

## A Wonderful Rock Garden.

BY HERBERT PRATT.



From a Photo. by] LAMPORT HALL—SHOWING BACK OF ROCKERY ON RIGHT. [G. S. Garrett.

**R**EADERS of THE STRAND MAGAZINE are more or less familiar with that peculiar form of gardening which goes by the name of topiary work. The illustrations of the gardens at Levens Hall and Elvaston, with their curiously cut trees, which appeared some time since, as well as the pictures of the hedge-work of a Continental railway servant published more recently, provoked so much interest that it is thought our readers will be no less interested in another and different form of garden craft. It will be readily understood that, as in other fields of labour, so in the art of gardening, from time to time departures are made from the beaten track by ardent gardeners; but it is open to question whether any other garden the world over contains features of such peculiar interest as the one that for more than half a century has been the loving care of Sir Charles Isham, Bart.

Lamport Hall, the residence for nearly four centuries of the Isham family, and which lies between Northampton and Market Harborough, possesses many features of interest, amongst which the unique rockery contained within its borders is not the least attractive, and to this in particular the writer would

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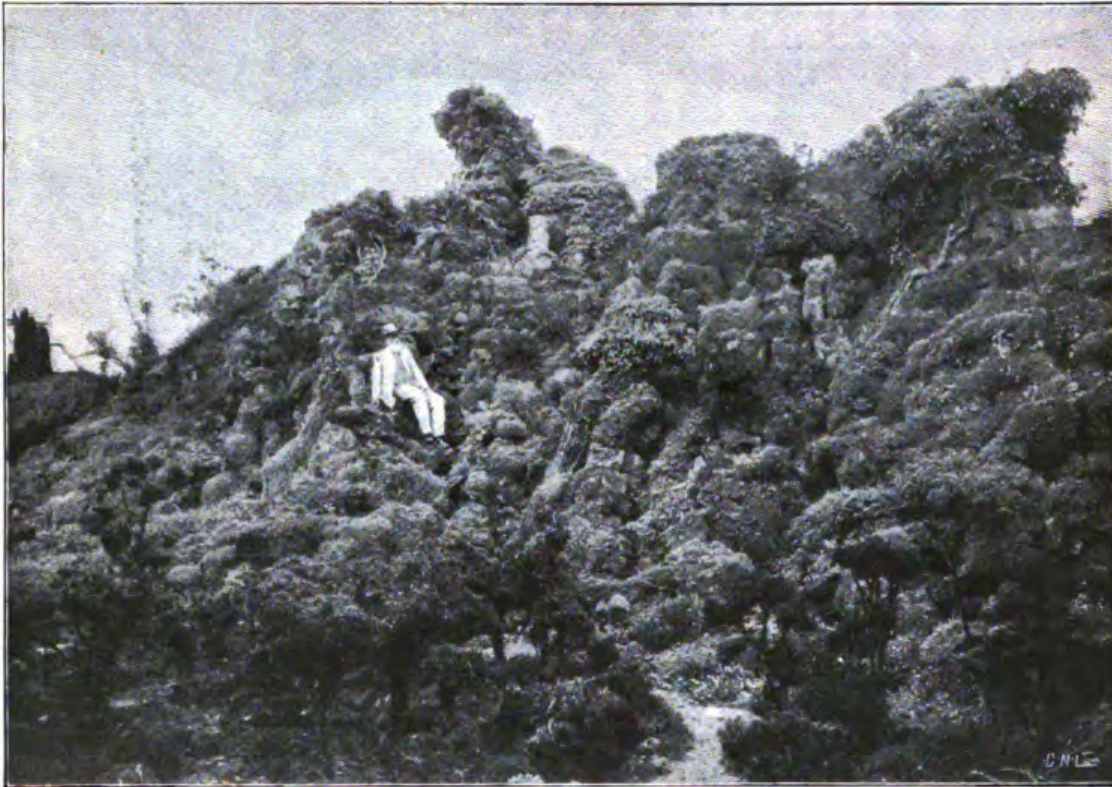
draw attention. The word "unique" has been used, but this is incorrect, in so far as it is not the only rock garden in existence, as many a suburban cinder or clinker heap, covered with straggling vegetation, and dignified by the name of rockery, would testify. But the word may be allowed to stand, for probably nothing to be compared with the rockery at Lamport can be found the world over. The only other place that in any way bears a likeness to Sir Charles Isham's curious production is in Austria, and was made by the Emperor's gardener, but expert testimony says that it is far inferior to the Northampton rockery.

