

Curious Clipped Trees.

BY HERBERT MATTHEWS.



MOST of us have heard of trees clipped into curious shapes and devices, and the microscopic minority that reads the gardening papers may possibly have seen drawings of some quaint examples of "verdant sculpture" or "topiary work," to give the thing its technical name. However, this is the first time that actual photographs have been taken of these wonderful trees for reproduction in a popular magazine.

These curious clipped trees may even yet be found at many old country mansions, but their quaint shapes are, generally speaking, only maintained because they are a relic of the past. "Topiary," writes Mr. Leopold de Rothschild, "is *not* appreciated by the great critics." It isn't. Somehow, they think it isn't quite natural, though why it shouldn't be, any more than, say, cutting a lawn, or trimming a hedge, one doesn't know.

The photograph reproduced on this page gives a capital idea of the extraordinary

Also other wonders of the sportive shears,
Fair Nature misadorning, there were found :
Globes, spiral columns, pyramids, and piers
With spouting urns and budding statues crowned ;
And horizontal dials on the ground
In living box, by cunning artists traced ;
And galleys trim, or on long voyage bound,
But by their roots there ever anchored fast.

"Architecture as applied to living trees" is many centuries old. Our old friend Pliny had the grounds of his Tuscan villa decorated in this way—rows of bristly sentries and the initials of ladies cunningly clipped in box. Down to the commencement of the eighteenth century, the leading Italian gardens were full of verdant sculpture. That inveterate gossip, Evelyn, tells us he saw at Genoa an extensive grove of yews cut to resemble a flock of sheep, together with their shepherd, and a few wild beasts of no particular species, but of menacing appearance.

The Royal Gardens of Holland, designed during the reign of William III., contained a number of trees clipped into geometrical figures—junipers shaped into pyramids; marsh-



From a Photo. by]

TOPIARY GARDEN AT LEVENS HALL.

[J. H. Hogg, Kendal.

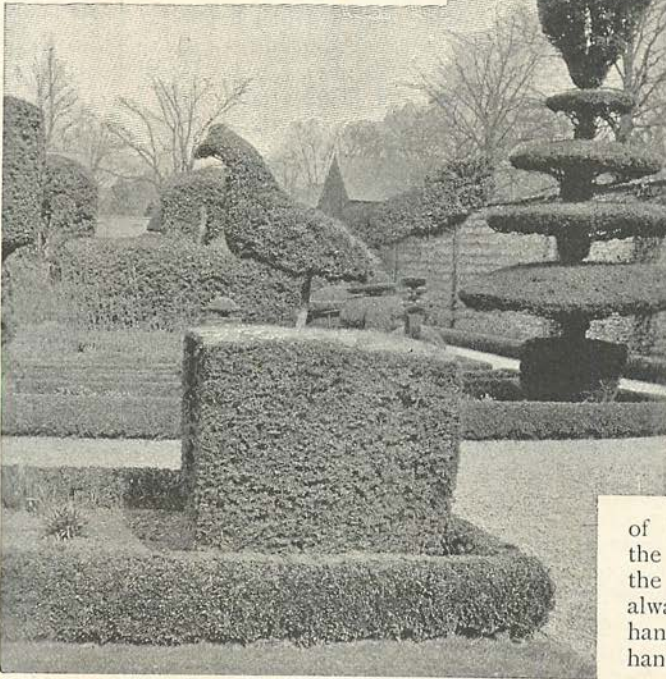
spectacle presented by one of these old topiary gardens. It is a general view taken in the grounds of Captain Bagot's magnificent residence, Levens Hall, near Kendal, in Westmorland. A glance at this photograph enables one to understand the following plaintive lines :—

There likewise mote be seen on every side
The shapely yew, of all its branching pride
Ungently shorn, and, with preposterous skill,
To various beasts and birds of sundry quill
Transformed, and human shapes of monstrous
size.

mallows as sun-dials ; and big yews cut and trained so as to form complete summer-houses. Many capital examples of this sort of thing may be seen in the foregoing photo.—pyramids, urns, small arbours, and sundry miscellaneous ornaments, all clipped in the living foliage.

