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' Life is a road, at either end a gate,
The gate of Life behind—of Death beyond.
Love guards the path and guides us all the way,
As through a garden where calm Hope doth rest.'
G. F. Bodley.

JANUARY 1894.—At last the white snow sheet is lifted, and we draw a breath of relief as it were, after the tension of a long long winter. It was not really long, however, it only lasted about three weeks or so. And there have been brilliant sunshines, and early morning splendours were not rare, when the lawns became wide diamond-fields, as pure and sparkling as winter's frost could freeze them. Splendours also there have been, of sunset skies whose glory died not until the utmost remotest glow of green had faded into grey. Wondrous joys such as these are,

must be now foregone ; for they perforce have waned with the frosty nights, and scarcely a regret goes with them, so happy is the feeling of the warmer air, and the smell of the grass set free at last from the ice-king's iron grip. Instantly, upon his departure, little sharp blades of crocus, with the broader pale green shafts of daffodil have arisen inches above ground, and 'daisies, pearled Arcturi of the earth,' will soon be born among the grass. Even in the gentian border there appears one poor bell of pinched and sickly blue, gleaming faintly among its frost-tainted leaves.

The first anxious visit after such severity of frost, is of course paid to the little clump of *Olearia*, near the western end of the rockery. A dozen or so of plants were grown from tiny cuttings, sent from the Isle of Wight, two years and a half ago. After most tender nursing they grew into fine young plants, as large as an ordinary lavender bush of the same age, and were duly planted out. Last summer they were literally white all over with little daisy

flowers. In the autumn (at the time that they were sheltered carefully under thick green spruce branches), each little spray and twig was loaded with a mass of buds just formed.

Alas! a glance underneath the covering at once betrayed the irremediable hurts our pets had suffered. They were all brown and grey, diffusing a sort of sickly fragrance, not perceptible in their summers of full strength and inflorescence. It has to be confessed, that our garden lies too low, and is not sufficiently dry, to suit some things.

Gentians seem to be always blowing: the vitality of them is marvellous; there was one on a patch niched snugly in the rock garden, that bloomed on for ever! It displayed its ultramarine magnificence every day for fully six weeks. Every day when the sun shone, I did homage to it. Sometimes the blue of it was so velvety, so brilliant, that one could scarce forbear to stoop and kiss its open face! I find this in my garden diary: 'Oct. 15. A large blue gentian on Roman walk. It

shuts up when very cold, and opens wide in the sun at noon.' 'Nov. 18. 'The Gentian there still.' On Nov. 27, 'Poor little gentian has begun to fade;' and then, Dec. 1, 'The Gentian is withered away.' It grew on a glossy-leaved, vigorous root, sheltered by a flat stone ledge, in a pocket half way up the bank, facing due south. This strange flower, with its movements of opening and closing, and its colour-changes of expression, resembled almost some live sea-creature. In May the plant is sure to bloom again, between great cushions of pink and snowy phlox *Nelsonii*. But then, its natural life will not last for more than a week or two.

It is like a 'far-off melody,' to return in thought from the grand deep azure gentian of the mountain-side or the garden, to its little sister of our own wild English heaths. It was near the sea coast where first we met, on one of the loveliest of miniature moors, where a sudden hollow hides the unsightly crowd of surrounding villas. The September sun shone down in softened brilliance, and the blowing breeze put one

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in mind of Scotland. The brown heathland glowed with autumn-flowering furze; that low creeping kind which inter-threads among the heather, and glows in the sunshine like embroidery of the richest gold. There remained still some scattered tufts of pink bell-heather and ling; green-grey lichen at their roots, variegated with delicious tones the all-prevailing brown.

Suddenly, low among the moss, in a wet boggy spot, between two heathery fir-crowned braes, I became aware of a soft gleam of blue. It was the pale azure of wild gentian. The flowers were opened wide in all their gentle loveliness, drinking in the full joy of mid-day.

It may not be rare, I believe it to be only what is called 'local,' but to me it was absolutely new. It is very delicate and shy—and how exquisite is its dream-like reflex of that other deep blue dweller on the Alps! The place where it grew was still, as might be any moorland solitude miles away from everybody. Only an indistinct low murmur either of the sea or noises of the town, mingled with light

whisperings among the pine tops, floated through the air around. Above the olive-green and tawny sedges where these earth stars shone, each one single and alone on its short upright stalk, there came an *Atalanta* butterfly leisurely wandering across the valley. . . . I hope it was not a very brutal impulse that moved me to nip off and gather into a little bunch every one of those wild *Gentian* flowers, and take them carefully away! Some covetous eye was almost sure to spy them out, some heedless hand would pull up the roots and carry them away to perish. But it seemed rather like doing evil that good might come!

More than nine years have slipped by since the last of these garden notes in September 1883. A new series was begun in the February following, breaking off before November. Three months are now worked in to complete the twelve. Through all these days and hours, changes of every kind have passed over the old Buckinghamshire garden. Nine times has Spring bloomed and ripened into summer there.

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Summer suns have burned and failed ;
Autumn leaves have fallen in showers of
rustling gold, and winter winds have swept
them away. Old trees are gone and new
trees have been planted, and everywhere
about the place reigns the inevitable law of
change. Old paths have been turned,
flower-beds here and there have been
turfed over, or new ones made. Yet now
things seem as if they ought always to
have been just so, and no other way at
all ! A new sundial, put together with
old carved stones and cement, now stands
upon the east lawn between the *Sequoia
gigantea*, and the Cedar. Already it wears
the look of having stood there for years.
There is a motto worked upon the steps
in Latin : it means, ' Light and shade in
turn, but Love always.' Round the top,
just below the dial, three lions walk with
solemn step from the sun-rising southward,
towards the east again.

The chiefest change of all, is the creation
of Peach Corner. On the sunny side of a
very old brick wall which had probably
formed the boundary between the garden

and the stable yard in former days, lay a rubbishy square plot of ground. Here were summered out the Camellias and Azaleas etc., etc. Here also was the place of dilapidated frames, and all sorts of orra* plants, and empty flower-pots. Old Peach trees were trained on the wall, and we used to think that peaches reddened riper there than on other walls. But the Peach trees kept on decaying year by year, making less hard the decision to remove them. When the time came for destroying the bit of old brick work—that was a harder matter ; not undertaken until after endless hesitations, yet not regretted since. The walk on the north side used to end in gloomy shade under a very large old Phylleria, growing in a narrow border full of melancholy ferns. Now, a much-needed thoroughfare is gained by carrying on the walk beyond. The great Phylleria breathes freer now, rejoicing in the sun which, for the first time warms its rugged old grey stem. Excepting upon its umbrageous

* 'Orra,' a Scotch word used for anything laid anywhere out of the way.