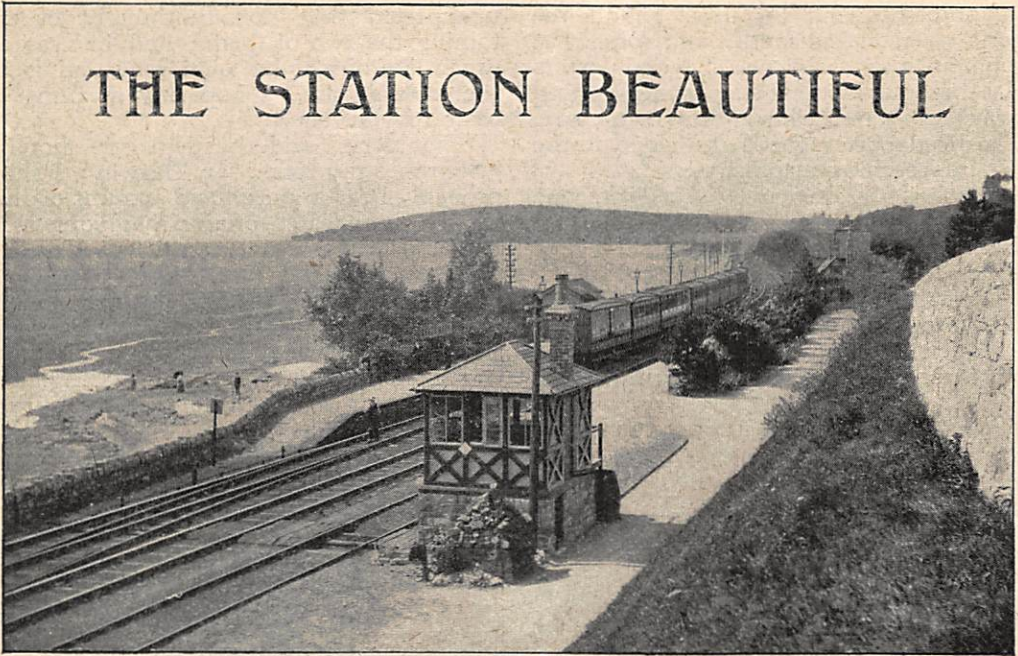


THE STATION BEAUTIFUL



KENT'S BANK.

(Photo: A. Hollis, Barrow-in-Furness.)

BY A. SIEVEKING AND HAROLD MACFARLANE.



WE have Keats' word for it that "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever," and further, that "its loveliness increases"—which is perhaps an enviable phase of the poet's mind—for surely with most of us it is going a little far. But whatever may be our powers of appreciating and holding in memory things of beauty, it is certain that railway stations are not as a rule specially associated with our idea of loveliness. Even when we know that a station like that of St. Pancras is a work of art, we hardly think of it as such. It is too essential a part of the ugliness and bustle and hurry of modern life. We do not think of the grace and strength of Sir Gilbert Scott's architecture, but rather of the smoke and din, the rush of porters shouting "By your leave," with trucks of luggage which nearly bowl you over, the clang of iron, the grinding of brakes, the frenzied desire to secure a corner seat or a hansom, as the case may be.

