

— Science Notes. —

SPRING FLOWERS.

AMONG the earliest spring flowers are those of the hazel and willow. While as yet no green leaves are to be seen except on evergreens, the hazel trees become covered by long pendulous catkins, known to the country children as "lamb's tails." These are collections of pollen-bearing or "male" flowers. A close examination of the hazel tree will reveal the hiding places of the minute nuts. Each is sheltered by a number of tiny green scales resembling a leaf bud, except for a few red hairs projecting from the top. The willow also bears flowers of two kinds; one kind producing pollen, and the other (after fertilisation) developing the seeds. The willow catkins of the former kind become golden yellow as they ripen, but in their younger state when grey and soft are sometimes called "palms," and carried on Palm Sunday. The pollen-bearing flowers occur on separate trees from the seed-bearing flowers; in this the willow differs from the hazel. In both cases, however, the pollen is dispersed by the wind; this explains why the pollen is so dry and so abundant, why the stamens are not protected by a calyx and corolla, and why the flowers appear so early. The flowers do not require the visits of insects to carry away their pollen, so they are not gaily coloured, nor do they produce honey. They appear while insects are somewhat scarce, when high winds are prevalent, and when there are no leaves to interfere with the dispersion of the pollen. Pine trees also are wind fertilised, and where many of them grow together a gust of wind will fill the air with a cloud of yellow dust and cover the surface of any pond or ditch in the neighbourhood so that the country folk are wont to say that it has been raining sulphur.

Among the more lowly growing plants of early spring, the glossy green leaves of the wild arum are conspicuous. They are very similar to those of the cultivated arum, but smaller, and the wild flower also resembles the cultivated in structure, but the sheath is green instead of white, and the club-shaped end of the stem is of a reddish-purple instead of orange. This stem bears two groups of very minute flowers towards the lower end of the sheath, and the latter acts as a trap to catch small flies. The flies, it is supposed, are attracted by the club-shaped end of the stalk which they may think is putrid meat; they then crawl into the narrow part of the sheath through a circle of downwardly directed hairs, which effectually deter their escape for a certain time. Their imprisonment lasts until the pollen is shed, and then the hairs shrivel up and allow the flies to escape, bearing pollen on their bodies. In spite of their previous experience, they again allow themselves to be imprisoned, and so convey pollen from one flower, or rather group of flowers, to another. It is remarkable that the flowers containing the future seeds are never ready for fertilisation at the time that the pollen-bearing flowers, situated immediately above them and contained in the same sheath, shed their pollen; therefore, the ovules must be fertilised by pollen brought from another sheath, and are dependent for fertilisation on the visits of insects.

Notes on Art.

THE SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

BETWEEN the reviews of the forthcoming Exhibitions, I propose to offer a series of "Notes" on the many Art treasures of various kinds that are to be found in the National Collections at South Kensington, in galleries which are crowded with people although the works are but little known in detail.

If you pass through the main entrance of the Exhibition, walk through the architectural court and turn to the left as you enter the building, you will find the staircase leading to the Art Library. On the walls of this staircase you will see seven very remarkable pictures, the works of G. F. Watts, R.A., one of the greatest poet-painters England has ever had in her midst. These pictures are not to be lightly glanced at and passed by, because, apart from their great artistic qualities, and underlying these qualities, there is in them always a deep meaning. They are true sermons without words which teach us many things. What words, for instance, could express to us the utter worthlessness of worldly aims and desires, the hideousness of money-living for its own sake so strongly as Mr. Watt's picture of *Mammon*, in which the brutal figure of the god is crushing the life and energy out of the wretched creatures crouching at his knees? A repulsive picture, it is true, but full of strength and power. The other pictures on the same walls are, *The Spirit of Christianity*, dedicated to all the churches, and bearing the title, "He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." There is also the more attractive, but less vigorous, picture, *Love and Life*; we will not, however, dwell on these. Look before you at one of the most perfect pictures it is possible to imagine; it is called *Hope*. I confess that I love it so much that to calmly describe its merits is difficult. We may, nevertheless, attempt to consider its meaning—*Hope* is seated on the world in the twilight; all is tender grey-blue except the sombre grey-gold of the round world. She is bending over her lyre listening with a trustful, half-happy expression on her simple face, trying to catch the softest tones of the lyre. She is blind-folded, and does not know that all its strings are broken save only one. She is also blind to the stern facts of the hard world. Let us hope that the one string will hold out and give music to the world until the heavenly music comes. The pathos of the whole exquisite picture is quite beyond any words of mine. From the painter's point of view, it is also perfect in harmony of colour, grace of attitude, and delicate treatment of drapery.

All these papers are written in the hope of being able to be useful to Nurses, and point them to rest and change of thought; and it would be impossible to find any artist whose works are more elevating and poetic than those of Mr. Watts. He paints, it is true, old time-honoured themes, for we trust that "Love," "Life," and "Hope" are always before us; but we feel that in his treatment of these deep subjects he never forgets the living world, or his wish to help us.

Of his portraits, there are two very fine examples on the same wall, Cardinal Manning and Lord Tennyson. The strong ascetic face of the prelate is relieved by

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