From Petal to Perfume.

By Emma Brewer.

From Photographs specially taken for The Strand Magazine *by Bruno Court, Grasse.*

From a] GATHERING ORANGE-BLOSSOMS AT BRUNO COURT'S. *[Photo.*

THERE are many exquisite properties in Nature ready and anxious to be recognised, but which never come out of their hiding-places until we human beings gain knowledge and power to call them forth and endow them with life. Trees grew for centuries before man discovered the music embodied in them or knew how to use it. Flowers charmed us with their colours and fragrance while they were fresh, and we threw them away when they withered, without a thought that there was a power within to charm us long after they themselves had passed away.

There is everything in the world to make man's life beautiful, pure, and graceful, but it is left to him to call forth the fulness of colour, perfume, poetry, and music by his own intelligence and for his own use.

Five hundred years have passed since the people of Southern France learnt the secret of extracting the perfume of flowers and preserving it. They discovered that as trouble and what is called "roughing it" often bring out the sweetness of certain characters, so the beauty and sweetness of flowers could only be obtained by crushing and heavy pressure, together with a certain doubtful companionship. This poetic industry of extracting and preserving perfumes has of late grown into giant proportions, and as very little is known of it, beyond the great pleasure the perfume affords to those who can purchase it, a visit with me to Bruno Court's Perfume Factory in Grasse will, I think, prove interesting.

Just as there are but a few primary colours and a few notes of music which in combination create new harmonies of colour and sound, so it is with perfumes, the basis of which are eight flowers, viz., orange-blossom, rose, violet, jonquil, mignonette, jasmine, tuberose, and cassia, which last grows in Provence and bears a yellow flower.

All flowers are, however, pressed into the

From a] GATHERING JASMINE. [*Photo.*

service, as well as scented woods, herbs, iris-root, and lavender, but they do duty, as it were, under the eight principal ones. Among these last, three stand out as queens, viz., orange-blossom, the rose, and the violet. The greatest patience, care, ingenuity, and skill

From a] GATHERING ROSES. [*Photo.*

are required in the manufacture of perfumes. It is necessary to know the flowers well, to take them at the right moment, and subject them to the necessary treatment in order to compel them to give out their fragrance.

The quaint, picturesque town of Grasse, situate in the Alpes-Maritimes, is the chief centre of this industry. The whole of the inhabitants are more or less occupied in the production of fruits and flowers and in preserving them. Between seventy and eighty men and women are always employed in Bruno Court's establishment, but in the flower months of April, May, June, and July an extra three hundred women and girls are taken on by him to manipulate the flowers brought in in the early morning. One of their special occupations is separating the pistils from the petals of orange-flowers and roses: the former being acid would spoil the softness of the perfumes if they were not removed.

Bruno Court has fixed days in the week for receiving violets and mignonette, but all other flowers are plucked and brought in fresh every morning during the whole of the flower season. Roughly speaking, about 216,250lb. of roses are received each month, so it is necessary to be very systematic and orderly in the work, otherwise many of the flowers would wither and waste before they could be used. Every year, on an average, 1,860 tons of orange-blossom are made use of, 930 tons of roses, 147 tons of violets, and 127 tons of jasmine, beside immense quantities of other flowers and scented woods. The area taken up in flower farming for perfumery is 115,000 acres.

It is difficult to imagine that anything so gross as fat, grease, or oil could have any part in the delicate process of making perfumes, and yet it is quite true that both pork and beef fat are employed largely for the purpose of extracting the full strength of the flowers, which, strangely enough, are not in the least contaminated by contact with this rough matter—rather, they impregnate the fat with all the delicate qualities they themselves possess. Of course, the fat is carefully prepared for its dainty work, and is used in such proportions that the extreme firmness of the one should correct the undue influence of the other. It takes several pounds of flowers to make one pound of pomade.

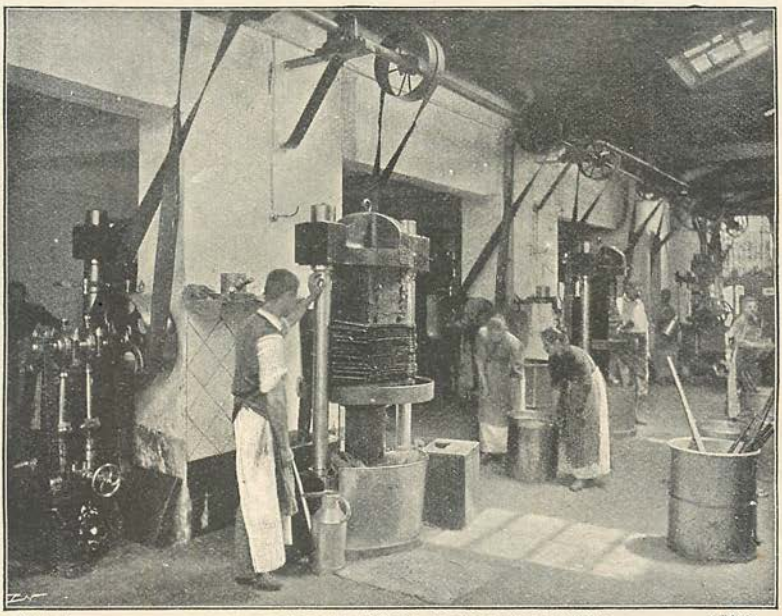
There are three ways of extracting the

From a] SORTING THE ROSES. *[Photo.*

perfume of the flowers, viz., by maceration, by enfleurage, and by distillation. There are some flowers so extremely delicate, such as jasmine, tuberose, and violet, that they scarcely yield any essence or attar by distillation; they are, therefore, subjected either to maceration or enfleurage, both of which depend for success on the wonderful property possessed by fat and oil of absorbing odours.

The first process consists of soaking or steeping the flowers in heated fat, where they are left till all their strength is extracted, after which they are drained on little wire trays in wooden frames, and later on subjected to hydraulic pressure. The presses are the very best which modern science can supply, and form a great contrast to the hand-presses originally used, which are carefully preserved by M. Bruno Court. They prove how the industry must have progressed since the time when hand-presses were sufficient for the work. The fat which has absorbed the essence of the flowers is known as pomade, and is sent to retail perfumers in all parts of the world, who in their turn compel the pomade to give up its sweetness by means of alcohol, and in its bereft state it is made into cakes of soap.

Suppose, however, that there are flowers whose perfume is very volatile, and of such delicacy that it cannot be caught by the hot fat; they are laid on sheets of glass framed with wood about three inches deep. These glass trays are spread over with cold fat about half an inch thick and sprinkled with freshly-gathered flowers renewed every morning. Great care is taken to prevent the evaporation of the aroma. At length the pomade is scraped off the glass, melted at a very low temperature, and strained. If the flower be jasmine, about three pounds of blossom will perfume one pound of fat. If essential oils are required, distillation is employed.



From a] INTERIOR OF THE LABORATORY, SHOWING THE PRESSES. [*Photo.*

Bruno Court's store-room is very attractive with its bright metal cans and the pomades varying in shades of colour, according to the flower-essence they have imbibed, from creamy-white, tinged with the palest sea-green, to rich, deep daffodil-yellow, filling the air with the most delicious perfumes.

Those who visit the Riviera should certainly go and see M. Bruno Court's factory of perfumes. He is most courteous to visitors.