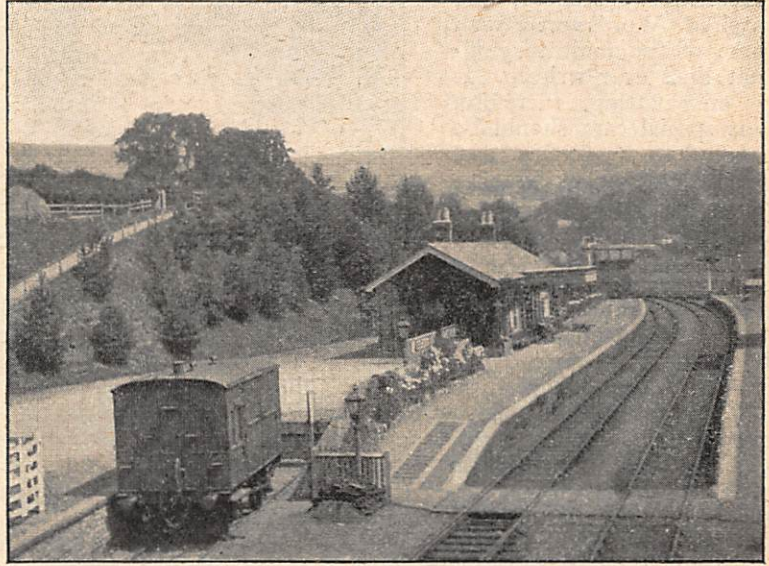
All the more grateful, therefore, ought we to be to those who exert themselves to make these centres of ceaseless activity into havens of peace, and to divert the mind of the wayfarer—so far as may be—from troublous thoughts of travel, so that, as he alights way-worn and weary from the carriage, his eye is rejoiced, a soothing influence steals over him, and, straightway forgetting the thirst which tormented him, he omits to ask his way to the refreshment room. "Thank God we are not an artistic nation," said a well-known naval expert the other day in the public Press. It is a proud boast. Thank God we care little for pictures and music and Nature, and birds and flowers, and that what cannot be set down in terms of pounds, shillings, and pence does not appeal to us! Thank God that we can only express our admiration of our great naval hero by the extravagant length of the column on which we set him! Thank God for Harley Street and the Stock Exchange! But those of us who are not so proud of our lack of artistic power and feeling will give credit to the railway companies who encourage the embellishment of working places, and to their employes who make the wilderness blossom as the rose. And, after all, even from the most utilitarian point of

view, there may be something to be said—at any rate, for a certain class of station. The commercial traveller with his eye on samples has, perhaps, little leisure or inclination to gaze around him; but the same man on pleasure bent may be of a different opinion. Though he may write to the papers to thank God he is not artistic, he probably prefers a bed of roses to a staring announcement in black and white that there is nothing like Blank's Pills for the liver, or that Ditto's Blood Purifier cures all diseases under the sun. It is not as if one only saw one or two specimens of the same announcement in the course of a journey. It is the wearisome iteration of the thing that gets on one's nerves. When you see Peach's Soap or Sycamore's Furniture not only on every station, but on every arch, and even on placards in the fields as you pass, you begin to feel a headache and find it perhaps a little difficult to thank God that we are so completely commercial.

Many companies now expend a small sum yearly in prizes for station decoration. The Great Western, which is said to have been the pioneer in the encouragement of floriculture, devotes a well-spent £250 per annum to this

purpose. In the distribution of prizes the attractiveness of the floral decoration is not, however, the only item. The way in which the whole station is kept is also considered.

Some of the most decorative stations on this line are Hayes and Harlington, Torquay,



TINTERN ABBEY STATION.

Brislington, Tredegar Junction, Tintern, and Cockett.

Mr. J. R. Williams, of Brislington, has earned great renown for his station by the number of prizes he has taken. One of his most admired effects was produced by the

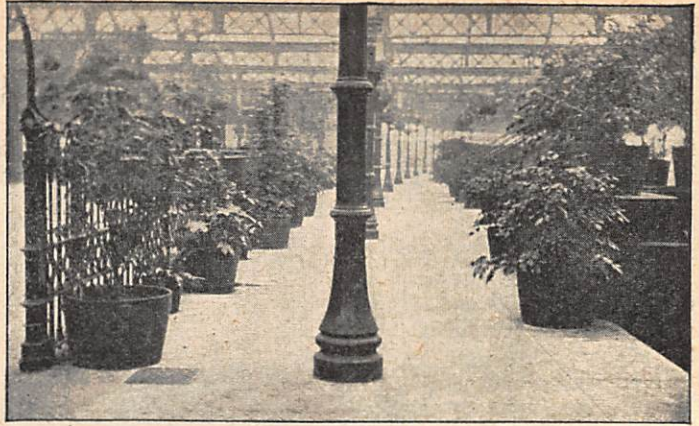


WICKWAR STATION.

(Photo: W. Perkins. Wickwar.)

following elaborate design—a floral crown between the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, the whole in a setting of pyrethrum and lobelia.

Tintern Abbey and the Valley of the Wye are celebrated the world over for loveliness of scenery, and inspired Wordsworth with some of the most magnificent lines ever written. It is only fitting, therefore, that special care should be devoted to its station, and our illustration shows that it has received it. If you would see fair Melrose right, you must, in the opinion of Sir Walter Scott, visit it by pale moonlight, but Tintern Station you may visit with advantage at all times and seasons. In spring it is adorned with snowdrops and crocuses—then follow hyacinths and tulips, and in due course it blossoms forth with full panoply of summer plants, the Malmaison and the rose of the Seven Sisters glowing pink above all. But the especial glory of this season and place are the double poppies



TYNEMOUTH STATION.