It was some fifty-two years ago that the idea of forming a dwarf rock garden was conceived, and through the years that have followed its owner has striven to realize certain ideals. To describe them in brief, it may be said that the Lamport rockery contains mountain scenery in miniature. To use the words of its constructor, "It is an assemblage of small caves, crevices, excavations, and inequalities, carpeted and incrustated with vegetation suited to the purpose." Practically in these last four words the difficulties of the situation are summed up, and from this high aim arose many needs that would not have sprung

Original from  
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into existence had a lesser ideal been present in Sir Charles Isham's mind. The rockery is placed close to the house, and is about 30yds. long by 14yds. wide, whilst in height it measures 8yds. On the side opposite to the house as well as on one of the narrow

do not exceed 3ft. in height. Some of them are of great age, and their collection has necessarily entailed a vast amount of trouble. No plant that in its natural state would grow quickly was ever a favourite at Lamport, and with those that showed signs of quick



From a Photo. by] VIEW OF THE ROCKERY, WITH ITS CONSTRUCTOR, SIR CHARLES ISHAM, BART.

[G. S. Garrett.

sides it is shut in by a high, ivy-covered wall. On the opposite narrow side a conservatory again confines the area. Indeed, so small is the space occupied that until the visitor almost enters the gate that leads to the rockery he fails to realize its existence. The relation of the rockery to the house will be appreciated by a glance at the first picture. The ivy-covered wall on the right-hand side is the back of the rockery.

It will be seen, therefore, that it was with no small difficulty that the accompanying pictures were taken. It is in consequence of these photographic difficulties that Sir Charles Isham, who can be seen in the accompanying illustration seated on the rockery, appears to be so small in size. In reality he is but 10yds. distant from the camera, although it seems as though he were at least 100yds. away. It is not altogether an easy matter to convey a true idea of the smallness of the Lamport rockery except by the miniature size of the vegetation. The largest firs and cedars grown on the rockery

growth steps were taken to retard their progress, with the result mentioned.

Frequently, as is well known, the advancing age of tree life means that it must support other forms of vegetation, and the sight of a creeper-clad trunk in a forest ramble is amongst the most artistic; but it is equally well known that the clinging ivy sooner or later spells death to the supporting tree. At Lamport, not to be foreign to the natural, Sir Charles Isham has obtained and planted certain miniature ivies which the venerable conifers—some 3ft. high!—are compelled to support. This much should be said though: they have not been permitted to run at will, and therefore, if the same attention is given as in the past, are not likely to bring to the ground the trees by which they are upheld.

Here it may be mentioned that the method of planting is curious, if not absolutely unique. When Sir Charles wished to obtain a certain effect he would take a stone and either place it in position himself or give

instructions for this to be done in his presence, for every part of the structure has been put together either by or under the immediate supervision of the owner. He would, however, first chisel a small hole through the stone—often over a foot in depth—and fill the hole with soil, so that the roots of the plant, when inserted, could reach and obtain nourishment from the proper earth beneath.

But the list of dwarf vegetation is by no means exhausted when reference has been made to the miniature trees that abound; indeed, the rockery is full of curiosities in

Reference might be made to many other interesting plants, but different features of this curious rockery call for mention. Amongst these a number of crystal caves formed of quartz, and which sparkle with dazzling effect when the sun's rays light upon them, are to be found in one corner. But perhaps more than anything else the visitor will carry away the remembrance of the fairy or gnome like figures which people the sides of the rockery or peep from the miniature caves. One seems in looking upon them much like a Gulliver amongst the Liliputians, and a recollection of the weird-



From a Photo. by]

"ON STRIKE."