But nothing will give you a better idea of this curious form of gardening than the photo. next reproduced. We have had a general glance at the gardens of Levens Hall; we now come to examine the individual

figures more closely. The peacock so sharply outlined here is a particularly fine example. Remember,



PEACOCK ON PEDESTAL—A WONDERFUL LIVING YEW.
From a Photo. by J. H. Hogg, Kendal.

in Warwickshire. On a huge mound is a big yew clipped in the form of a cross. Paths branch off from this central spot in various directions, and are bordered with hedges of box. The mound is called the Mount of Olives, and close by are the "Four Evangelists" — four large yews clipped in the shape of square canisters. Smaller yews, dotted about on the lower ground, represent (according to the quaint design) a mixed multitude listening to one of the Evangelists preaching. And to this strange place hundreds of pilgrims resorted in by-gone days!

The photo. next reproduced shows that tree in the grounds of Levens Hall which is called the "Cup and Saucer." Notice the little sprig of foliage that is always retained to do duty as the handle of the cup. Without this handle the figure might pass for an old-fashioned hat, whilst the

the whole is *one living yew tree*—pedestal, stick, and bird. The border of the bed is box. So fine a figure as this requires periodical trimming, otherwise the peacock, after gradually undergoing fearful transmogrifications, would fade right away in the ordinary course of nature. In other words, it would grow completely out of shape.

When glancing at this photo., one should not overlook the curiously clipped tree on the right-hand side, which is intended purely for an ornamental figure. Peacocks seem to have been the favourite figure of the verdant sculptors. Now, in the case of the queer birds at Haddon Hall, one can understand and appreciate the choice, for a peacock forms part of the crest of the ducal family of Rutland. At Haddon, by the way, there is also a boar's head, rather grown out of shape. The lawn at The Durdans, Lord Rosebery's Epsom seat, is adorned with a couple of leafy geese, two Dutch hens, and a peacock; and Lady Warwick has at Easton a peculiar sundial, clipped in yew and box—hour-figures, dial, and all.

One of the quaintest groups of clipped trees in the country is at Packwood House,



THE "CUP AND SAUCER."
From a Photo. by J. H. Hogg, Kendal.

lower part of the tree resembles a mushroom.

The French taste in this direction was at the summit of its fame during the reign of Louis XIV., who employed an eminent landscape-gardener named Le Notre, to decorate the gardens at Versailles in such a manner "that the nation and the Court might be dazzled and enchanted by its novelty and singularity." M. Le

Notre succeeded. He went so far in the topiary way that the very branches of the trees were clipped to represent the architecture of different periods. Greyhounds in full cry after a stag were represented in clipped box — a remarkable exhibition, which caused

a shrewd English writer to remark that "such hunting shall not waste your corn, nor much of your coyne." At the same time, however, it still calls for a little "coyne" to keep up a topiary garden, unless you want your "living statuary" to become ragged and finally fade away altogether. So much animosity was at one time felt against this curious work, that one wonders why no society was started for its suppression. Even Pope grumbled about it:—

"A citizen is no sooner proprietor of a couple of yews, but he entertains thoughts of coverting them into giants, like those of the Guildhall!" By the way, why hasn't somebody thought of using verdant sculpture for advertising purposes? A couple of birds and a rabbit or two in pots, placed outside a restaurant door, would be certain to attract a crowd. And one of our informants, Mr. Donald McDonald, of Carter's famous seed warehouse (to whom we are greatly

indebted for assistance), tells us that a Belgian nurseryman devotes a large area in his grounds to the training and cutting of yews into grotesque shapes solely for the English market. From which it is clear there must still be some demand for these curiosities. But clipped trees can be useful as well as ornamental. The "Judge's Wig" seen in the accompanying illustration is both. It is



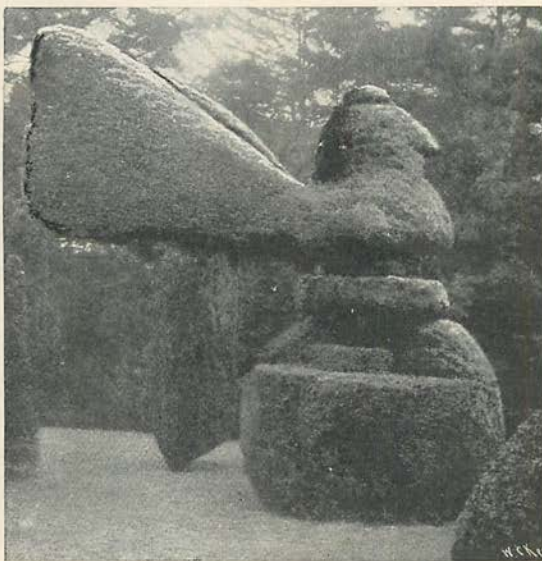
From a Photo. by

THE "JUDGE'S WIG."

