

## Mrs. Delany's Flower-Work.



HE author, or inventor, of this truly wonderful work was Mary Delany, well known from her "Autobiography and Correspondence," which was edited by Lady Llanover, and

published in six volumes in 1861 and 1862.

The early life of this interesting lady was somewhat romantic. She was born at Coulston, in Wiltshire, and was the daughter of Bernard Granville, younger brother of George Granville, Lord Lansdowne. Her father's sister Ann (afterwards Lady Stanley),

being Maid of Honour

to Queen Mary, Mary

Granville was sent at

an early age to live

with her aunt, in ex-

pectation of a place

in the Queen's house-

hold; but the Queen

dying soon after, and

the Granvilles being

Tories, they lost the

Court favour, and

Mary went to stay

with her uncle, Lord

Lansdowne, at Long-

leat, the family seat.

Here she stayed for

some time, and her

beauty, wit, and good

breeding attracted

much attention; among

her admirers

was a young gentle-

man named Twyford,

who succeeded in

gaining her affections.

But in this case, as in

so many others, the

course of true love did

not run smooth, for one day, when they were

all at dinner, an old gentleman was brought in

wet and dripping, having travelled on horse-

back on an exceedingly rainy day, and was

announced as Mr. Alexander Pendarves, of

Roscrow, Cornwall.

Her uncle was, she says in her letters,

"exceedingly pleased at his arrival, and

begged him to join them at once. I expected

to have seen somebody with the appearance

of a gentleman," says Mrs. Delany, writing at

the time, "when the poor old dripping,

almost drowned, *Gromio* was brought into

the room, like Hob out of the well: his wig,

his coat, his dirty boots, his large, unwieldy

person, and his crimson countenance were all subjects of great mirth to me."

Thus she writes of the man who was

destined to become her future husband, for

though nearly sixty, this *Gromio*, as she calls

him, was rich, and falling in love with her at

sight, he prevailed upon her uncle to further

his cause, and he, nothing loth, being eager

to strengthen his political interest in that part

of Cornwall, of which Pendarves owned the

greater part, promised to do so. With this

object, he pleaded the old gentleman's cause

with all the eloquence he could command,

but, his niece remain-

ing obdurate, he

threatened to have her

young lover, Twyford,

dragged through a

horse-pond, should he

venture to appear.

Yielding at last to

these forcible argu-

ments, she consented,

and, much against her

inclination, was mar-

ried to Pendarves in

February, 1718. Her

young lover died

shortly after of an ill-

ness believed to have

been brought on by his

hopeless attachment.

After six years of

unhappy married life

her ancient partner

died, leaving her with

nothing but her jointure,

for she had un-

fortunately dissuaded

him on the day before

his death from signing

his will.

It was during this interval of widowhood

and before her second marriage, which took

place in 1743, that she made the acquaintance

of her lifelong friend, the Duchess of Port-

land, as well as a number of prominent

literary ladies of the time. The Duchess

took her under her especial care, and she was

frequently at Bulstrode, the Duke's seat in

Buckinghamshire. Here it was that the

greater part of the "Flower Mosaic Work"

was accomplished; for her second husband,

Patrick Delany, dying only five years after

their marriage, the Duchess insisted upon

her taking up her abode with her altogether.

She, therefore, passed the summers at Bul-



MRS. DELANY.

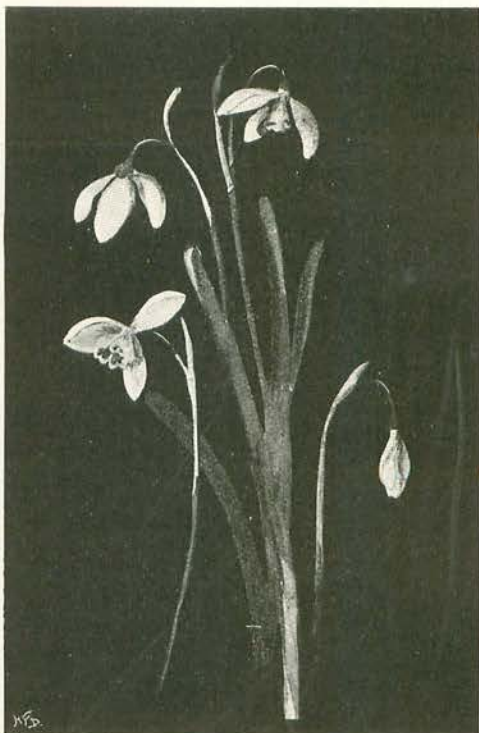
From the Original Picture painted by Opie for George III. and now at Hampton Court.



strode and the winters in her own house in London, in St. James's Place, where she was the centre of attraction among a group of famous literary people of the time, among whom was Horace Walpole, who spent much of his leisure at her house, Miss Burney (Madame d'Arblay), who lived with her during the latter part of her life, Mrs. Montague, Mrs. Chapone, Dr. Burney, Mrs. Carter, etc.

