collector—the scycamore, lime, maple, poplars (white and black), tulip, plane, and pear-trees, magnolia and india-rubber plant, the holly, with its companion evergreens, ivy and box—leaves from all these will repay our trouble.

We need not content ourselves with leaves only; we must gather seed-vessels, for these are an immense improvement to the phantom bouquet. Those of the campanula and corn-poppy, mallow and medicago, henbane and honesty, together with the more sturdy thorn-apple, will afford a pretty variety. Then there are ferns, which will form another addition. Make choice of light specimens, such as maiden hair, beech, and oak ferns, and do not take hart's tongue.

II. About the end of June leaves are in their prime, and this is their proper state for our purpose. Take living leaves off the branches, and not those you find on the ground, and mind you select the older leaves; the younger ones, you know, are at the tips of the branches. You will have to wait until later for ferns, for they must have their seeds on their backs before being gathered. Look carefully over all the specimens, and select those which have perfect forms and are free from blemish. It is well to have several of each kind, because misfortune is sure to happen to

some during the process of altering their appearance.

III. How to obtain skeletons of the leaves is an important consideration. Well, the object of the process is to get rid of the fleshy tissues and vegetable matter which fill up the interstices between the nerves and veins, and thus to bring to view the whole of the delicate tracery concealed by the coats of green.

Find an earthenware vessel with a large wide mouth, put the leaves in it, fill it with rain-water, place it in a warm sunny corner, and there let it stay while the desired work of maceration goes on, slowly, silently, but surely. Now and then as you pass by give the mass a gentle stir with a mop handle, that being wooden and round. Different leaves take different periods of time; thick ones, like those of the indiarubber plant, are months in becoming skeletons, while more delicate leaves are ready in a few days; keep watch, therefore, and when you see a leaf which appears to be ready, slip a piece of cardboard underneath it and transport it into a basin of cold water, shake it gently to and fro, when much of the green matter will float away, let it have another clean bath, and you will then see whether the network is as clear as it ought to be. Thick leaves want a little more help, and when they are in the bath you must dab them gently with a soft tooth-brush.

All the perfect leaves must now be bleached. Put a table-spoonful of solution of chloride of lime and a quart of water into a wide-necked bottle; place the leaves carefully in it, and remove each leaf when it becomes white: this transformation generally takes place in a few hours. Do not forget them, for long immersion makes them sadly brittle.

I must not omit to mention that ferns are not to be skeletonised, they are only to be bleached; their delicacy at all times will exercise your patience, but be determined to succeed. I think you will manage all your specimens better if you take hold of them with forceps, instead of with fingers merely. When brought out of the bleaching bottle they must be put into a bath of tepid water, in order to be freed from all chloride, and they should then be dried; the sun will do this better than a fire, but if there is no sun we must employ a fire. It must not be a very hot one, however, or our lovely specimens will curl and shrivel. We now put them between sheets of clean white blotting-paper, and having settled them comfortably, we put them under books, and there let them remain until we are ready for them, for, sad to say, they shrink if exposed to the air.

IV. We have now come to our last consideration—what to do with our beautiful skeletons. Unless they are intended to form a collection in a book, they ought to be readily seen and admired, and as they are very frail and delicate they should be protected from harm under glass.

There are three ways in which you can arrange a group of these leaves. You can make a basket or trellis-work of red coral, and tie the leaves to it with red silk, and over this a glass shade can stand. You can cover a flat piece of wood with dark-coloured velvet, and on this arrange tiny specimens keeping them in place by a drop of gum ;

a deep frame and a glass must be provided for this picture group, and plenty of space allowed between the glass and the leaves. A third plan is to get a good-sized bung cork, to swathe this in cotton-wool, and having made the padding even, and yet sloping, to cover the cushion with dark velvet. Holes—some tiny and some a little larger—are then to be made in the cushion by two brad-awls, into which the stems of the leaves are put, and held there by a drop of gum. When this bouquet is arranged the tall specimens should be placed in the centre, and the cushion should be often turned round, to ensure a good shape for the group.

E.C.

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RENÉE.



ONE by one the church clocks of Rouen had struck six, and the nest of small dark streets behind the Rue Jeanne d'Arc woke up into light and life. On the fourth floor of one of the oldest and narrowest houses a little girl had opened a window half covered by long trails of Virginia creeper, and trimmed and watered a scarlet geranium that stood on the sill. She stood for a moment

listening to the clatter of the sabots in the street below, the noise of the market-carts as they rattled over the large round stones, and the shrill voices of the passers-by. Then she looked once more round the little room, spread a piece of bright coloured cretonne over her bed, carefully dusted the table and chair which stood by the window, and went down the dark staircase to the floor beneath. She had scarcely reached the landing place, when a door opened softly, and an old grey-haired woman came out.

"Not now ; not now, Renée," she said, in a low voice ; "thy mother has been sleeping for the last hour. Thou shalt go in and see her when she wakes."

The little girl looked up in sudden terror.

"Madame Rueil," she said, in a whisper, "is my mother worse ?"

"No, not worse," said Madame Rueil, "but she has not slept all night, and she has been telling me that it is thy birthday." Madame Rueil sat down in Renée's room ; her grey hair was smoothed back under her cap, and her small pale face looked worn and troubled as the light fell upon it. She

drew Renée towards her. "My poor child," she said, "Hadst thou forgotten that it is thy birthday? Thou art eleven to-day. Oh! if thou wert but older! If I were to die, Renée, what would become of thy mother? She is not strong enough to work for herself and for thee, and thou art too young to earn bread."

"Cannot I work as my mother works?" asked Renée, anxiously. "Cannot I make caps like those that she makes?"

"Thou art too young to sit at needlework all day long, and sometimes into the night besides. If thou wert older thou could'st go to England and teach, as thy mother did.

"But, Madame Rueil," said Renée, the tears springing to her eyes, "how could I leave her? If I were to go away—hundreds of miles away—it would break her heart."

"Her heart is breaking because she cannot work for thee any longer," said Madame Rueil. "She does not like to take the little food that I can give her, and if I die she will no longer have a shelter."

"My mother has taught me to draw and to do needlework," said Renée ; "and I have read, oh, so many books of history! Why cannot I teach?"

Madame Rueil got up from her chair with a deep sigh, and went towards the door. "Thou art too young," she said ; and she left the room as sadly as she had entered it.

For three years Madame Rueil had exercised the most self-denying charity and kindness towards Madame Barentin and her little daughter. Madame Barentin in her youth had lived in English families as a governess. She had married an artist, who died suddenly, leaving her with her child dependent on her own exertions. During several years she managed by extreme care and industry to support herself in London by giving lessons ; but after a