[G. S. Garrett.

the way of plant life. Numerous Alpine plants, procured with much trouble and at great expense, clothe the stones and show themselves through the crevices. One plant, the *Agave Utahensis*, is fifteen years old, and measures but 5in. in height. It is a very rare specimen of the only hardy American aloe, and is surrounded by variegated dog-wood, which adds greatly to the effect. Another plant that spreads itself over a great part of the rockery is shown in the picture in which the miniature trees stand out in contrast. It is the Spider house-leek, whose silvery tones are delightfully pleasing.

ness of the scene leads one almost to wonder whether the figures are not the creation of an imaginative fancy. Look at the reality of the picture, "On Strike," and consider the labour involved in the production of figures that so closely harmonize one with another and produce a life-like effect, which was first conceived by the constructor and afterwards worked out with such skilful care. The notice board bearing the inscription:—

Eight hours' sleep,  
Eight hours' play,  
Eight hours' work,  
Eight shillings pay,



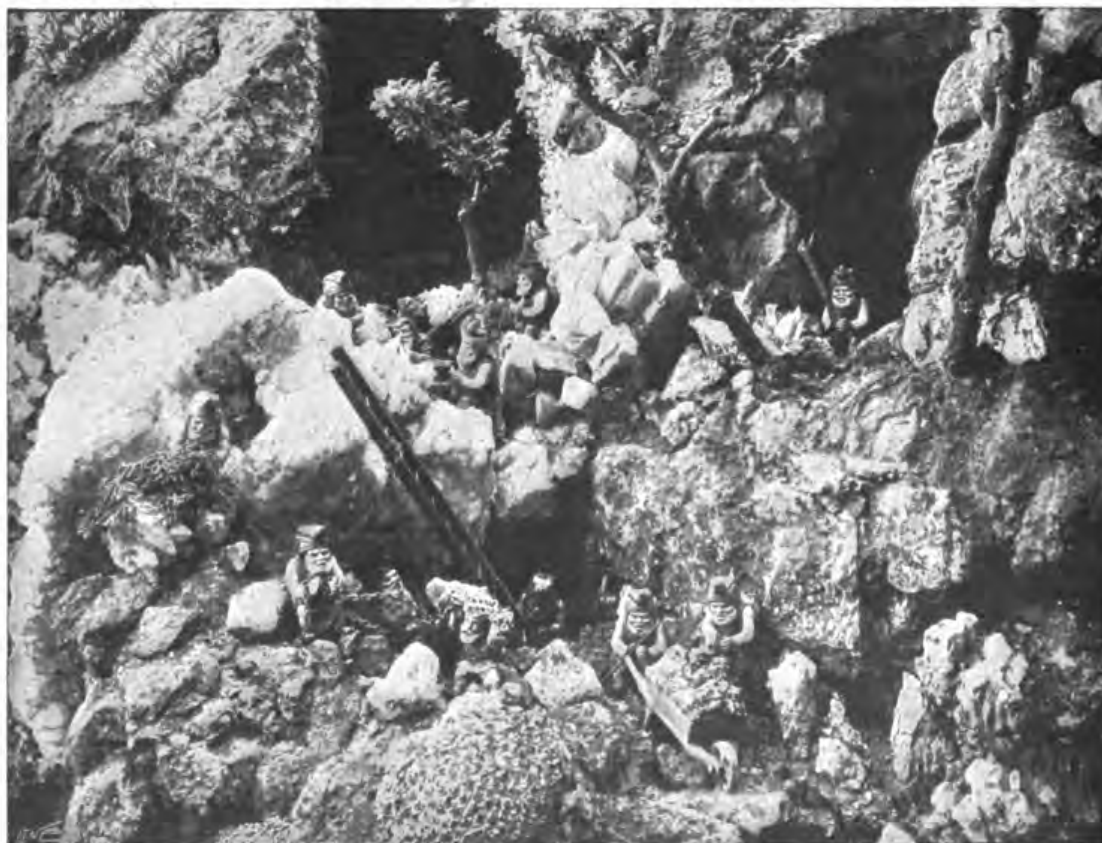
From a Photo. by]

"AT WORK AGAIN."