(Photo: R. F. Smith, Tynemouth.)

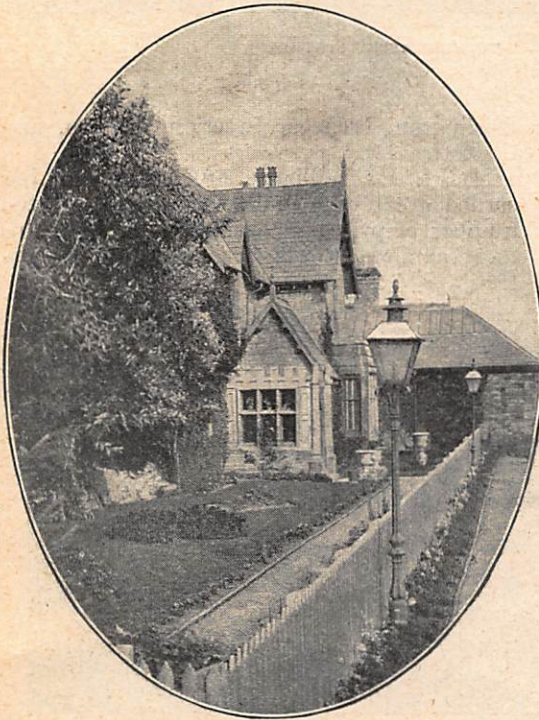
which here, owing perhaps to some unusual quality of the soil or climate, grow to dimensions far beyond the ordinary. "And who pays for all this?" you ask, as you look with delight on the varied show. The answer is "The Duke," and, if you are acquainted with that part of the world, of course you know that round about there there is only one duke known—namely, the Duke of Beaufort.

Matlock Bath is another station which from its surrounding scenery might be expected to inspire the artist-gardener; nor are our expectations disappointed. Matlock Bath is a noted prize-winner, run close by its neighbour, Wakewell, where one bed alone contains as many as 100 rose trees of the finest kind and 5,000 violas.

We give an illustration of another Midland Railway garden, at Wickwar in Gloucestershire, its stationmaster-gardener, Mr. Watkin, in the forefront amid full floral profusion.

Who would not be a stationmaster and live in Arcady? Who would not rise at 4 a.m. to tend his—sheep, I was going to say—for Corydon, the typical dweller in Arcadia, is always represented as tending sheep. Why sheep, I wonder? Surely flowers are sweeter—and what flowers are here! Roses, gladioli, iris, auriculas, marigolds, stocks! and how they flourish is shown by the fact that one rose tree trained on the wall boasted at one time no fewer than 600 blooms.

The North Eastern Railway began distributing prizes for the best-kept stations on their system in 1895, when fifteen prizes were allocated to each of the four divisions of the line. These prizes are of three classes—1st, £6 each; 2nd, £3; 3rd, £1 10s.; and of



MIDDLETON-IN-TEESDALE STATION.

