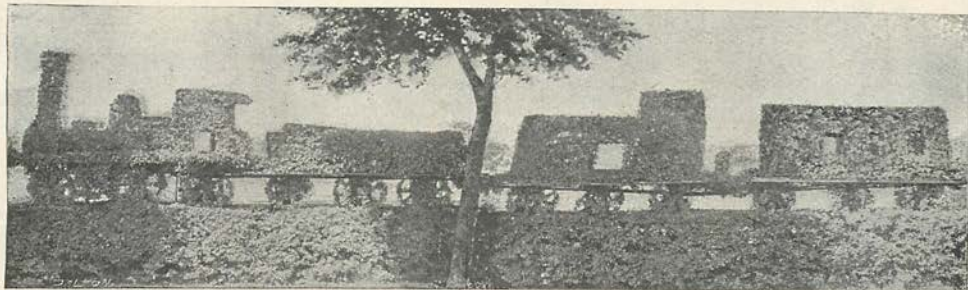


The Most Wonderful Hedge in the World.

By JAMES WALTER SMITH.

[From Photographs specially taken for George Newnes, Limited, by F. Lammersen, Steinheim, Westphalia.]



HAWTHORN HEDGE REPRESENTING COMPLETE TRAIN.

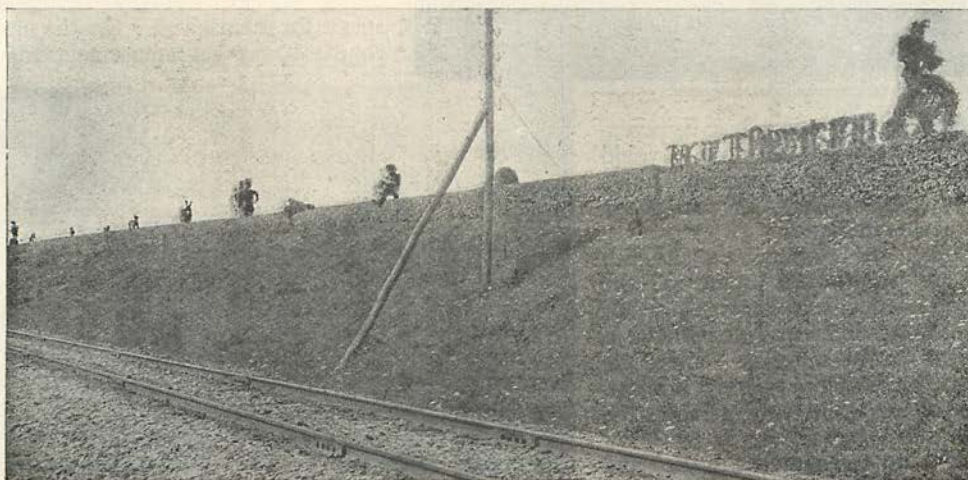


SOME months ago an article in this Magazine, entitled "Curious Clipped Trees," attracted more than a little attention. It was indeed a striking thing that so many figures of so many curious shapes should have been made by English gardeners, and that so few people should have seen them. Many letters on the subject came to this office expressing surprise. What will the senders now say when they hear that at a small German station called Steinheim a railway guard has been able, in his odd moments, to create over threescore of these hedge curios, and that they serve as a railway fence, meeting with the commendation of the railway authorities, and the admiration of visitors, as they happen to pass along the line?

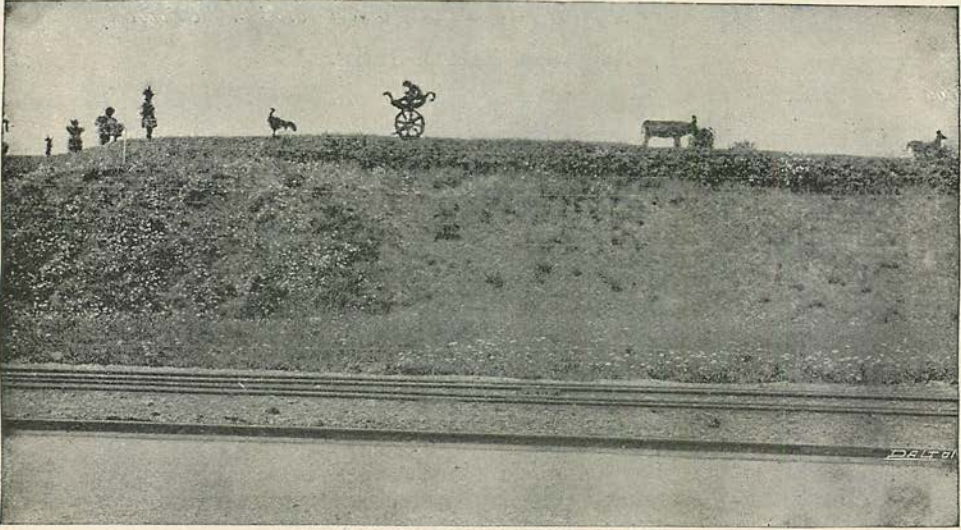
Yet there it is, to be seen by you, yourself, if you ever happen that way. Steinheim lies

