A TRUE ECONOMY IN GARDENS.

A true economy would be to stop altogether the clipping and distortion of trees and shrubs which are done to a vast extent in our gardens without the slightest reason, artistic or other. It is a wasteful expenditure of energy; injurious, too, in that it teaches young men that that sort of false form is right. As I go from the country to the "wen" I pass acres of disfigured Cherry Laurels sometimes shorn down without any reason except to get these trees to a dwarf state. If a shrub is wanted of that height why not plant the evergreen Barberry or other low-growing shrub, which would give one a free outline and natural grace without which everything worth having is lost? Whatever it is, whether the Cherry Laurel, or the true Laurel, or the Yew, in our country seats there are these monuments of misdirected activities, sometimes miles of them, and imagine the thoughts of the men who are paid to do this degrading work. Some places where men of scientific attainment are in charge are as much disfigured by this clipping as any others.

Look at the shrub garden against the Palm-house at Kew. It is disfigured with trees cut into the shape of billycock hats. The idea of wishing to break up the surfaces of gardens with shrubs taller than the flowers is right, but why not choose shrubs for this purpose that are of the right size to make distortion unnecessary? Many evergreens, from the true Laurel to the nobler Rhododendrons, have fine forms, which are easily destroyed by those who do not see true form. It is not unusual to see forest trees put under this indignity, but why plant a forest tree in the garden? The wood is the place for Yew, Beech, and Hornbeam, and these trees are wrongly placed in a garden, and can only torment the hapless gardener by spreading their roots where they should not be.

Another point of some importance is the loss of the beauty of form which trees and shrubs take in a high wind, and which is very striking in the Yew and the Cedar of Lebanon, and, indeed, almost any natural form of evergreen tree or shrub. One does not see this when such trees are cut into shapes and walls. Thus an enormous amount of labour is wasted. In one garden in Surrey I know there are several millions of Yews all cut down to the height of 6 inches or less, and this is done every year in order to carry into effect some fantastic idea of an architectural gardener.

The hard lines of Yew hedges are most offensive to the artistic eye. Who can make a picture out of such deformities? And this distortion is not only an old English practice; much of it was brought on by Dutch William, and it then became the fashion to plant Yews to an inordinate extent in many gardens, such as Levens. The Yew is one of the hungriest of forest trees we have; it is impossible to grow flowers under it with any effect. If we look into the old Dutch books we find the whole idea of the Dutch gardener was to clip and shed everything into line, even forest trees were so trained into hideous examples.

Our most beautiful native trees are distorted in this way. Holly, Yew, Fir, and Box are trees which have their most beautiful form and colour when natural, and this is destroyed. Even the Ivy does not escape. I have lately seen a large and costly garden in which immense beds are almost entirely given over to an ugly variegated yellow form of the common Ivy. This has been planted with the misguided view of adding something of colour in winter, but the result is indescribably hideous. In the same garden there are many variegated Yews cut to a shape. Many miles of Yew hedges have been planted of recent years by men who clearly did not know anything of the poisonous nature of the Yew and its fatal effects on horses and cattle.

Now we have another gift from the Dutch nurseries in the shape of Yews and Box clipped to many shapes—e.g., cork-screws, lambs, pheasants, and foxes. A garden with a stock of these must be well supplied with skilled labour to keep the abortions in "shape." Such labour might well be applied to the growth of beautiful flowers and shrubs.

W. R.

NOTES OF THE WEEK.

The Silvery Geranium (Geranium argenteum).—After many years' acquaintance with this plant I doubted its health and good effect as a garden plant until I saw it at Friar Park—a silvery cloud of it happy between two bold rocks. It was a pleasure to see it after so many failures, including my own. It grew on the cool side of the rock garden, the raised position keeping it dry. Among the Cranesbills there are various good border and rock plants, this being a gem of the alpine species.—W.
THE WRONG ROUTE.

There was never a time when there were so many ways of teaching art through academies, schools, in every parish almost, and professors and books no end, and there never was so much bad art. This is the common opinion of good judges in Paris and London. In Lord Redesdale’s book there is a passage which has a bearing on this:

“I remember how once, when a lady consulted Lord Leighton about her boy, who showed a great talent for painting, his answer was: ‘Let him have the education of a gentleman in the first place; then, if he should still have an inclination for art, let him specialise.’”

There is evidence to show that the way advised by Lord Leighton is not the right way. Excellence in art is not to be had without early devotion to the work, and the education in colleges until a man is well over twenty precludes any early training in art.

If we look at the history of our own great landscape painters we find that excellence in the result was not through any college education, but by early devotion to work, often under the poorest conditions. David Cox was the son of a blacksmith, and he was an artist with a true eye for the beautiful in nature. Constable was a miller’s son, and began his studies with a painter and glazier friend in the fields—a much better place to study art than any academy. Turner was not quite so happy in his father, being the son of a barber, but even in Maiden-lane a genius may arise. Old Crome began life as a doctor’s errand boy. These were among our very best painters, leaving out those who died young, like William Müller, Carolus Duran, whose portrait of Pasteur—a masterpiece—was seen in London some years ago, told me he was at work in the Academy at Lille at eight years of age.

By far the best landscape art in England arose from conditions different from those laid down by Lord Leighton, whose own work does not justify his teaching. A picture by one of the old Dutch painters who, as boys, were apprenticed to their craft, was worth all he ever did. Watts and Constable among English artists are examples of the right way of arriving at art excellence through work. Though healthy birth in country air is an advantage, it in no way frees a youth from the need of early apprenticeship.

This may seem all away from garden design and planting, but it really is not so, because the problems that confront the landscape planter are the same as those which the landscape painter has to deal with—viz., beauty, repose, breadth, and air. The man who uses trees instead of pigments has the nobler task. He has advantages, too, in that he has ready to hand the atmosphere of Corot and the sky of Diaz. The painter has much to learn in landscape, the artist planter more points, however, were the field state and in cultivation. Without that knowledge there can be no good design in park, field, or garden. W. R.

NOTES OF THE WEEK.

Apricot-trees.—In reply to “G. P. K.,” in Gardening Illustrated,” January 8th, I have very good crops of Apricots every year by keeping the roots high up and supplied liberally with chalk, which ensures the roots not getting too dry when the fruit is setting.—C. Phillips, Shillingstone, Dorset.

Erica carnea gracilis.—This has been one of the earliest to flower this year. It has, I think, surpassed itself in beauty, the drooping habit showing well the pretty flowers. The flowers are what are called “Italian pink,” a good shade, a little lighter towards the base. The tips of the flowers are dark brown. It appears to me from my experience of three years now to be slightly less hardy than some of the others. It is well in bloom now (January 14th).—S. Amott.

Christmas Roses at Kirkcudbright.—Hellebores of the Christmas and Lenten Rose classes always do well in Mr. Hornet’s garden at Kirkcudbright, but the blooming of the large-flowered Christmas Rose. Helleborus nillfolius, deserves special mention this year. The clumps are not protected in any way. The chief points, however, were the number and size of the flowers. At Broughton House the plants receive full attention in the shape of manure, but it is evident that the deep, black, somewhat alkaline soil suits the Christmas Rose.—S. Amott.

Hamamelis arborea.—This Witch Hazel is now bedecked with its twisted yellow flowers, which are rendered all the more conspicuous by the prominent chartreuse-coloured calyx. It is quite the best of the group, being also one of the first to bloom.