[J. H. Hogg, Kendal.

formed of a number of good-sized yews, and lives admirably up to its name so far as appearances go, the close foliage and perfect cutting completing the illusion. But besides this the "Judge's Wig" forms the pleasantest summer-house you could imagine. Five o'clock tea in the Wig is a novel and delightful experience; the table and seats you can see for yourself in the photograph.

Trees of this kind cannot be grown in a year — scarcely in a century. Thus it is that we find the best examples of topiary work only in the ancestral seats of the nobility, where these curiosities have been the delight of generations. There are likewise a number of quaintly clipped trees at Elvaston Castle, the splendid country residence of the Earl of Harrington, near Derby. We are greatly indebted to Lord Harrington for his kind permission to photograph these trees. The photograph here reproduced shows a particularly plump and perky



From a Photo. by

A WELL-GROOMED BIRD.

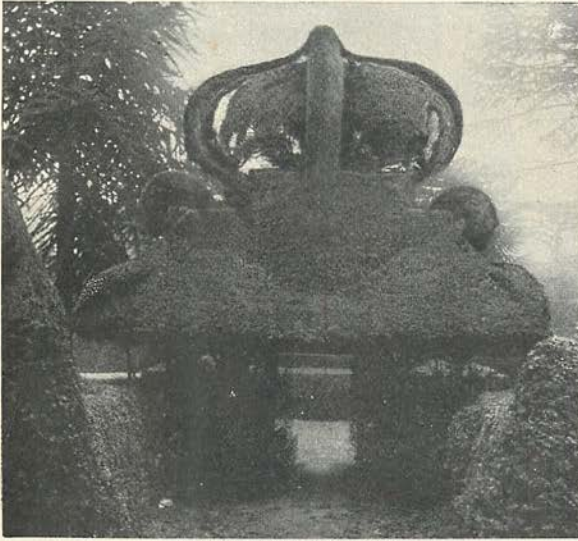
[W. W. Winter, Derby.

peacock mounted on a highly elaborate pedestal. As yew is an ever-green, these extraordinary objects retain their shape all the year round.

Fashions in gardening change, just as do fashions in dress. Ask our leading landscape gardeners — Mr. Milner, of Victoria Street, or Mr. McClean, of Derby—and you will learn how indifferent people are nowadays towards verdant

sculpture as an ornament to the grounds about a mansion. Most of the working gardeners, even, are averse from what they consider an unnatural mutilation of trees. The thing is entirely a matter of taste. Certainly to the ordinary person a topiary garden, such as the one shown in the view reproduced on the first page of this article, is far more interesting than a mere ordinary park or flower-garden. And many noblemen and others who possess gardens like those at Elvaston, usually find the clipped trees a perennial source of interest to their guests.

Churches fortunate enough to possess verdant sculptures also find these curious trees an attraction. Cyclists and others will recall the great double peacock that forms so remarkable an arch in front of the porch of the parish church of Bedfont, a



CHINESE PAGODA AND CROWN.
From a Photo. by W. W. Winter, Derby.

