Crocuses In The Scots Town Of Ayr

"Look at the crocuses!" We speak the words with gay abandon, as we greet one another these days. For crocuses are a feature of our Ayrshire gardens where they thrive in our light, sandy soil, blooming in time for St. Valentine's Day in mid-February. The first of the flowers appear in my own garden in a string-straight line of bright yellow, in shape not unlike fat exclamation marks. But an exclamation mark should mark an end, while the crocus starts the flowering of spring bulbs.

As happens every year, my tame blackbird makes me aware of the blooms. There he sits on a low bough of my cherry tree calling "Come out!" Off he flies down on the lawn, cocks his glossy head, and then looks in at the kitchen window with bright, orange-ringed eyes.

It is the signal for me to stop work — the blackbird's utter lack of responsibility is infectious — and I go out into the garden to find the crocuses growing under the cherry tree as they have grown for longer than I can remember.

I contrast the yellow of the flowers with the blackbird's orange bill and find the two warming the air with their flames of light. Startled by this discovery, I run to the open window, shouting to the inmates of the house: "Come and look at the crocuses!" And the birds cry shrilly to one another, as though startled by the same feel of spring.

Before the yellow bloom is spent, crocuses in blue, purple, and white show in the paths and borders. The petals open into chalices when the sun shines, and ingratiating scents steal up from the crocus cups, coaxing the bees to visit. The flowers are worth growing for the bees alone.

We are proud of our crocus lawns in the town of Ayr, and since the removal of tall, iron garden railings these floral carpets of blue and yellow are seen to advantage by pedestrians. One garden I used to know had its crocus carpet embellished with floral letters forming the words. "Flowers that bloom in spring."

Another garden in the same town still has its outstanding lawn planted with crocuses. The flowers are packed as closely as daisies in a meadow, increasing every year. The owner informs me: "Nobody knows who first planted them, but we do know they have been there for one and a half centuries. No new ones have been added, nor large clumps divided."

By March crocuses are at the peak of their bloom in my home town. And that is the time when our letting season begins, with everyone galvanized into sudden preparation for those who will be our house tenants for several months of the year. Fresh curtains are hung on the windows, fresh paint put on front doors and garden gates. But more attractive than the paint or curtains, to those in search of a house to let, is the sight of thousands of crocuses in the little front gardens. They are irresistible to people who live in the city, writes Marion Henderson in the Christian Science Monitor.

While they are common to almost every British garden and grow in most parts of the world, the history of the crocus remains obscure. It is thought that a pilgrim of the 12th century introduced the plant to England, secretary in the hollow of his staff a few corms picked up in Syria. Those corms took to British soil and were known as those of Crocus sativus, the autumn crocus, which proved a valuable source of saffron for more than 500 years in Britain.

The flower of the autumn crocus blooms in September, rising out of the ground bare of leaves. From the strong, yellow stigma was derived the saffron that gave its name to the small Sussex town of Saffron-Walden where the industry prospered until the introduction of synthetic dyes over a century past.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this industry was the fact that it took no fewer than 4,000 crocus stigmas to produce a single ounce of saffron. The price of the product was always high, for saffron was thought to be a valuable medicine as well as being used to color cakes and meat in England.

Up to the end of the last century the Irish used saffron to dye their linen, and in the Scottish Highlands it dyed the curtains of large and small houses until Victoria's reign ended.

The autumn crocus, though no longer used for manufacture of any kind, appears as an ornamental graden plant, seeming to bring back the spring when it blooms in September. It lacks the joyous look of the spring crocus and has nothing like its prodigal bloom. Spring's happiest flower "children" are the first crocuses. They recall the advice a Chinese writer gave his people: "Take time to look your fill on the Spring flowers . . . the sight of them renews the spirit of man and woman."

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BARDOT IS BACK—Brigitte Bardot swaps stage kisses with actor Jean-Paul Belmondo in Paris during her first studio session since the birth of her son, Nicolas, last month.

Chronicles of Ginger Farm
by Gwendoline P. Clarke

Another week gone by . . . a pleasant week, weather-wise. That is, until Saturday. Then we had a combination of rain, fog, ice, snow and flood-water. But thank goodness the basement remained dry. We went down in the middle of the night to make sure.

