THE PLANT AS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY:
BY ALICE LOUNSBERY

THE love of plants is one of the earliest of passions and it is one of the most enduring. The interdependence of the animal and vegetable kingdoms forms now, as in the past and as it will in the future, a chain so strongly woven that its links cannot be severed. The child, before developing its ideals, stretches out its hands to grasp a brightly colored flower, and a smile lights up the grandfather’s face as the fragrance of a favorite blossom stirs in his heart the emotion of memory. One of the most humanizing and soul-satisfying facts of the universe, and one better understood as civilization advances, is the existing friendliness to man of the plant world.

Lord Morley said: “There never was a time, there never was an age when from the highest to the lowest there was more common human-heartedness, more earnest desire to alleviate the lot of those who have to perform the hard services of the world and face its gusty insecurities; and never a time when people were more willing to make personal sacrifices.” And in this day of abundant altruistic feeling, the home-plant plays its part in furthering this very sentiment of human-heartedness.

The degree of intelligence possessed by individual plants is still a matter under discussion by scientists who have not yet begun to fathom its mysteries. They concede, however, that plants are more akin to animal life than is generally thought, a simple reason for their air of silent sympathy with our moods. For instance, one of the phenomena of the plant world is that there are certain members that set traps for flies and other insects, which they eat, digest and assimilate for their physical welfare. Plants sleep somewhat after the manner of humans, and they are controlled, as far as reproduction is concerned, by the great element of sex. Moreover, as all who observe them carefully know, plants have a determined and obdurate scheme of life and often a most subtle instinct impelling them to gain their own way; the determination of a vine stretching toward a certain trellis on which it wishes to climb is an everyday illustration of this fact. To gain an objective point many plants have been known, if need be, to strangle various other kinds of vegetation interfering with their designs. Another characteristic which the plant world shares with higher forms of life is its division into workers and parasites which often deceive each other.

The influence of the plant world on man, however, is invariably beneficial to his character, as is taught preeminently by the Japanese. When intimately known, the plant expresses the quintessence of modern progressive thought—“helpfulness.”
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This increased understanding, even though far from perfect, which is accorded plant life today, is emphasized by the great number of plants found in homes of every description, from the most humble to the most luxurious. That these plants give to the inmates of the homes something personally desired, is evident, or they would not be so assiduously tended. In their steady growth they inspire toward perseverance; in their gentle ways they are mute examples of patience, and they present a lesson of unselfishness in the way they sacrifice their blossoms to the ripening seeds or even die when the future of the next plant generation seems assured.

The growing of house plants during the winter months is not confined to any particular section of the country, although it is naturally less popular in tropical and semitropical regions, where Nature wears a green garb throughout the year. In most large cities, however, fields of brick and mortar, there has been for the last few seasons a very perceptible increase in the number of plants taken into the family circle.

In January especially there are many ferns and other growing things upholding in the home the message of youth and greenness that lies slumbering in the earth. “We are biding our time,” the plant member of the family tells us in the delicate flutter of its leaves, the exquisite grace with which it stretches new shoots toward the light. “Our particular world is not dead,” it whis-
pers, "because the crust of the earth is dry, snow-covered perhaps, and because its warm breath has blown over the fields and away at this holiday season. We know that the spring will return and we shall again take the earth into our arms, clothe her and woo her back to her virginal beauty." Thus the little plant of the family, with its optimistic reminder of Nature's yearly resurrection, is often the cheeriest member of all.

Lack of success in growing house plants has caused many to abandon the effort, even though such discouragement has been the outcome of inadequate knowledge. All plants, one should remember, are not adapted to grow indoors. In fact it is few out of the vast multitude of plants indigenous to the United States that will live under the conditions developed by steam heat, gas and electric lights, sudden and violent draughts let in from windows raised for ventilation. No matter how intelligent the care given certain species of plants, the conditions under which they are expected to thrive are such that from the beginning their doom is foretold. To buy from the florist a cultivated violet laden with bloom, to bring it into the house and expect it to thrive is little short of folly. In all probability it has been taken directly from a glass house or cold frame where the temperature has been carefully regulated to force it into unseasonable bloom. It has then been potted merely for the purpose of selling, and consequently should be bought simply for the beauty of the moment. The cultivated violet is not a house plant, neither is the pansy; but they can be used as illustrative of a large number of plants which, although very attractive in the florist's window, are unpractical and costly as decorations for the home. Likewise most of the rarer ferns have but a short existence indoors, although they are continually recommended for this use.

Of blooming plants the most satisfactory for winter house culture are undoubtedly the sturdy geraniums—especially the Martha Washington and the well known red and white flowered variety—for they will live and bloom continuously from fall till spring. They are most effective in sunny windows, and their richly colored, translucent petals can be made to enhance an infinite number of color
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One of the ferns that is much used in jardinières and where through the unfavorable conditions of their placing it shows often a reluctance to grow.

Symmetrical leaves and brilliant heads of bloom from a tomato can. And usually in such places it thrives amazingly, as though realizing how much needed is the brightness of its flowers.