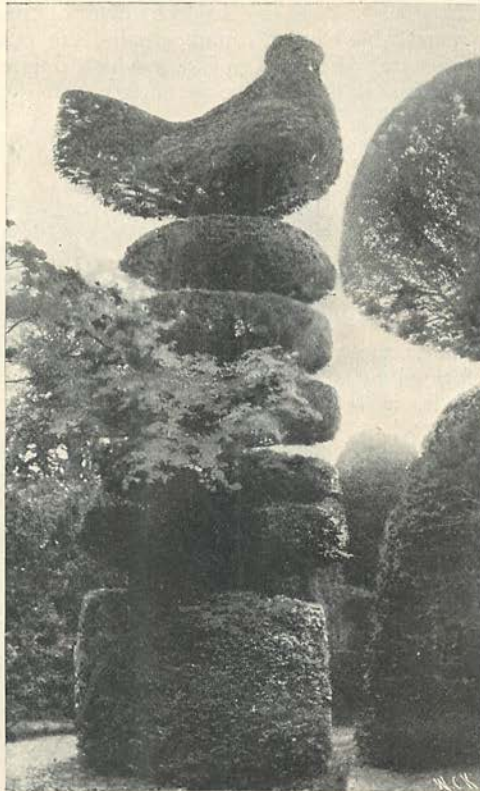
delightful little village near Staines. One of these immense birds (both are clipped in venerable yews) bears the date, "1704," outlined in the foliage; whilst the other peacock has below it the initials of a former vicar and churchwardens, "J. H.," "J. G.," "R. T."

The next illustration conveys a good notion of the bizarre arboreal decorations in the grounds

of Elvaston Castle. Here we see what is intended to represent a Chinese pagoda, surmounted with an Imperial crown. The

ornamentation at the corners is curiously elaborate; and it will be noticed that the entire strange edifice is thrown across the path, so that from some little distance it looks not unlike a lych-gate.

The remarkable fowl seen in the accompanying reproduction is intended to be a hen. Her beak has either withered away or been broken off. The position of that penetrating eye is not, one fears, precisely true to Nature, and as the foliage of the tree happens to be a little thin, the moulting season irresistibly suggests itself. Still, this is a good specimen of verdant sculpture, the curiously wrought pedestal rearing the hen aloft in such a



THE HEN "IN EXCELSIS."
From a Photo. by W. W. Winter, Derby.



From a Photo. by]

A MARVELLOUS ARBOUR.

[W. W. Winter, Derby.

way that she is clearly silhouetted against the sky. The yew tree on the right, clipped with extraordinary precision, would be termed a dome by the "sculptors."

Yet another of the very remarkable clipped trees at Elvaston is shown here. In fact, on looking at this photograph, it is very difficult indeed to realize that this symmetrical arbour is a living tree at all. The principal trunk and all the ramifying branches are completely hidden beneath the very close green foliage; and it is only by going inside that one is enabled to get "behind the scenes," so to speak.

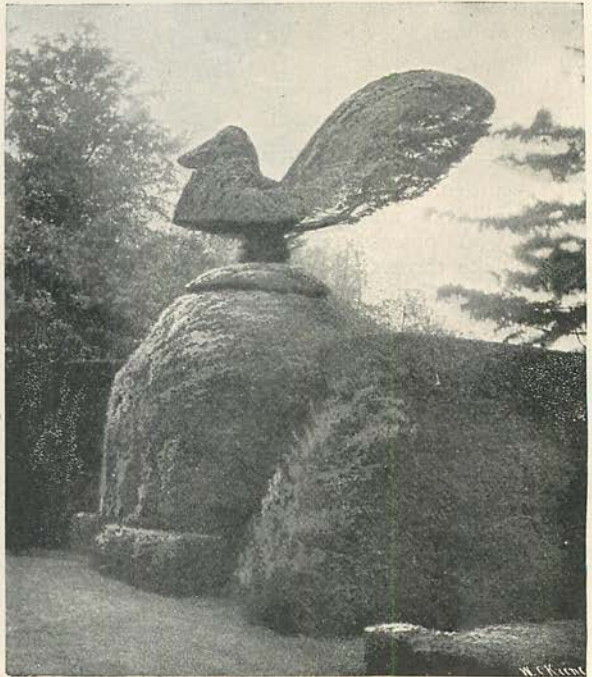
Take the peacocks at Bedford Church. If you walk towards the church through the arch formed by the above-mentioned birds, and stand well behind the two ancient yews out of which they are formed, you will see no shape whatever—merely two ordinary trees whose branches interlace overhead. And when inspecting various items of verdant sculpture, many astonished people carefully explore the "statues" and arbours in this way, solely in order to satisfy themselves that these amazing structures are in reality living trees.

The quaint effect of the arbour shown in the last illustration, by the way, is heightened by the two peacocks that rise, one above the

other, behind it. The tails of the birds are a little thin, but this must be expected in places.

