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*"To the solid ground
Of Nature trusts the mind which builds for aye."*—WORDSWORTH

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1869

NATURE: APHORISMS BY GOETHE

NATURE! We are surrounded and embraced by her: powerless to separate ourselves from her, and powerless to penetrate beyond her.

Without asking, or warning, she snatches us up into her circling dance, and whirls us on until we are tired, and drop from her arms.

She is ever shaping new forms: what is, has never yet been; what has been, comes not again. Everything is new, and yet nought but the old.

We live in her midst and know her not. She is incessantly speaking to us, but betrays not her secret. We constantly act upon her, and yet have no power over her.

The one thing she seems to aim at is Individuality; yet she cares nothing for individuals. She is always building up and destroying; but her workshop is inaccessible.

Her life is in her children; but where is the mother? She is the only artist; working-up the most uniform material into utter opposites; arriving, without a trace of effort, at perfection, at the most exact precision, though always veiled under a certain softness.

Each of her works has an essence of its own; each of her phenomena a special characterisation: and yet their diversity is in unity.

She performs a play; we know not whether she sees it herself, and yet she acts for us, the lookers-on.

Incessant life, development, and movement are in her, but she advances not. She changes for ever and ever, and rests not a moment. Quietude is inconceivable to her, and she has laid her curse upon rest. She is firm. Her steps are measured, her exceptions rare, her laws unchangeable.

She has always thought and always thinks; though not as a man, but as Nature. She broods over an

all-comprehending idea, which no searching can find out.

Mankind dwell in her and she in them. With all men she plays a game for love, and rejoices the more they win. With many, her moves are so hidden, that the game is over before they know it.

That which is most unnatural is still Nature; the stupidest philistinism has a touch of her genius. Whoso cannot see her everywhere, sees her nowhere rightly.

She loves herself, and her innumerable eyes and affections are fixed upon herself. She has divided herself that she may be her own delight. She causes an endless succession of new capacities for enjoyment to spring up, that her insatiable sympathy may be assuaged.

She rejoices in illusion. Whoso destroys it in himself and others, him she punishes with the sternest tyranny. Whoso follows her in faith, him she takes as a child to her bosom.

Her children are numberless. To none is she altogether miserly; but she has her favourites, on whom she squanders much, and for whom she makes great sacrifices. Over greatness she spreads her shield.

She tosses her creatures out of nothingness, and tells them not whence they came, nor whither they go. It is their business to run, she knows the road.

Her mechanism has few springs—but they never wear out, are always active and manifold.

The spectacle of Nature is always new, for she is always renewing the spectators. Life is her most exquisite invention; and death is her expert contrivance to get plenty of life.

She wraps man in darkness, and makes him for ever long for light. She creates him dependent upon the earth, dull and heavy; and yet is always shaking him until he attempts to soar above it.

She creates needs because she loves action. Wondrous ! that she produces all this action so easily. Every need is a benefit, swiftly satisfied, swiftly renewed.—Every fresh want is a new source of pleasure, but she soon reaches an equilibrium.

Every instant she commences an immense journey, and every instant she has reached her goal.

She is vanity of vanities ; but not to us, to whom she has made herself of the greatest importance. She allows every child to play tricks with her ; every fool to have judgment upon her ; thousands to walk stupidly over her and see nothing ; and takes her pleasure and finds her account in them all.

We obey her laws even when we rebel against them ; we work with her even when we desire to work against her.

She makes every gift a benefit by causing us to want it. She delays, that we may desire her ; she hastens, that we may not weary of her.

She has neither language nor discourse ; but she creates tongues and hearts, by which she feels and speaks.

Her crown is love. Through love alone dare we come near her. She separates all existences, and all tend to intermingle. She has isolated all things in order that all may approach one another. She holds a couple of draughts from the cup of love to be fair payment for the pains of a lifetime.

She is all things. She rewards herself and punishes herself ; is her own joy and her own misery. She is rough and tender, lovely and hateful, powerless and omnipotent. She is an eternal present. Past and future are unknown to her. The present is her eternity. She is beneficent. I praise her and all her works. She is silent and wise.