Other house plants of old-time sentiment, tried and trusty, are the Cape Jasmine, now better known as Gardenia florida, the maple bell, oxalis, lemon verbena, tea rose and the Amaryllis which, when in bloom in the winter months, surpasses almost all other plants in striking beauty.

Gloxinias, flowers rich and heavy in texture as Genoese velvet, are wonderfully decorative in the home, and are easy to keep in vigorous health. They thrive best at a somewhat cool temperature, and are therefore desirable in rooms or halls where heat is not constant. During part of the day these flowers should have full sunlight.

Tuberous-rooted begonias have become of late great favorites for window cultivation, and the large schemes. For geraniums, besides, the simplest care suffices. They must have, of course, a sufficient amount of water, sunlight and fresh air; their blooms should be clipped off occasionally that others may be encouraged to form, and they should be kept free from dead or discolored leaves. It is interesting to note that often in the poverty-stricken quarters of town or city, it is a geranium that gives a touch of cheer to the neighborhood, rearing its

THE BOSTON FERN THAT THROUGH ITS LENGTH OF FRONDS AND GENERAL LOOK OF VIGOR INDICATES THE GOOD CARE IT RECEIVES AND THAT IT IS IN TRUTH A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY.
single-flowered ones are especially beautiful. They require an abundance of water and do much better than geraniums in places of enforced shade.

The Norfolk Island pine is now a well known house plant, and is highly popular for the sunroom or cool, light corner. In appearance it suggests a tiny pine tree. It is a foliage plant, the bloom being too inconspicuous to be taken into account.

The Crotons form also a group of foliage plants distinguished in form and rich in color. If properly cared for they can be kept indoors during the winter and planted out in the garden when spring returns.

Ferns are charming in the home, the ordinary varieties being well known to all. The Boston fern and its kin have secured immense popularity through their remarkable durability and splendid expressions of health. For all problematic places in the house they are the plants most likely to endure. The ostrich plume fern has very finely divided fronds and is the fern par excellence for either table or hanging baskets. In all probability more house ferns are killed by excessive moisture than by lack of water. They should be kept only moderately moist, and during the winter when they are more or less in a dormant state they require much less water than in spring and summer when sending forth new fronds.

Palms, of course, especially the smaller ones, are among the most graceful of all house plants, the Kentias being the best for general purposes. These vary in height from a few inches to six or seven feet, and are more svelt, more light and graceful than the equally well known fan palms.

A house palm of unusual interest is the pigmy Phoenix discovered by Mr. Charles Roebelen in Cochin-China, in eighteen hundred and eighty-

BOSTON FERN: A HARDY, BEAUTIFUL PLANT SUITED TO FAMILY LIFE.
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nine. It is a veritable dwarf, albeit a plant that created a sensation when first introduced into Europe, the pioneer specimen in London selling by auction for fifteen hundred dollars. The first plant brought to this country two years later sold for five hundred dollars. The skill and patience of nurserymen, however, have now so greatly increased the number of these palms in America that they are within reach of every lover of rare plants, so far as cost goes; and once one of them has entered the home, it is apt to become an individual of importance, a little member of the family appealing to all through its chaste and exquisite personality.

When for various reasons no other plants are grown indoors, there will sometimes be found a number of rubber plants. They are extremely healthy, accepting conditions that would kill most members of the vegetable world. Rubber plants are adaptable to training and can be made to branch in desired directions or to grow tall and straight simply by encouragement or suppression of the shoots that appear where the old leaves drop off. To thrive best, the plants need pure air, and water in somewhat limited quantity in winter, and the leaves should be washed sufficiently often to be kept free from dust. If the winter prove severe, or if the plants have suffered from draughts and neglect, they are grateful for a drink of sweet oil, a pint bottleful emptied about their base. The variety called *Ficus pandurata* is in appearance the most distinguished of all rubber plants, and perhaps the most satisfactory.

One of these plants that had become a real member of a family once met with a serious accident. It was dropped from a height by a young son of the house and its main stem was broken. The boy did not wish to confess his fault, and therefore resorted to what he supposed to be a clever subterfuge. He bound the stem together with string wrapped about it in the form of a bandage, doing so to put off the inevitable confession of his carelessness. Every morning he looked askance at the plant, dreading to see that its leaves had begun to shrivel. He watched for the signs of death day after day, but no such signs appeared. It is true that for the moment the plant ceased growing, yet it gave no evidence whatever of lack of vitality. The boy’s curiosity was aroused, and one day he took off the string bandage. The severed parts were growing neatly together, for the plant had sent out sap to act as a healing salve for its wounds! So delighted was the lad that he bound another bandage about the stem, and from that day forth attended the plant with the assiduity of a surgeon. It responded to his care, the supposed calamity binding them together in friendship.
ON EIGHT DOLLARS A WEEK!

HOW DO THEY DO IT ON EIGHT DOLLARS A WEEK?: FROM A PEN AND INK DRAWING BY ETHEL MYERS.