Good weather during the past week made it easy getting around, and that was fortunate. Tuesday more quilting — quilt done and out and I brought it home to bind. For some unknown reason no one ever seems anxious to bind the finished quilt. No one except me and I rather like the job. It gives me a nice feeling to cover the raw edges with a neat binding and to know that one more job is really finished and the quilt ready to be sent on its way — to bring comfort and warmth to someone who really needs it. I often wish I could follow — unseen — some of our quilts to their destinations; to see and know something of the families to which they go; maybe to some outpost in northern Saskatchewan where winters are long and the comforts of home dependent upon the strength and ingenuity of the people.

This week we are setting up two more quilts. Yes, we are going to punish our fingers all over again just as they are getting nicely healed following the inevitable jabs and pricks without which no person can quilt successfully. Every time you hear an "Ouch" or a "Darn" you know someone has done it again and you pass over the adhesive or suggest a dab of nail-polish — some prefer one, some the other.

Another highlight last week was our Institute meeting — topic, Historical Research. Four of the older members were asked to give brief histories along specific lines. (1) Street names in the village and how they originated. Also history of the two churches. (2) Life of Dr. Dixie, pioneer medical man of the district. (3) History of "Cherry Hill Farm," also that of "Glenerin" now used as a convalescent home for Robert Simpson employees. (4) Indian history of the district previous to pioneer settlement All this material will la r be incorporated in our Tweedsmuir Scrapbook.

The story of "Cherry Hill" almost made me weep. Once the most beautiful house in the district it is now almost falling apart. Not only that at one time it was furnished with wonderful handmade furniture of walnut, cherry and bird's-eye maple. The old house for some years now has been lived in on a rented basis and at some time the solid walnut dining-table had been used for ironing the family wash. As a result the marks of an overheated iron are burnt right into the table-top. Isn't it dreadful how little respect is often shown for old buildings, trees and pioneer relics of all kinds? In some districts historical societies are doing their best to revive interest in, and appreciation of, historical landmarks but alas, in many cases it is already too late. So much has been lost. In the Old Country everything possible is done to preserve historic sites but in Canada all too often trees and old buildings are doomed for destruction by powerful, relentless bulldozers.

How does this wholesale destruction come about? I know one way. For some years now property owners have been approached by real estate brokers or representatives of a land-deal syndicate and a tempting price offered for farm or small holding. The business is done through lawyers, the identity of the actual purchaser remains obscure. The owner feels he cannot afford to turn down a good offer so in due time the deal is closed. Later the former owner feels terribly upset to see his old house in ruins and his once carefully tended fields over-run with weeds. But he has burnt his bridges and no amount of regret can replace them. Financially he has made a good deal and he has to face the fact that you can't eat your cake and have it too.

Now for the latest on family news. The day after Eddie had his cast off Jerry went to the doctor's to have an abscess lanced on his neck, and then again on Friday. When he found Daddy was stopping the car outside their own home there was trouble. "No — no — not home. Go Grandma!" Friday night is a regular ritual — shopping and then grandma's. However, they came out next day and all was well. The three boys came in with a lovely bouquet of red carnations for our anniversary. Incidentally we had visitors today and I said "Don't you like our beautiful carnations?" "Yes," said Mrs. B., "they look almost real, don't they?" "Look real," I exclaimed, "they ARE real!" Now I ask you, how can you win? Mrs. B. had to smell the carnations before she would believe I wasn't kidding.

Compact Cars Russian Style

If someone in Moscow wants to buy a Moskvitch, Russia's "economy" car, he coughs up 25,000 rubles ($6,500 at the official rate of exchange, $2,500 at the more realistic tourist rate) and puts his name on the waiting list. Two years later, if he's still around, he gets it. In less than 30 days, however, Joe Smith, American, will be able to get the same car for only $1,500 — and it's quite possible he won't have to wait at all. The difference, apart from ideologies, is soft-spoken, persistent Robert Castle, 31, of Herkimer, N.Y.

Castle, a prosperous auto dealer (Ford, Renault, Fiat — about 2,500 sales a year) with real-estate and financing interests in Herkimer and nearby Syracuse, trekked to the Soviet Exhibition in New York one day last summer along with some 40,000 tourists. Castle had heard of the Moskvitch (literally, "Moscow resident") — a four-seat, four-door, four-cylinder car with a 45 h.p. engine — and there he saw it. He liked it, wanted to sell it, and immediately opened negotiations with the Amtorg Trading Corp., official Soviet trading organization in the U.S.

A few weeks ago in Moscow, Castle signed a contract giving him an exclusive franchise to distribute 10,000 Moskvitch cars in the U.S. in the next two years. Castle said the first of the little Moskvitches would start arriving around the end of April at the rate of 500-a-month (sedan and station-wagon models) with sufficient parts to service them. He added that he had inspected Russia's Moskvitch production facilities, and had been assured the Soviets could ship him all the cars he could sell.