No explanation is wrung from her ; no present won from her, which she does not give freely. She is cunning, but for good ends ; and it is best not to notice her tricks.

She is complete, but never finished. As she works now, so can she always work. Everyone sees her in his own fashion. She hides under a thousand names and phrases, and is always the same. She has brought me here and will also lead me away. I trust her. She may scold me, but she will not hate her work. It was not I who spoke of her. No ! What is false and what is true, she has spoken it all. The fault, the merit, is all hers.

So far Goethe.

When my friend, the Editor of *NATURE*, asked me to write an opening article for his first number, there came into my mind this wonderful rhapsody on "Nature," which has been a delight to me from my youth up. It seemed to me that no more fitting preface could be put before a Journal, which aims to mirror the progress of that fashioning by Nature of a

picture of herself, in the mind of man, which we call the progress of Science.

A translation, to be worth anything, should reproduce the words, the sense, and the form of the original. But when that original is Goethe's, it is hard indeed to obtain this ideal ; harder still, perhaps, to know whether one has reached it, or only added another to the long list of those who have tried to put the great German poet into English, and failed.

Supposing, however, that critical judges are satisfied with the translation as such, there lies beyond them the chance of another reckoning with the British public, who dislike what they call "Pantheism" almost as much as I do, and who will certainly find this essay of the poet's terribly Pantheistic. In fact, Goethe himself almost admits that it is so. In a curious explanatory letter, addressed to Chancellor von Müller, under date May 26th, 1828, he writes :—

"This essay was sent to me a short time ago from amongst the papers of the ever-honoured Duchess Anna Amelia ; it is written by a well-known hand, of which I was accustomed to avail myself in my affairs, in the year 1780, or thereabouts.

"I do not exactly remember having written these reflections, but they very well agree with the ideas which had at that time become developed in my mind. I might term the degree of insight which I had then attained, a comparative one, which was trying to express its tendency towards a not yet attained superlative.

"There is an obvious inclination to a sort of Pantheism, to the conception of an unfathomable, unconditional, humorously self-contradictory Being, underlying the phenomena of Nature ; and it may pass as a jest, with a bitter truth in it."

Goethe says, that about the date of this composition of "Nature" he was chiefly occupied with comparative anatomy ; and, in 1786, gave himself incredible trouble to get other people to take an interest in his discovery, that man has a intermaxillary bone. After that he went on to the metamorphosis of plants, and to the theory of the skull ; and, at length, had the pleasure of seeing his work taken up by German naturalists. The letter ends thus :—

"If we consider the high achievements by which all the phenomena of Nature have been gradually linked together in the human mind ; and then, once more, thoughtfully peruse the above essay, from which we started, we shall, not without a smile, compare that comparative, as I called it, with the superlative which we have now reached, and rejoice in the progress of fifty years."

Forty years have passed since these words were written, and we look again, "not without a smile," on Goethe's superlative. But the road which led from his comparative to his superlative, has been diligently

followed, until the notions which represented Goethe's superlative are now the commonplaces of science—and we have a super-superlative of our own.

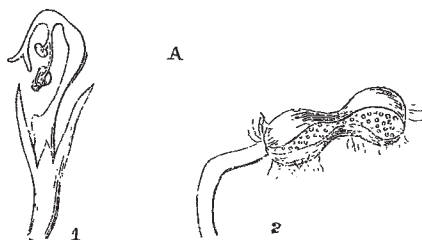
When another half-century has passed, curious readers of the back numbers of NATURE will probably look on *our* best, “not without a smile;” and, it may be, that long after the theories of the philosophers whose achievements are recorded in these pages, are obsolete, the vision of the poet will remain as a truthful and efficient symbol of the wonder and the mystery of Nature.