in Westphalia between Cologne and Berlin. The patient guard, who, after many years of service, has been retired, is named Anton Meier, and the exact number of the figures is at present sixty-three. They lie on both sides of the line, thirty-one on one side and thirty on the other, continuing for some hundreds of yards on each side of the station, and lengthening each year in accordance with Herr Meier's ability to plant and tend them. The sixty-second figure, which we have not yet accounted for, takes the form of a locomotive and three cars, the *chef-d'œuvre* of its inventor, and, without doubt, the most remarkable thing of its kind ever done with leaves and shears.

Our article, as you have noticed, begins with this striking figure. Below, on the first page, we are able to give a general view of one side of the line, showing the various hedge-figures disappearing in the distance.



HEDGE FIGURES ON NORTH SIDE OF THE RAILWAY STATION AT STEINHEIM.



HEDGE FIGURES ON SOUTH SIDE OF STATION.

At the top of this page is shown the other side of the line, with another set of figures—all different, all elaborate, and all attractive in themselves. To stand

Steinheim. Herr Meier, training his hawthorn bushes on wooden framework, held together by means of wire, has erected the green signs shown in the accompanying illustrations, "Berlin" and "Köln," the latter being the German name of Cologne.



ORNAMENTAL RAILWAY SIGN.

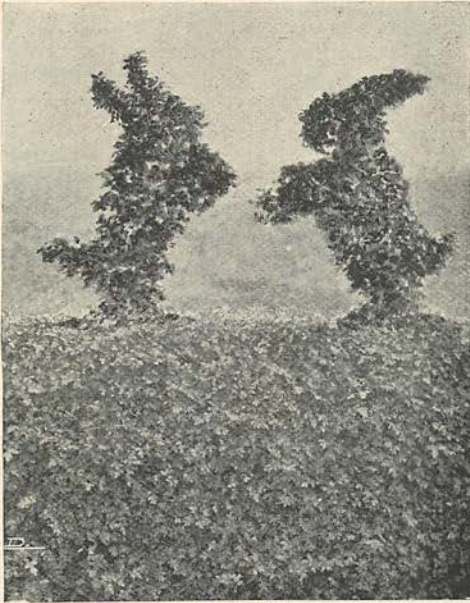
at Steinheim Station just as evening is coming on one would think that these shadowy forms were veritable fays of the poetic German Fatherland.

There are stations on English railways where the name of the station is effectively shown by means of rocks of different colours laid in the turf on the hill-side. There are others in which a happy arrangement of carpet-bedding achieves the same effect, but so far as we know there is no arrangement in England so excellent as that in use at

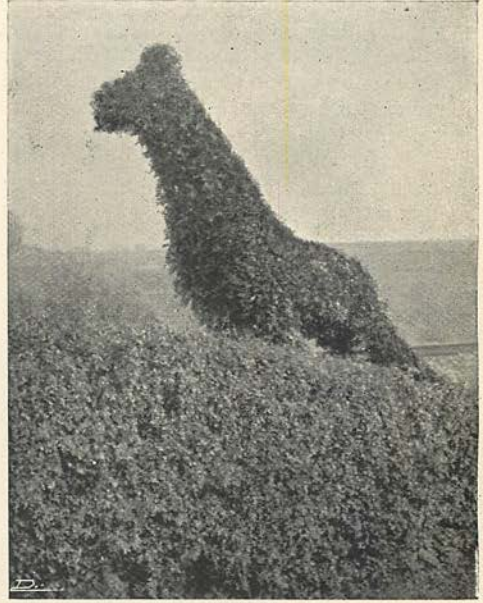


ORNAMENTAL RAILWAY SIGN.