[G. S. Garrett.

serves to emphasize the Trade Union spirit. It seems that the only person wanted to complete the scene is the paid agitator, unless the little gentleman on the upper ledge, who is dignified by the possession of a hat as compared with the caps of the miners, may be considered as such.

These figures measure from two and a half to three inches in height, and were necessarily extremely difficult to photograph. Mr. G. S. Garrett, by whom the pictures were taken, and to whom the writer is desirous of expressing his best thanks, has succeeded excellently well in his difficult task. He was obliged to use a box, and in some cases a stone,



From a Photo. by]

MINERS IN CHAINS.

Original from

[G. S. Garrett.

instead of a camera stand. His lens was placed within a few inches of the figures, and his trouble was to photograph the gnomes without actually enlarging them. In a different part of the rockery is depicted another mining scene—a set of miners, whose demands have evidently been satisfied, and we see some of

over them. Let us hope they exact a full day's work. It is when one comes to criticise the individual figures that the originality of the owner of Lamport is seen. Beneath many of the gnomes poetic descriptions have been placed. One of these inscriptions, which is written upon a piece of paper about

the size of a paper about the size of an ordinary private envelope, reads:—

Under a saxifrage, beautiful home!  
There peacefully rests a diminutive gnome.  
His food is pure nectar contained in a jug,  
Can any kind friend find a suitable mug?  
He dwells in this paradise mostly alone,  
With occasional calls of a big drumbedrone.  
The saxifrage, tufty and perfectly grown,  
May compare with a gem in a setting of stone.

Like many another owner who occasionally allows the public to share in the pleasures of his private possessions, Sir Charles Isham seems to have had some troublesome visitors when he composed the inscription that appears in another illustration:—

Having heard of his fame, many visitors come  
To judge for themselves of his wonderful home.  
Just now there are two, He's too kind to complain,  
Yet he doubtless alone would prefer to remain.  
The one is all active, the other looks on,  
Whilst owner is wishing them both to be gone.  
If Longnose don't mind with his lumbering ladder,  
He'll soon come to grief, Now what could be sadder?



From a Photo, by

GNOMES, WITH INSCRIPTION.

(G. S. Garrett.)

them at work with pick and shovel, others wheeling barrows or climbing ladders, whilst others sit and smoke the pipe of peace—or laziness. In still another part of the rockery are a number of miners loaded with chains, and who, apparently, have task-masters set

These figures are also 3in. high, and their fairy-like proportions, combined with their surroundings of dwarf trees and miniature caves, compel one to imagine himself in another world.

One figure that graces the rockery, and a



THE LITTLE LADY FROM BRUSSELS.  
From a Photo. by G. S. Garrett.

photograph of which is shown on this page, in comparison with the gnomes is as a giantess amongst the pigmies. The contrast is so great that one's attention is immediately arrested, and frequently at a slight distance the impression given is that it is of a living child. The figure was first exposed to public gaze in the Brussels exhibition, from whence it found its way into the shop of a London curio dealer, only to be rescued by Sir Charles Isham to adorn his rockery. Since that time the young lady has been presented with a gorgeous hat and a diamond ring by two interested visitors, and in the picture she may be seen wearing both.

In conclusion, it is only appropriate that a photograph of the

painstaking constructor of the unique rockery at Lamport should be reproduced. It shows Sir Charles Isham standing beside one of the box bowers that form another feature of interest at Lamport. They were planted nearly a century and a half ago by Sir Edmund Isham, and with the curiously trained yew trees, and particularly the rock garden, make Lamport one of the most interesting places in England. But the venerable builder will not allow that his work is accomplished, and indicates that the difficulties which beset the man who would imitate him are enormous. To use his own words, "The constructor of the Lamport rockery, being advanced in years and being still a learner in the art of rock gardening, is conscious that what has entailed a period of fifty years of almost daily employment could not be maintained in any approach to its integrity by a new hand."



From a Photo. by

SIR CHARLES ISHAM, BART.

[G. S. Garrett.]