Was Detroit quivering at the unexpected competition? Not at all. "Who'd buy them?" snorted one U.S. automan. "Just some crackpots who'd like to say they own a Russian car." Castle was undaunted. By the end of the week, he claimed he had already received more than 50 inquiries from aspiring Moskvitch dealers from coast to coast.

SALLY'S SALLIES

"I don't want to go down in history like you; I'd be glad to go anywhere."

A Real Shocker!

Last month a little dog beloved by a Toronto woman, became suddenly ill and died. The owner had no place to give it a decent burial so a friend said "Bring it over to my garden." The grieved one started off carrying it in a large shopping bag. On the way she stopped in one of the big department stores and set the bag down while she made a quick purchase. When she turned back it was gone. The clerk told her that the usual routine among shoplifters is to go to the nearest washroom, take out the contents and throw away the container. Off went the owner of the little dog, opened the nearest washroom door and there on the floor lay a woman in a faint — the dog in the open bag beside her. With supreme presence of mind our friend pushed through the curious customers surrounding the woman, picked up the bag and walked out.

From Gossip

KNOW THY SELF

What a man believes may be ascertained, not from his creed, but from the assumptions on which he habitually acts. — George Bernard Shaw.

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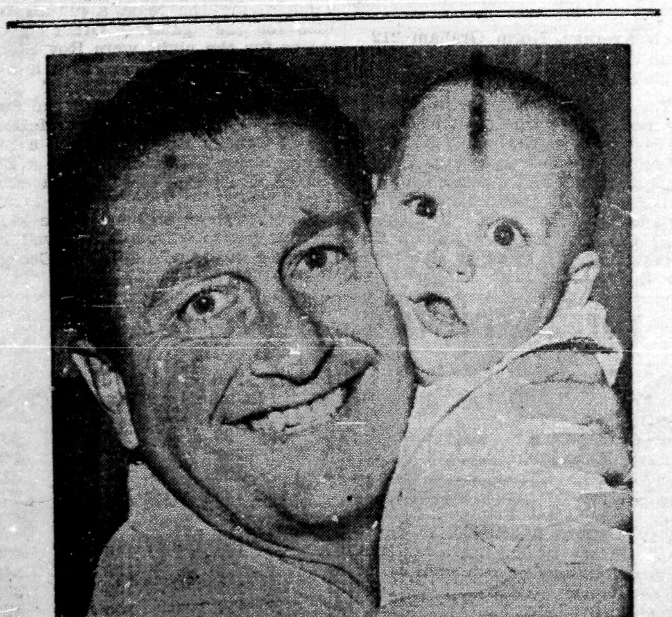


LET WELK-KIN RING — Lawrence Welk is cheek-to-cheek with one of his favorites. Meet 7-month-old Robbie, his grandson, the child of Welk's eldest daughter, Shirley.

DOLLSVILLE — Unusual beatnik dolls, called "sweetniks," naturally, surround their creator, Lada Draskovic, in Rome. The dolls are dressed in loose-fitting sweaters, toreador pants and sandals. Their straggly, woolen hair is done in bright red, blue, orange and green.

The "All Fall Down" Grand National

Of all the events in the sporting calendar the Grand National is the one most likely to provide a regular quota of sensations. We have become so used to some kind of a "turn up for the book" that it is a minor sensation if the favourite wins.

One of the strangest of the series was the 1921 Grand National. Of the thirty-five starters only one completed the course without falling. Even that one very nearly came a cropper. Only four horses finished and the rider of the favourite remounted to finish second, after breaking his collarbone.

The final oddity was that every schoolchild in Lewes, Sussex, where the surprise 100-9 winner, Shaun Spadah, was trained, was given an Easter present of a new shilling to celebrate the victory.

The rapidity with which horses went down and out of the race stirred memories of the nursery game, "Ring o' roses, all fall down."

The race was farcical from the beginning. Slippery conditions caused horses to tumble like ninepins at all the early jumps. Seven fell at the first fence and four more at each of the next three.

Among the three victims of Becher's Brook was Turkey Buzzard ridden by an amateur, Capt. Bennet. But Capt. Bennet, knowing his mount was as strong as a lion, remounted and urged him on. Two fences later, however, Turkey Buzzard lost his footing again and once more the rider came off.

Still he refused to admit defeat and, remounting once more, set off in chase of the leaders. Evidently he felt that as so many horses had come down already there was a chance that some of those in front of him would also drop out.