Out of the sixty or seventy photographs which we have had specially taken for the readers of this Magazine, we have selected over a score for publication. These have been chosen to illustrate the variety between the figures, and the skill with which they have been executed. It is almost impossible in the limits of this article to describe them in detail, so we virtually let them speak for themselves. On the next page we may get amusement from



HARES AT PLAY.



GIRAFFE.

the two hares at play on their hind legs, trying to shake hands with each other. We may almost hear the musical twitter of the giraffe in the upper right-hand corner, and we may pause, as we believe Herr Meier has often paused, to wonder at the two animals below, and to decide if each was not really intended at some time for the other. To be zoologically correct, one is a goat and the other a canine. For evidence we

have Herr Meier's statement: the horns on the goat, and the tail on the dog.

The evolution of this remarkable idea has been explained to us by Herr Meier himself. About fifteen years ago, it seems, the railway authorities planted some bushes to fence in the line. These grew quickly, and for about five years served their purpose usefully. At this time Meier was a signalman, and one day, when he was on duty,



DOG.



GOAT.

the thought struck him to beautify his cottage by cutting these bushes into different shapes. No thought of the labour involved, or its probable consequences, entered his mind, and he went stolidly to work. Cutting here and planting there, his first attempts were confined to reproductions of the commoner animals such as dogs, cats, hens, and cows, but as time went on the rarest specimens of the zoological and ornithological worlds secured his attention. As regards the creation of new figures, it may be said that it takes two to four years for the figures to grow to their full size, and that, during that time, they have to be constantly watched and trained. That is what we mean when we speak of "probable consequences."

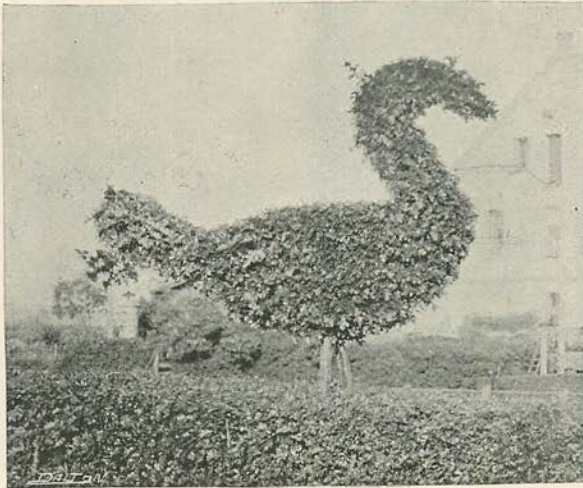
When Meier was pensioned, the railway company gave the bushes into his charge, and allowed him to cut them three times a

year—in June, August, and October. Virtually, this was equivalent to a permission for continual cutting, as by the time the sixty-three figures were finished the cutter was

ready to begin on the sixty-three again. Our photographer was compelled to wait nearly a month until the figures could be properly trimmed. Variety is further evidenced in the figures on this page, representing a swan (a very elongated and rotund swan), a woman making butter, and a circus dog. The woman carries herself

very naturally, and the dog might make his fortune at any show if he were not so deeply attached to Steinheim.

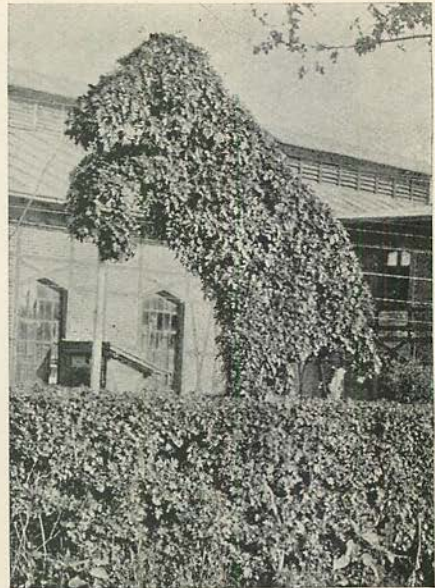
The latter figure will give us some idea of the preliminary care which must be exerted with the framework in order that a true effect may be secured two years hence. The frame is very similar to, though not so elaborate as,



SWAN.