With the Royal Family she was an especial favourite, George III. always speaking of her as "his dearest Mrs. Delany," and after the death of her dear friend and benefactor, the Duchess of Portland, which took place in 1785, he settled upon her a pension of £300 a year, and gave her a house at Windsor for life, where she was frequently visited by all the members of the Royal Family, from the King and Queen down to the little Princess Amelia, who always called her "dear Lany."

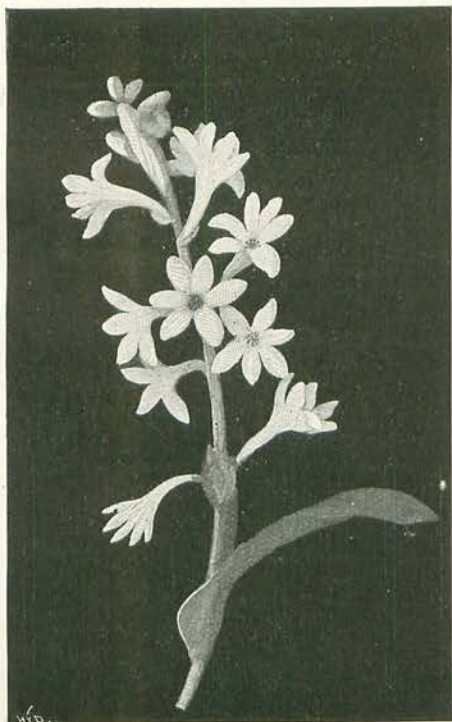
The "Flower-Work," of which a few specimens are here reproduced, was not begun till she was in the seventy-fourth year of her age, when, her eyesight beginning to fail her, and feeling herself likely to be cut off from the elegant pursuits of life, painting and drawing, fine needlework, etc., in which she was remarkably proficient, she cast about for some



SNOWDROP.

other occupation which would give employment to her ever-busy fingers, and at the same time occupy her mind. The result was this remarkable work from which this selection has been made, which was admitted by Sir Joshua Reynolds and all the best judges of the art of drawing and painting to be unrivalled in perfection of outline, delicacy of cutting, accuracy of shading and perspective, and harmony and brilliancy of colour; while, at the same time, they were the admiration of such botanists as Sir Joseph Banks, Dr. Solander, etc. Indeed, Sir Joseph Banks used to say of them that they were the only imitations of Nature that he had ever seen from which he could venture to describe botanically any plant without the least fear of committing an error.

What first suggested the idea to Mrs. Delany, and encouraged her to proceed with the work, was a mistake which her friend the Duchess of Portland made one day in taking an imitation geranium, which she had just cut out from paper, for the real one. It is thus recorded: "Having a piece of Chinese paper on the table of bright scarlet, a geranium caught her eye of a similar colour and, taking her scissors, she amused herself by cutting out each flower by her eye, in the paper resembling its



TUBEROSE.



hue; she laid the paper petals on a black ground, and was so pleased with the effect that she proceeded to cut out the calyx, stalks, and leaves in shades of green and pasted them down. After she had completed a sprig of geranium in this way, the Duchess of Portland came in and exclaimed, 'What are you doing with the geranium?' having taken the paper imitation for the flower. Mrs. Delany answered that, if the Duchess really thought it so like the original, a new work was begun from that moment; and the work was *begun* at the age of seventy-four and *ended* at the age of eighty-five; such a work as no other person before or since has ever been able to rival or even approach."

It was long after the suggestion that the aged and indefatigable worker brought her work into any system, and in the first year she finished only two flowers, but in the second she accomplished sixteen, and in the third 160, and after that many more.

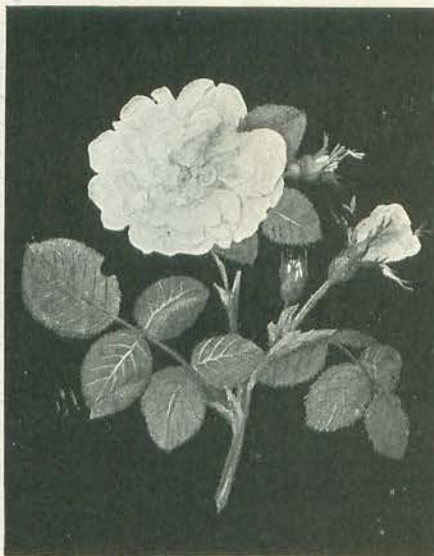
The flowers were all from Nature, fresh gathered or still growing plants, and her collection consists of whatever is most choice and rare, in flowers, plants, and weeds. Her plan was to place the plant or flower before her, and at the back of it, but not to touch it, she put a sheet of black paper doubled in the form of a folding screen, which, forming a dark background, threw out distinctly the outlines of the leaves and flowers, and made the lights and shadows more distinct. She did not draw the plants, but, *by her eye*, cut out each flower, or rather each petal, as they appeared; the lights and shades and tints were afterwards all likewise cut out and laid on, being pasted one over the other—the stamina, style, and leaves were separately done in the same manner, in various coloured papers, which she used to procure from captains of vessels coming from China, and from paper-stainers, from whom she used to buy pieces of paper in which the colours had run and produced extraordinary and unusual tints. In this manner she procured her material, and was enabled to produce the