These clipped trees are not by any means well known. Many well-to-do people who see them for the first time ask whether such trees are grown for sale anywhere. They are. Anyone who likes may send over to Rotterdam and buy "arboreal outrages" of any design—human figures, elephants, chairs and tables, and so on. The cottagers round about Rotterdam let their fancy run riot among their yews and box, and eventually send their most successful productions to a certain big local nurseryman.

The next reproduction shows a peacock mounted upon a dome-like base. In all cases the whole consists of one tree, cunningly trained and clipped with a pair of shears by some Elizabethan gardener, whose patience only equalled his ingenuity. In the case of nearly all the foregoing photographs, the operator took up a point of view which only embraced the extremely close surface and outline of the foliage, and



From a Photo. by]

PEACOCK MOUNTED ON DOME. [W. W. Winter, Derby.

the resulting photos. revealed scarce a single branch of the tree itself. Here, however, we can see the smaller branches in the peacock's tail. Possibly this destroys the illusion a little, but still it enables one to see that these are really trees.

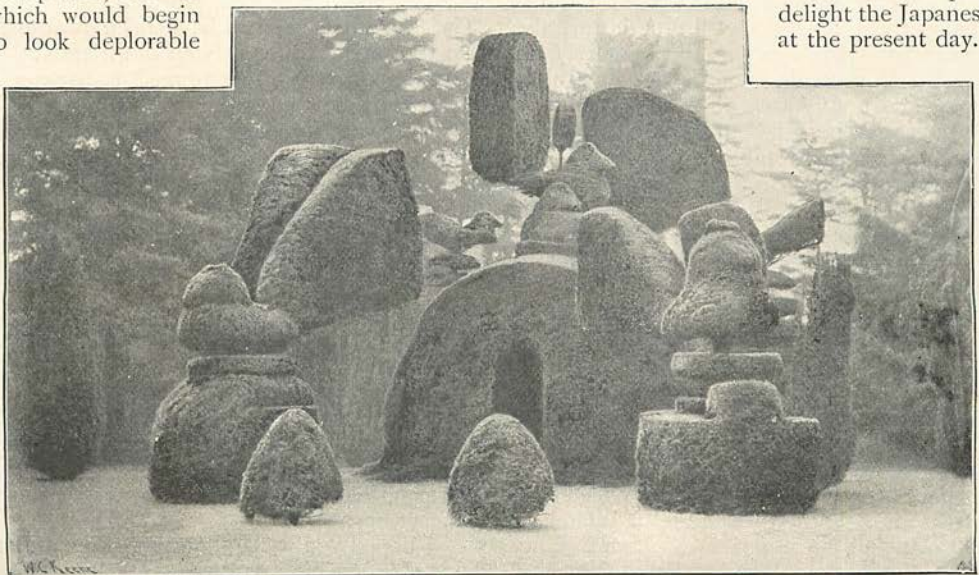
But the whole internal economy of the tree is pretty well laid bare for us in the next reproduction, which shows us the clipped yew known as the "Open Umbrella" in the gardens at Levens Hall, near Kendal. And well may this curious old tree be styled an umbrella. One might sit on the seat beneath it during the heaviest shower, and hardly a drop of rain would percolate through the close leaves. A little farther away is seen a pyramidal-shaped tree, crowned with a little cupola. On the right and left will be noticed other curious specimens of verdant sculpture, all of which would begin to look deplorable



THE "OPEN UMBRELLA."
From a Photo. by J. H. Hogg, Kendal.

were it not for the constant and unremitting attention they receive at the hands of the head gardener.

The last photograph to be reproduced in this article shows a corner of the gardens at Elvaston Castle. Truly, it suggests a nightmare rather than a group of venerable, respectable old yew trees! Here are represented a number of nondescript birds, apparently guarding a quaint little arbour. But it should be remembered that these birds grow just like other birds; and when they are young and unformed it is difficult to classify them. And those persons who cavil at verdant sculpture, such as Messrs. Gilbert and Onslow Ford never dreamt of, should always remember that it is a form of landscape gardening which delighted our ancestors, much as the century-old dwarf trees in flower-pots delight the Japanese at the present day.



From a Photo. by]

GROUP OF CURIOUS CLIPPED TREES AT ELVASTON.

[W. W. Winter, Derby.