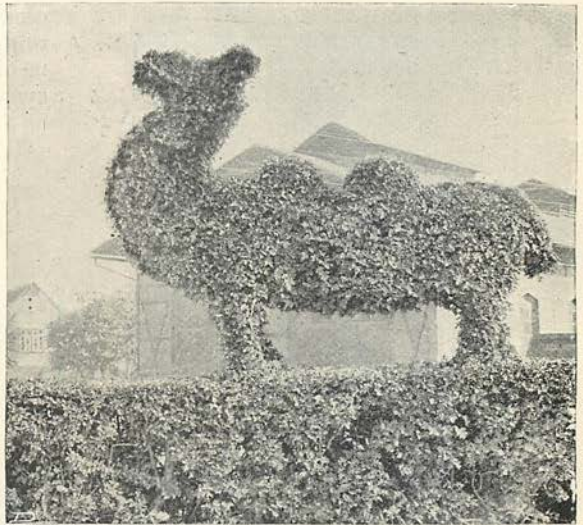


PEASANT WOMAN MAKING BUTTER.

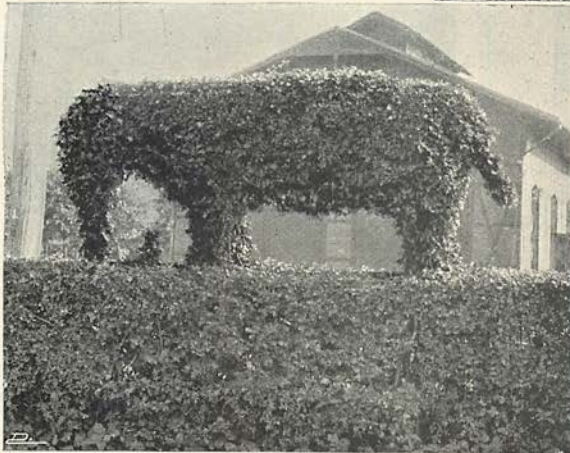


CIRCUS DOG.

the skeletons which taxidermists use to build their elephants, dogs, and other animals upon. Mention of elephants brings us appropriately to the next illustration, which, however, bears little resemblance to the true Asian or African breed. It has a trunk, but a very immobile trunk—a tail, but a very abbreviated tail. Perhaps it is not an elephant after all, but a German boar. At all events, it is one of the largest and most striking specimens of the collection, and if we had allowed Herr Meier more time to trim it we might have been able more accurately to give our readers the exact genus and species of this all-absorbing beast.



DROMEDARY.



ELEPHANT.

Another large figure is the dromedary, or double-humped camel, shown in the upper right-hand corner of this page, a great favourite with the children, and a most successful exhibit. Unfortunately, however, we have nothing more to say about this dromedary, and we let it stand by itself.

An amusing story is current in Steinheim to the effect that a certain young German cavalier, who shall be nameless, was out one evening visiting at a friend's house with particular reference to the presence of a beautiful German maiden. The story goes that good German beer ran strong, and that by the time the German cavalier was ready to start home he was in a parlous state. Crossing the fields diagonally he suddenly found himself in the presence of all sorts of animals. Obstructed at every turn by some curious creation of Dame Nature, and finally excited

to uproarious amazement by the duplication and reduplication of the species, the next morning, so the story continues, when the vision was clearer, the truth of the thing dawned upon this gallant, but not until the little community of Steinheim was ringing with laughter at the story of his experience with the figures along the line.

The following illustrations show several of Meier's more successful figures. Below is represented a man who appears to be in the act of scratching the back of his friend.

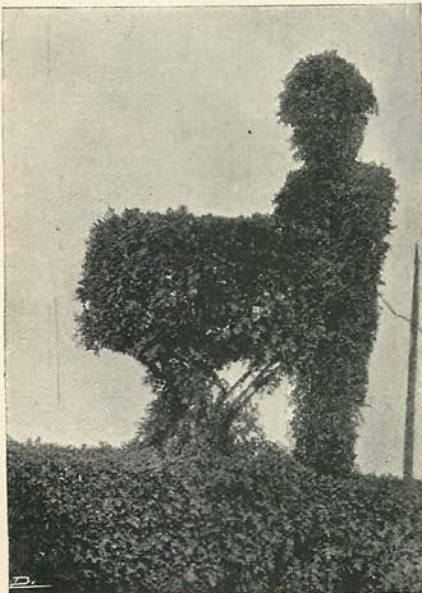


THE SCRATCHER.



