

NATURAL SCIENCE.

NOTES ON FLORA OF WEST LIMERICK.

BY R. D. O'BRIEN.

The stony tract which, beginning at the Ferry Bridge, extends along the river almost to Foynes, and which stretches inland by Cappagh Castle to Rathkeale, has a distinct and interesting flora of its own, which may best be studied at Curraghchase.

By the lake and in the "savanna" near at hand the graceful meadow rue, *Thalictrum flavum*, grows luxuriantly, distinguished by its upright habit, its cut leaves and feathery balls of yellow blossoms. You can find it also at Mollough, and probably elsewhere in the district.

You can also find the purple columbine, *Aquilegia vulgaris*, beside the lake—a doubtful native. Its beautifully divided leaf supplies the motive of much fine gothic carving, particularly in the French school.

On the rocky ground the Carline thistle, *Carlina vulgaris*, is perhaps the most characteristic plant. Like its more imposing cousin, the milk or holy thistle, *Silybum Marianus*, it is a biennial; this latter plant grows round the ruins of the abbey at Askeaton, and visiting the place last September with Mr. Præger, I was shocked to find that it had quite disappeared from the pasture that I had seen embossed with its handsome clumps of foliage. We found it presently in a new place; yet it seems strange that a plant whose hold on any particular plot is so fugitive, should maintain itself in the neighbourhood, as this plant must have done through centuries.

Look at this *Salvia*, *Salvia Verbenaca*, which grows between the ruins and the river. It is rare. Rare too is the Dogwood, *Cornus sanguinea*, which grows freely at Curraghchase and at Mollough.

The white beam tree, *Pyrus Aria*, is certainly a native, but whether it is wild at Curraghchase is hard to say—I think it is—you have it here in flower, and there is another example, fruiting, from New Pallas.

Some botanists are very indignant with people who try to naturalize new plants in their grounds—falsifying the record as they say. I have no sympathy with this scientific purism. Anyhow, the Curragh folk have set us several pleasant problems of the kind.

Here is the dusky Geranium, *Geranium Phœum*, an escape, no doubt, but equally without doubt known for generations to grow wild in a certain spot in the demesne, where it maintains itself indefinitely, yet its ambit is not fifty yards across.

The most successful alien, however, is the plant that, as a boy, I used to know as the Rose of Sharon. I don't find that the name is recognized now. I mean the *Hypericum Calycinum*; this beautiful John's wort has run rampant over the place, and entirely clothes the open ground about the cross.

Close by, growing parasitically on the roots of the beech trees, was Doctor George Fogerty's great find, the yellow bird nest, *Hypopitys Monotropa*, whose seductive plumpness (like Asparagus) is very poorly represented by the shrivelled remains you see.

We ought to find its relation, the winter-green, *Pyrola*, but we have not got it yet. I propose this pretty thing, with a flower like the lily of the valley, to the ambition of our young blood.

Anywhere in the small ponds and marshy corners that are common hereabouts, you will get the twig rush, *Cladium mariscus*, a fine bold plant, too big to shew properly in a herbarium.

The ploughed fields produce the quaint Venus' Comb, *Scandix Pecten Veneris*, which to the uneducated eye looks more like a crane's bill than an umbellifer. Here, too, are the common spurges, *Euphorbia Peplus*, *E. Helioscopia*, and the rarer *E. exigua*, and since you have the cover open look also at the interesting *E. portlandica* from Fanore in Burren, and notice please that some of you have to get the Irish spurge, *E. hiberna*, which is said to grow near Adare, and which certainly can be found in the White River near Ballyhahill, but that is far west, etc., etc., but that is enough, and more than enough, for one night.