utmost brilliancy where it was required with the greatest harmony of colouring from the various semi-tones of tint laid on.

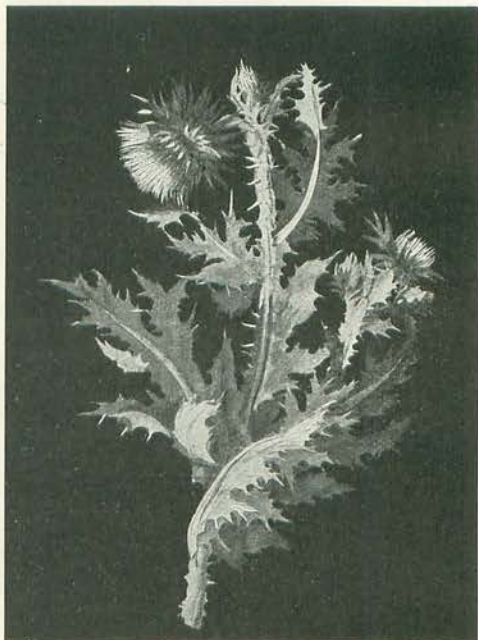
But the part of the work in which she appears ever to remain unrivalled is the way in which, by the eye alone, she directed the scissors, to cut out the innumerable parts necessary to complete the outline, shadowing, and detail of every leaf, flower, and stem, with such exactness that they all hung together, and fitted each other, as if they had been produced instantaneously by the stroke of a magic wand, and yet without a fault in perspective, or in the most difficult foreshortening. To look at them it is difficult to imagine that the work is not done in relief, so strongly do the subjects

appear to stand out from the paper. They are, however, done absolutely on the flat, as much so as if they were painted on the paper.

Her plan was to finish a thousand, but the



BLUSH ROSE.



MUSK THISTLE.





BURNET ROSE.

progress of the work was stopped when she was within only twenty of that number. In 1782 she was compelled to abandon the work, her eyes being no longer able to direct her scissors in imitating accurately the exquisite and minute tracery of Nature.

Each flower is marked on the back of its mount with the spot from whence she took or received her model, with the date, and on not a few are interesting notes, of which the following are a few examples:—

“Finished Thursday, Sept. 7th, 1781. The day after I had the honour of paying my duty at the Queen’s Lodge, at Windsor.” “Bulstrode, Sept. 25th, 1780. Lord Mansfield came.” “Bulstrode, Aug. 7th, 1778. Finished the day after the King and Queen were at Bulstrode.” “The flower given me by Lord Harcourt,” etc. On the front in either corner are the name of the flower and the monogram of the artist in coloured letters; but the last year, when she found her eyes becoming weaker and weaker, and threatening to fail her before her work was accomplished, she cut out her initials in white, for she says, “I fancied myself nearly working in my winding-sheet.”

One of the last flowers that she did was the *Portlandia grandiflora*, a West Indian flower, so called, according to a note in Mrs. Delany’s own hand, after Her Grace of Portland, “a great lover of botany and well

acquainted with all English plants.” This flower is dated at the back by herself, “Bulstrode, 9th Aug., 1782. Kew,” from whence the original specimen had been sent to her by command of the King and Queen, who always desired that any curious or beautiful plant in the Royal Gardens should be transmitted to Mrs. Delany when in blossom, and there are numbers of flowers executed by Mrs. Delany marked “Kew.”

Nothing seems to have been too minute or intricate for these busy clever fingers, and every little detail of each plant is faithfully imitated, even to the down of the thistle and the tiny hairs on the stem of different plants. She even dared to attempt to imitate, and with remarkable success, the delicate fronds of the asparagus, which was a masterpiece, and forms one of the half-dozen or so specimens which Queen Charlotte selected for herself from the collection, the spaces from which she drew them still remaining vacant in the volumes, with the words in Mrs. Delany’s own hand written across the page, “Selected by Queen Charlotte.”

The work is contained in ten folio volumes, and is now in the national collection at the British Museum, to which institution it was bequeathed by Lady Llanover in 1897.



HORSE-CHESTNUT.