He was right. A great cheer soon proclaimed that Turkey Buzzard, the horse that had fallen twice, had gone to the front — and the race was not yet half over!

But though so few animals were still surviving, they were keeping so close together that in these conditions a mishap to one could easily affect two or three others. This happened at the fence before the water, where one horse rolled over and brought down another, the fancied Loch Allen.

It is probable that this accident also unnerved Shaun Spadah, for he misjudged the jump and landed on his knees. His head touched the ground, but his rider, F. B. Rees, managed to retain control and got him to his feet again.

Coming into the racecourse first time round only seven were still standing. Turkey Buzzard, apparently unaffected by his two tumbles, was still in the lead, followed by All White, Forewarned, Shaun Spadah, The Bore, Glencorrig and Loch Allen, who had been remounted and made up the procession, though a long way behind.

Loch Allen, however, was destined not to complete the race. First he refused at the fence before the water. Though eventually he was persuaded to get over, he clearly had had enough, for he came down at the Brook.

Now the pace and the effects of the falls were beginning to tell on Turkey Buzzard, for going out into the country for the second time he faded and surrendered the lead to All White and Shaun Spadah. It seemed that the race would lie between these three, as the only others left, Forewarned, The Bore and Glencorrig, formed a group a little way behind them.

Then Glencorrig refused and not only put himself out of the race, but conceivably also ensured that the other two would not win. All White and Forewarned came down at the same fence, probably distracted by his refusal, thereby mistiming their jump and coming to grief on the treacherous turf.

So now the field was down to three horses out of nearly three dozen, and there was still a long way to go. But though the number of runners had been reduced so severely the race was by no means over.

Shaun Spadah, Turkey Buzzard and The Bore were racing along in that order — All White, who had been remounted, was cantering steadily on well in the rear.

Then the drama was carried a stage farther when Turkey Buzzard, now thoroughly tired by his efforts to make up the ground lost by his earlier falls, came to grief once more, at the fence between Becher's and the Canal Turn.

Yet again his rider remounted, determined to finish the course, and the gallant animal tore after the leaders.

But now the leeway was too great and the distance in which to draw up too small. Turkey Buzzard, though still running, was out of the race for practical purposes.

Meanwhile The Bore, galloping hard towards the finish, had closed up on Shaun Spadah and these two raced neck and neck. It looked like being a thrilling finish after all, even if it was a two-horse race now.

But there was still another unexpected twist to come. Two fences from home The Bore fell heavily, throwing his rider and owner, Harry Brown. Shaun Spadah was thus left almost alone.

Mr. Brown, obviously hurt, quickly scrambled back on to his horse and went on to the finish. The crowd cheered him home, for The Bore was favourite. But not until afterwards did they discover that he had ridden home with a broken collarbone sustained in the fall, which was caused by a rein breaking at the critical moment.

In the end the chief honours went, as they should, to the only horse that kept its feet throughout the race, with secondary honours to the rider of the favourite.

But many think the real hero of that "All fall down" National was Turkey Buzzard, who came back to finish after three falls. Yet, officially, he is doomed to obscurity because he finished a few yards behind the leaders!

Magicians should be barred from sawing women in half — there are too many of them as it is.

LIGHTS OUT — Stopped for good, San Francisco's famed "bird cage" traffic lights have been taken down as too old-fashioned for the modern city. These lie in a warehouse before a public auction.

Binoculars For The Sportsman

What almost all sportsmen want in their glasses is resolving power, which may be roughly defined as the ability to focus on details to identify a species, judge the size of a head, or to distinguish animals' tracks

For general purpose, I use a 7 x 35 binocular because of its light weight and size. It answers for about 90 per cent of my observations perfectly, but it is not sure for the identification of small birds beyond 75 yards, nor will it surely tell a buck from a doe at 400 yards.

So, I often carry a 12 x 60 monocular in my rucksack, for long distance only. Yet it costs, weighs, and bulks less than my 7x35 glasses. It might pay the hunter of sheep and goats exclusively to select just one high-power glass, such as a 10x50, provided its bulk and weight were not too much for continual carrying. But my combination suits me perfectly.

Almost all of the best binoculars offered since World War II have the lenses coated with magnesium fuoride. I refer to the coating of all the surfaces of all lenses and prisms; not only the two exterior lenses. Such coating is always an advantage. It transmits a little more light, thus slightly increasing resolving power. To a very large extent, it eliminates glare, or dazzle, when observing toward the sun, particularly if sunlight touches the objective lens.