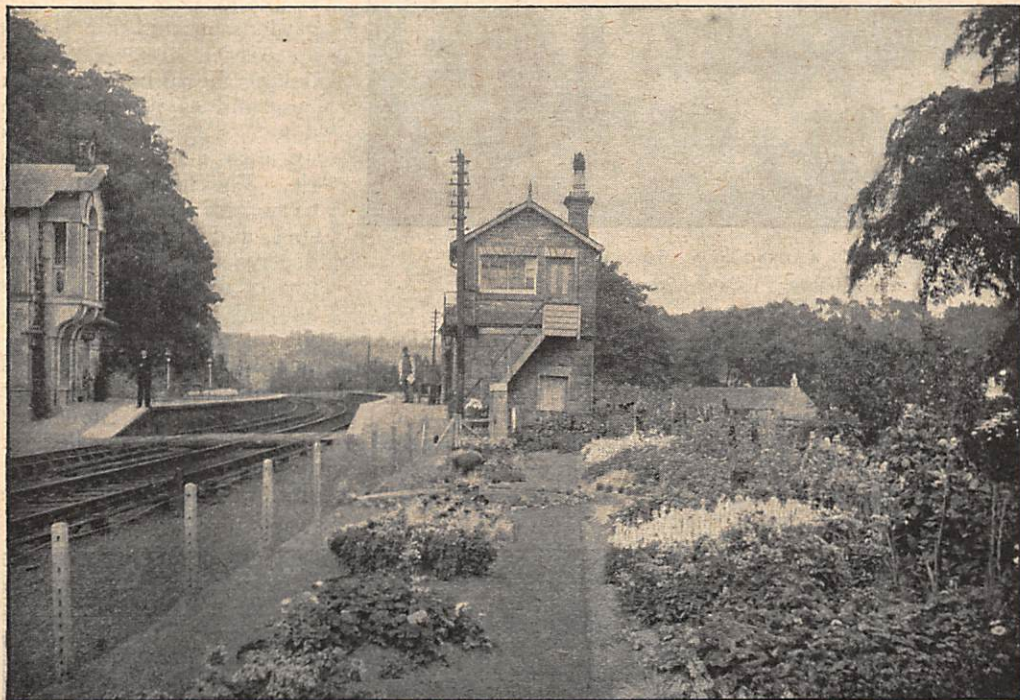
(Photo: F. Spraggon, Middleton-in-Teesdale.)

these sums two-thirds go to the station-master and one-third is divided among the station staff. The method of judging is as follows. One hundred is full marks, awarded thus :—

Floral Decorations	60
Tidiness of Station	20
Tidiness of Signal Cabin	...	}	10 each.
Tidiness of Station Rooms	...		

Now, if you please, cast your eye on our next illustration and tell us what you find. "This is not a station," you say, "but a

We can fancy that a stranger, arriving at this flourishing Northumberland watering-place and noting the beauties of the station, would pass on his way into the town rejoicing, and decide that such a place was likely to be worth staying in. It might pay local authorities to consider whether, in conjunction with the companies, something more of this kind might not be undertaken with advantage to their districts. The hotel proprietor takes care that his entrance-hall shall present many attractive features ; why



CASTLE HOWARD STATION.
(Photo: G. Hepworth, Brighouse.)

magnificent conservatory." It looks like it indeed. But it *is* a railway station, nevertheless—that of Tynemouth.

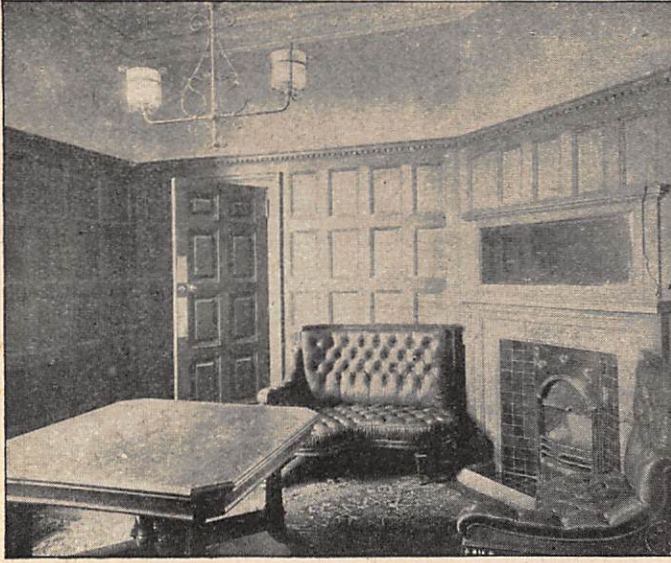
This is something like an entrance to a watering-place, is it not? "You can't grow much on cement," says the stationmaster, Mr. James Lee, and yet this photograph shows what may be accomplished. If that is a specimen of how things are done in Tynemouth, one can well understand the enthusiasm of Mr. Lee, who in another place imitates Mr. Silas Wegg and drops into poetry—poetry not inscribed with mere pen or printer's ink, but writ in mossy characters and enclosed in a floral border. It is to this effect :—

"Oh, give me the rocks and the wild rolling sea,
The cliffs of old Tynemouth for ever for me."

should not a town council take a wrinkle from him and apply and extend the principle?

The station of Wynyards shows the name of the place lettered in gigantic type of ever-green moss, and the traveller may see an announcement in similar form at Tynemouth.

