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Jane Loudon

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**Botany for Ladies**

Jane Loudon (1807–58), the Mrs Beeton of the Victorian gardening world, wrote several popular books on horticulture and botany specifically for women. Her enthusiasm for plants and gardening was encouraged by her husband, the landscape designer John Claudius Loudon, whom she married in 1830. Her *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* (also reissued in this series) was enormously successful, and she followed it up in 1842 with this volume on botany, in which she uses the natural system of classification. The 'grand object' of the work is 'to enable my readers to find out the name of a plant when they see it ... or, if they hear or read the name ... to make that name intelligible to them'. She takes her readers through the botanical orders, using a familiar plant as an exemplar for each, and then presents de Candolle's systematic description of plant species.

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BY

MRS. LOUDON,

Author of “Instructions in Gardening for Ladies,” “Year-Book of  
Natural History,” &c. &c.

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## PREFACE.

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WHEN I was a child, I never could learn Botany. There was something in the Linnean system (the only one then taught) excessively repugnant to me; I never could remember the different classes and orders, and after several attempts the study was given up as one too difficult for me to master. When I married, however, I soon found the necessity of knowing something of Botany, as well as of Gardening. I always accompanied my husband in his visits to different gardens; and when we saw beautiful flowers, I was continually asking the names, though alas! these names, when I heard them, conveyed no ideas to my mind, and I was not any wiser than before. Still the natural wish to know something of what we admire, impelled me to repeat my fruitless questions; till at last, vexed at my ignorance, and ashamed of not

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being able to answer the appeals which gardeners often made to me in doubtful cases, (supposing that Mr. Loudon's wife must know everything about plants,) I determined to learn Botany if possible; and as my old repugnance remained to the Linnean system, I resolved to study the Natural one. Accordingly I began; but when I heard that plants were divided into the two great classes, the Vasculares and the Cellulares, and again into the Dicotyledons or Exogens, the Monocotyledons or Endogens, and the Acotyledons or Acrogens, and that the Dicotyledons were redivided into the Dichlamydeæ and Monochlamydeæ, and again into three sub-classes, Thalamifloræ, Calycifloræ, and Corollifloræ, I was in despair, for I thought it quite impossible that I ever could remember all the hard names that seemed to stand on the very threshold of the science, as if to forbid the entrance of any but the initiated.

Some time afterwards, as I was walking through the gardens of the Horticultural Society at Chiswick, my attention was attracted by a mass of the beautiful crimson flowers of

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*Malope grandiflora*. I had never seen the plant before, and I eagerly asked the name. "It is some Malvaceous plant," answered Mr. Loudon, carelessly; and immediately afterwards he left me to look at some trees which he was about to have drawn for his *Arboretum Britannicum*. "Some Malvaceous plant," thought I, as I continued looking at the splendid bed before me; and then I remembered how much the form of these beautiful flowers resembled that of the flowers of the crimson Mallow, the botanical name of which I recollected was *Malva*. "I wish I could find out some other Malvaceous plant," I thought to myself; and when we soon afterwards walked through the hothouses, I continued to ask if the Chinese *Hibiscus*, which I saw in flower there, did not belong to *Malvaceæ*. I was answered in the affirmative; and I was so pleased with my newly-acquired knowledge, that I was not satisfied till I had discovered every Malvaceous plant that was in flower in the garden. I next learned to know the *Cruciferos* and *Umbelliferous* plants; and thus I acquired a general knowledge of three extensive

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orders with very little trouble to myself. My attention was more fairly aroused, and by learning one order after another, I soon attained a sufficient knowledge of Botany to answer all the purposes for which I wished to learn it, without recurring to the hard words which had so much alarmed me at the outset. One great obstacle to my advancement was the difficulty I had in understanding botanical works. With the exception of Dr. Lindley's Ladies' Botany, they were all sealed books to me ; and even that did not tell half I wanted to know, though it contained a great deal I could not understand. It is so difficult for men whose knowledge has grown with their growth, and strengthened with their strength, to imagine the state of profound ignorance in which a beginner is, that even their elementary books are like the old Eton Grammar when it was written in Latin—they require a master to explain them. It is the want that I have felt that has induced me to write the following pages; in which I have endeavoured to meet the wants of those whomaybenow in the same difficulties that I was in myself.

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The course I pursued is also that which I shall point out to my readers. I shall first endeavour to explain to them as clearly as I can the botanical characteristics of the orders which contain plants commonly grown in British gardens ; and at the end of my work I shall lay before them a slight outline of all the orders scientifically arranged, which they may study or not as they like. Most ladies will, however, probably be satisfied with knowing the orders containing popular plants ; and these, I am confident, they will never repent having studied. Indeed, I do not think that I could form a kinder wish for them, than to hope that they may find as much pleasure in the pursuit as I have derived from it myself. Whenever I go into any country I have formerly visited, I feel as though I were endowed with a new sense. Even the very banks by the sides of the roads, which I before thought dull and uninteresting, now appear fraught with beauty. A new charm seems thrown over the face of nature, and a degree of interest is given to even the commonest weeds. I have often heard that know-

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ledge is power, and I am quite sure that it contributes greatly to enjoyment. A man knowing nothing of natural history, and of course not caring for anything relating to it, may travel from one extremity of a country to the other, without finding anything to interest, or even amuse him ; but the man of science, and particularly the Botanist, cannot walk a dozen yards along a beaten turnpike-road without finding something to excite his attention. A wild plant in a hedge, a tuft of moss on a wall, and even the Lichens which discolour the stones, all present objects of interest, and of admiration for that Almighty Power whose care has provided the flower to shelter the infant germ, and has laid up a stock of nourishment in the seed to supply the first wants of the tender plant. It has been often said that the study of nature has a tendency to elevate and ameliorate the mind ; and there is perhaps no branch of Natural History which more fully illustrates the truth of this remark than Botany.

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