BALLET-DANCER.

On this page we show a ballet-dancer and an Italian hurdy-gurdy man. It took much care to perfect these figures, not only in the earlier stages, but in the constant trimming necessitated during several years of growth. The



ORGAN-GRINDER.

ballet-dancer is, perhaps, the most artistic of the set, and as we stood looking at it several months ago we were amazed at the naturalness of the pose. There was, too, an ex-

ceeding effectiveness in the organ-grinder, who stood not far removed from several members of the monkey kingdom. This evident connection between organ-grinders



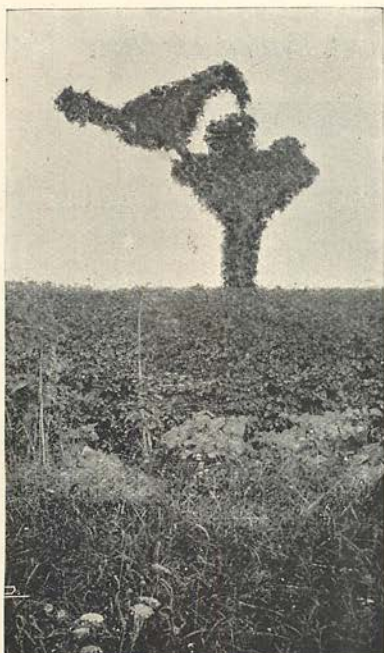
HORSE.

and monkeys, in the mind of the inventor, was a happy thought, and typical of the fancy with which nearly the whole series of figures was planned.

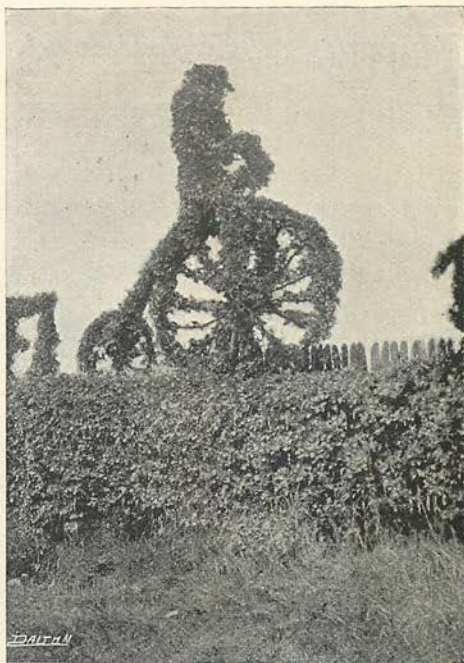
On this page we also show a horse with huntsman as rider. On a slight slope of the hill



GAMEKEEPER.



BIRD FEEDING YOUNG.



CYCLIST.

the animal stands with feet braced against the ground and mouth wide open, as if on account of an unusual strain on the bit. Note also the gamekeeper, with sturdy figure and gun upraised. In the upper left-hand corner of this page is a very pretty representation of a bird feeding its young; and at its side is a most successful representation of a bicyclist on a high wheel. No subject, it seems, was too difficult for Herr Meier's scissors. All the figures are of hawthorn. After a figure has been made of wire and wooden rods, the branches which have been cut are trained in the various directions. We trust we may not be blamed for again calling attention to the laborious nature of this work, and we take pleasure in giving a picture of the man who has done so much



HERR ANTON MEIER.

towards making this half-way place between Cologne and Berlin a thing of pleasure to the eye. Some men make it their life-work to write a book; others spend years on a piece of sculpture which brings them fame; others, in humbler stations, find their reward in work well done, whatever it may be. Herr Meier's life-work in this distant German town is his hedge-fence which bounds the railway. People pass it only to admire, knowing nothing of the trouble which it took; others pass it by, with a sneer, as a freak of disordered imagination; while others, knowing the history of the thing and the love of the man for his work, encourage him with their words of commendation. We who have heard the story, and who know both man and work, add to this our praise.