Castle Howard on the same line is the subject of our next illustration, and the reader can judge for himself whether Mr. Smith deserves the many prizes he has won. The photograph shows the main garden with its lawn, fountain, and large beds of geraniums, calceolarias, begonias, and cactus dahlias ; but everything cannot be shown in one view, and the rockery, window-boxes, hanging baskets of flowers and floral decoration even of the



THE KING'S WAITING-ROOM, WOLFERTON STATION.
(Photo: F. Ralph, Dersingham.)

signal cabin are of necessity omitted. A station that has earned the distinction of being described as "unrivalled in the six northern counties" is that presided over by Mr. Collings at Middleton-in-Teesdale. We give an illustration of it. The chief features of this railway pleasaunce consist of the eastern and western gardens and a verandah that is a veritable blaze of colour. In addition to various kinds of lilies (*auratum*, *Harrisii*, and *lanceifolium*) petunias, geraniums, begonias, baskets of campanulas, musk, lobelia, nasturtiums, a climbing Maréchal Niel rose, passion-flowers, clematis, and giant fuchsias are all to be found beneath the sloping roof, while the rockeries abound in specimens of ferns indigenous to that lovely district.

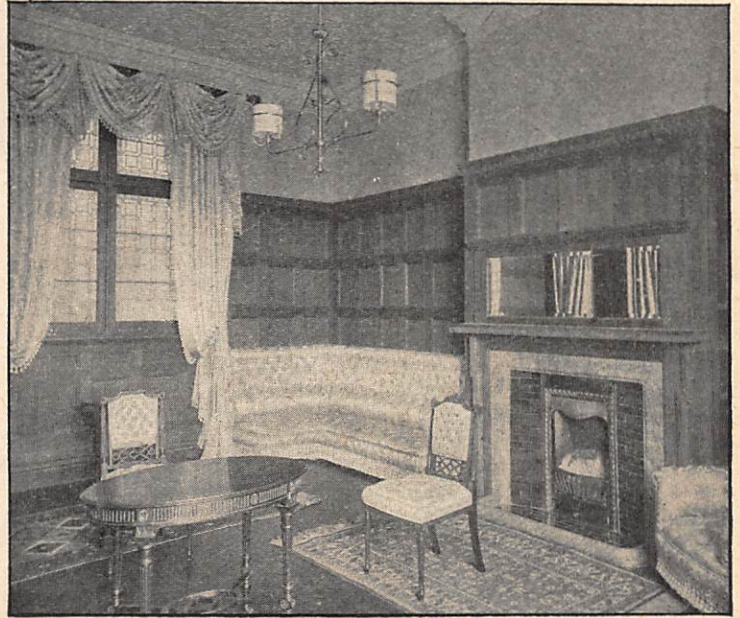
Saltmarsh and Brough are two very pretty stations, but on their flowery beauties we have not space to dwell.

We must change carriages and get on to another line, the North British, which has adopted a somewhat similar system

to that of the North-Eastern, but the rules seem a bit more inclusive. For instance, the condition of the platform lamps is mentioned as an item for consideration, and the appearance of the staff receives the attention of the judges. So we suppose no amount of gorgeous blossom will make up for the absence of a clean collar or an unwashed palm.

The making of some of the gardens on this line was not an easy matter, Nature not having shown herself quite so bountiful as she might have done. Take Rawyards, for instance, a station near Airdrie. The name alone seems to suggest a sterile and desert spot, and the name does not deceive us. It is placed on top of a hill some 600 feet above sea level and had not

originally enough soil to support a blade of grass. Up this incline 500 cartloads of material had to be brought before any gardening operations could be begun, or even thought of. Then the ground had to be levelled, and finally sown with grass. A large rockery of Peterhead granite was next constructed,



QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S WAITING-ROOM, WOLFERTON STATION.
(Photo: F. Ralph, Dersingham.)

around whose base ferns were planted, with mosses and flowers in the spaces between the stones. Flower beds and paths of red ashes were set amidst the turf, ornamental vases were placed along the main platform, while a row of trees against the wall afforded a cool and shady background in summer.