T. H. HUXLEY

ON THE FERTILISATION OF WINTER-FLOWERING PLANTS

THAT the stamens are the male organ of the flower, forming unitedly what the older writers called the “androcium,” is a fact familiar not only to the scientific man, but to the ordinary observer. The earlier botanists formed the natural conclusion that the stamens and pistil in a flower are intended mutually to play the part of male and female organs to one another. Sprengel was the first to point out, about the year 1790, that in many plants the arrangement of the organs is such, that this mutual interchange of offices in the same flower is impossible; and more recently, Hildebrand in Germany, and Darwin in England, have investigated the very important part played by insects in the fertilisation of the pistil of one individual by the stamens of another individual of the same species. It is now generally admitted by botanists that cross-fertilisation is the rule rather than the exception. The various contrivances for ensuring it, to which Mr. Darwin has especially called the attention of botanists, are most beautiful and interesting; and the field thus opened out is one which, from its extent, importance, and interest, will amply repay the investigation of future observers. For this cross-fertilisation to take place, however, some foreign agency like that of insects is evidently necessary, for conveying the pollen from one flower to another. The question naturally occurs, How then is fertilisation accomplished in those plants which flower habitually in the winter, when the number of insects that can assist in it is at all events very small? I venture to offer the following notes as a sequel to Mr. Darwin's observations, and as illustrating a point which has not been elucidated by any investigations that have yet been recorded. I do not here refer to those flowers of which, in mild seasons, stray half-starved specimens may be found in December or January, and of which we are favoured with lists every year in the corners of newspapers, as evidence of “the extraordinary mildness of the season.” I wish to call attention exclusively to those plants, of which we have a few in this country, whose normal time of flowering is almost the depth of winter, like the hazel-nut *Corylus avellana*, the butcher's broom *Ruscus aculeatus*, and the gorse *Ulex europæus*; and to that more numerous class which flower and fructify all through the year, almost regardless of season or temperature; among which may be mentioned the white and red dead-nettles *Lamium album* and *purpureum*, the *Veronica Buxbaumii*, the daisy, dandelion, and groundsel, the common spurge *Euphorbia peplus*, the shepherd's purse, and some others.

During the winter of 1868-69, I had the opportunity of making some observations on this class of plants; the result being that I found that, as a general rule, fertilisation, or at all events the discharge of the pollen by the anthers, takes place in the bud before the flower is opened, thus ensuring *self-fertilisation* under the most favourable circumstances, with complete protection from the weather, assisted, no doubt, by that rise of temperature which is known to take place in certain plants at the time of flowering. The dissection of a flower of *Lamium album* (Fig. A) gathered the last week in December, showed the stamens completely curved down and brought almost into contact with the bifid stigma, the pollen being at that time freely discharged from the anthers. A more complete contrivance for self-fertilisation than is here presented would be impossible. The same phenomena were observed in *Veronica Buxbaumii*, where the anthers are



A. LAMIAM ALBUM.

1. Section of bud, calyx and corolla removed.
2. Stamen from bud, enlarged, discharging pollen.

almost in contact with the stigma before the opening of the flower, which occurs but seldom, *V. agrestis* and *polita*, the larger periwinkle *Vinca major*, the gorse, dandelion, groundsel, daisy, shepherd's purse, in which the four longer stamens appear to discharge their pollen in the bud, the two shorter ones not till a later period, *Lamium purpureum*, *Cardamine hirsuta*, and the chickweed *Stellaria media*, in which the flowers open only under the influence of bright sunshine. In nearly all these cases, abundance of fully-formed, seed-bearing capsules were observed in the specimens examined, all the observations being made between the 28th of December and the 20th of January.

In contrast with these was also examined a number of wild plants which had been tempted by the mild January to put forth a few wretched flowers at a very abnormal season, including the charlock *Sinapis arvensis*, wild thyme *Thymus serpyllum*, and fumitory *Fumaria officinalis*; in all of which instances was there not only no pollen discharged before the opening of the flower, but no seed was observed to be formed. An untimely specimen of the common garden bean *Faba vulgaris*, presented altogether different phenomena from its relative the gorse, the anthers not discharging their pollen till after the opening of the flower; and the same was observed in the case of the *Lamium Galeobdolon* or yellow archangel (Fig. B) gathered in April, notwithstanding its consanguinity to the dead-nettle.

Another beautiful contrast to this arrangement is afforded by those plants which, though natives of warmer climates, continue to flower in our gardens in the depth of winter. An example of this class is furnished by the common yellow jasmine, *Jasminum nudiflorum*, from