Coated lenses give a better rendition of colour. But it is not an absolute necessity, and one can sometimes pick up a pair of older best-make glasses at a reduced price which, for most practical purposes, are as good as the coated ones.

Field of view is the diameter of the circular view seen through the binocular, and it is expressed in so many feet at 1,000 yards. It depends largely on the magnification, a low-power glass having a much wider field than one of higher magnification. A 7x35 typical binocular will have a field of about 375 feet at 1,000 yards. Wide field of view is a necessity with glasses to be used for watching athletic events in order to keep the objects or contestants constantly in view. Glasses used for such purposes should have a field of not less than 300 feet. It is not so necessary for long-range hunting, where a field as small as 200 feet is not objectionable.

Most binoculars can be had with either central focusing or with individual focusing. With the former, the two telescopes are focused for distance simultaneously by means of a focusing wheel that lies between the two. With the individual focusing glasses, each telescope must be focused individually by turning the eye lens of the telescope.

Thus with the central focus, you can focus the entire instrument instantly while it is held at the eyes. With the independent focusing glasses, you must take the glasses away from your eyes and turn each eyepiece to the proper adjustment on the scale engraved on the eyepiece.

It is true that you can focus each telescope of the latter type for a universal focus of over 100 yards, and then while observing at that or greater distances the glasses will be in correct focus and will not need to be changed. Also, it is claimed that the individual focusing glasses are more dust and waterproof, but I think this difference is exaggerated.

When observation is to be confined almost exclusively to a considerable distance, as in mountain hunting, probably the individual focusing glasses are slightly superior, and certainly they are slightly cheaper.

But for observation at short distance, particularly for bird study, or for woods hunting, where you may have to change the range of your observing often, the central focus glasses are much better, for they can be focused instantly while continually observing the subject.

Regardless of the glasses used, sportsmen wish to observe very critically, and for this reason any binocular must be held steadily. A good way is to sit down and rest the elbows on the knees, or something solid such as the limb of a tree, a rock, or a tree stump.

— By Col. Townsend Whelen, Associate Editor, Sports Afield.

Smuggled Secret

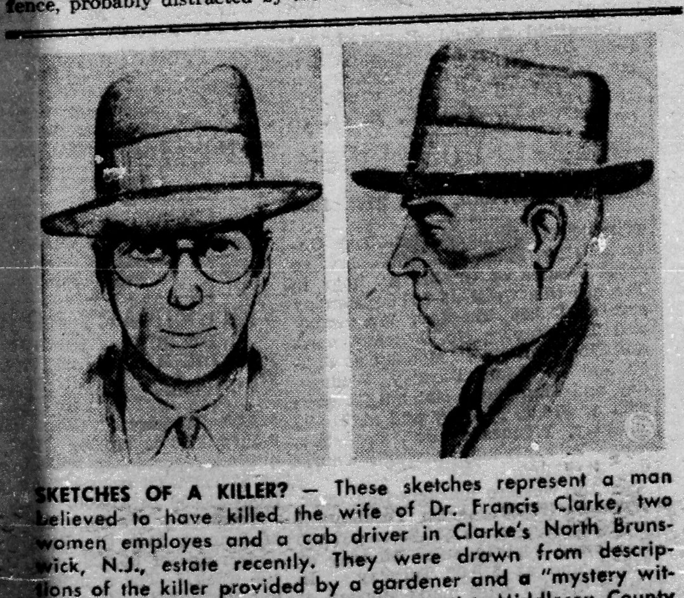
It was in the East — China — that silk was first developed 4,000 years ago by one of the Empresses. The story goes that after being jealously guarded in China the secret of silk production was given to the world by a princess who married an Indian prince in the year A.D. 419, and in her head-dress smuggled the eggs of the silkworm and the seeds of the trees which produced the leaves on which the worms fed.

People driven from France by the loss of their religious rights in 1685 included skilled silk weavers who settled in Spitalfields, London. By 1700 silk weaving was one of England's most important industries. It reached its highest prosperity in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the looms numbered 17,000.

"I resent him saying there's a fool in every family."

"Why?"

"Well, he knows I'm an only child."



SKETCHES OF A KILLER? — These sketches represent a man believed to have killed the wife of Dr. Francis Clarke, two women employes and a cab driver in Clarke's North Brunswick, N.J., estate recently. They were drawn from descriptions of the killer provided by a gardener and a "mystery witness" said to have been an amateur artist. Middlesex County Prosecutor Warren Wilentz said that from descriptions offered so far, the suspect's main characteristic was a "ruddy face."

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