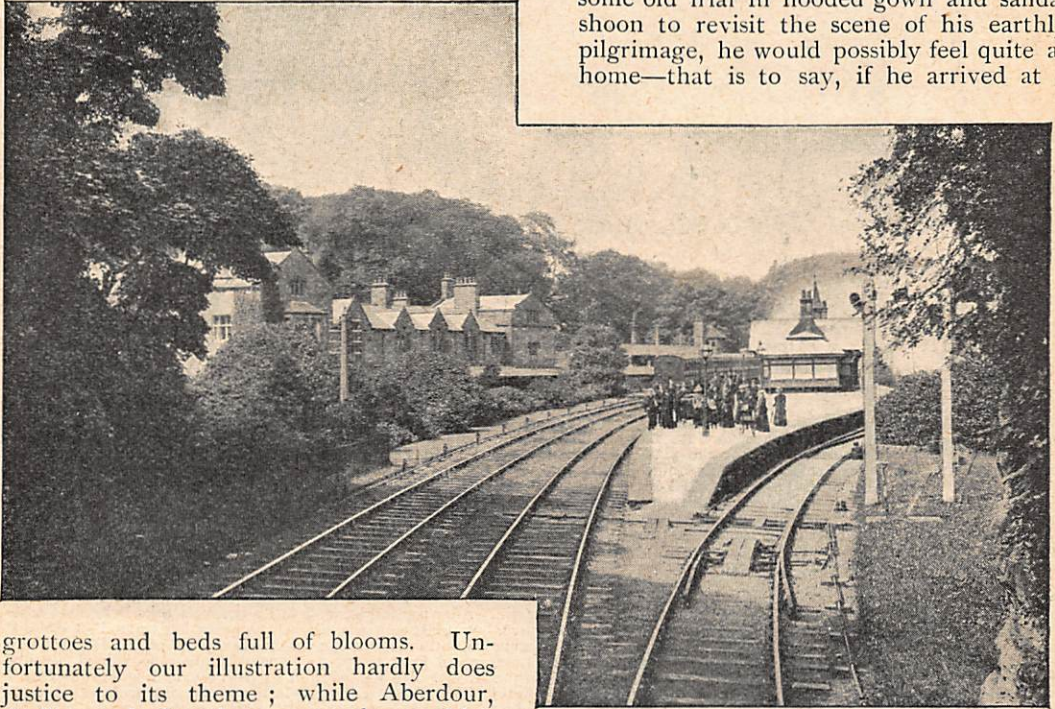
So you see the canny North-countryman is not easily daunted by disadvantages; he proceeds to win prizes in spite of them.

At Jordanhill, with a soil only one foot deep, the long platform of 500 feet is gay with

rooms respectively, and which is which hardly needs pointing out.

The Furness line can boast of a high percentage of artistic stations, of which we may mention Grange, Cark in Cartmell (within a mile of Holker, the Duke of Devonshire's place), Kent's Bank, and Barrow-in-Furness.

Of the last two we give illustrations. Kent's Bank, as will be seen, has the advantage of being situated amid scenes of great natural beauty, while the picturesque station at Furness Abbey is so admirably in keeping with its monastic surroundings that, were some old friar in hooded gown and sandal shoon to revisit the scene of his earthly pilgrimage, he would possibly feel quite at home—that is to say, if he arrived at a



FURNESS ABBEY STATION.

(Photo: A. Hollis, Barrow-in-Furness.)

grottoes and beds full of blooms. Unfortunately our illustration hardly does justice to its theme; while Aberdour, Ardlui, and Granthouse are places which show the master-hand of the energetic and practised gardener.

To leave the hardy but difficult North and to transport ourselves to the more fertile and breezy Eastern counties, we find Wolferton, the station for Sandringham, what we should expect to find it—a station fit for a king. Special attention has been given to the designing of the buildings; the flaunting poster is banished hence—it has not even a diminished head to hide—the elegant wrought-iron lamp-posts are surmounted by crowns, and the very time tables are framed and glazed.

Our readers will doubtless be interested in our pictures of the exterior of the royal waiting-lodge and the two rooms within. They are the King's and Queen's waiting-

quiet hour—though, if he happened to come along when a locomotive with train attached was thundering along the line, it is probable he would take to his heels in the full persuasion that the devil was after him.

And now, with just a mention of Bovey Tracey's beautiful station, of Symond's Yat, of Manton with its roses and renowned Ayrshire climber, of Eckington, also famed for roses and many another plant, we leave this pleasant subject with many thanks to those general managers who have so kindly answered our inquiries, and to the garden loving stationmasters of Great Britain.