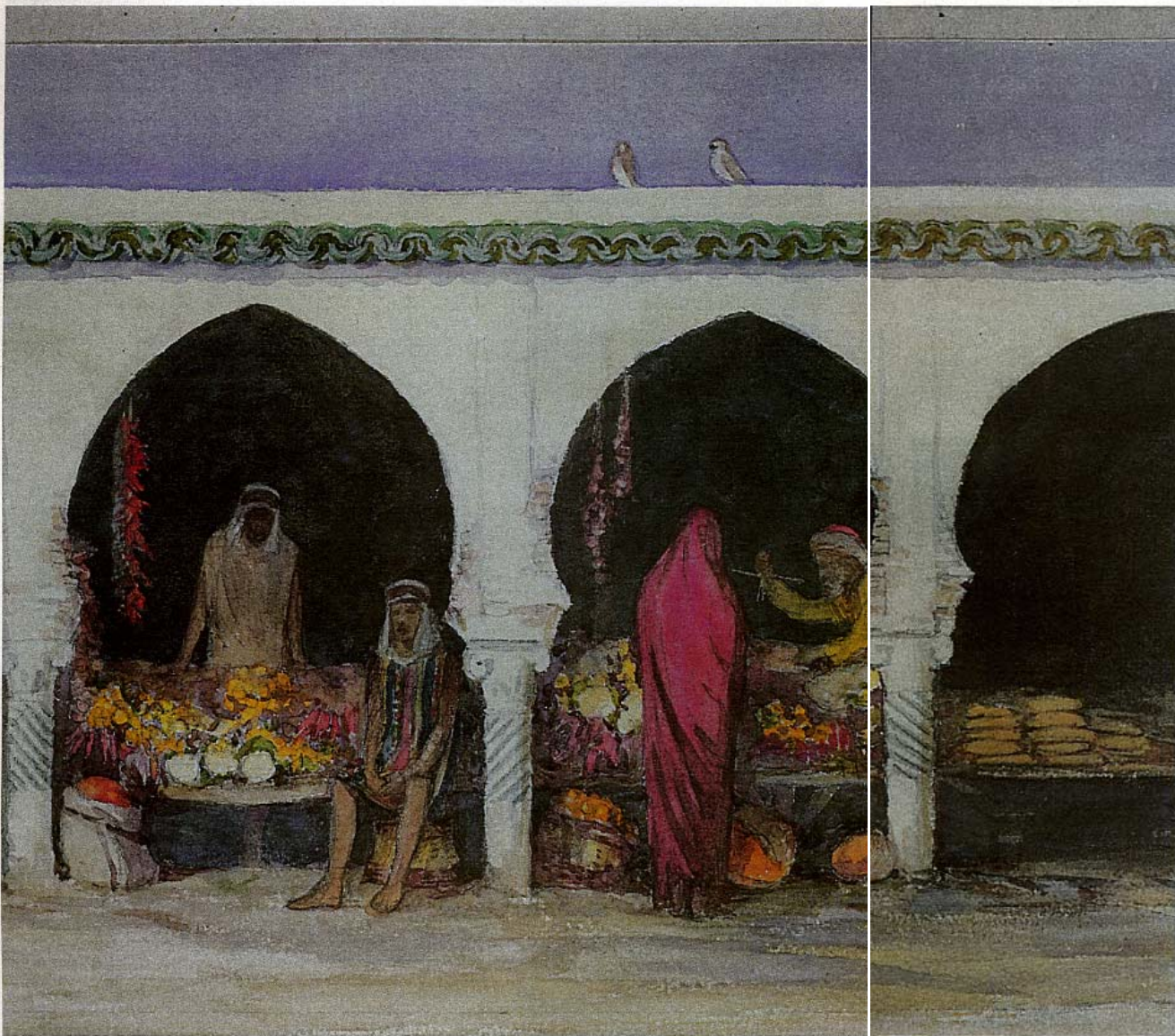


# WHERE *FLOWERS*

# BLOOM IN THE SANDS



Gertrude Jekyll's long-lost watercolours of her Mediterranean travels have recently come to light in a Surrey library. **JUDITH TANKARD** assesses this surprising side of the great gardener's life.

**L**ONG before she settled down to a quiet and purposeful life at Munstead Wood, Gertrude Jekyll was an intrepid, if not fearless, traveller in foreign lands. Voyages which took her in the late 1860s and early 1870s to Greece, Turkey and North Africa, as well as Italy and France, stimulated her well-known interests in exotic plants, landscapes and local customs. Because she was a young art student at the time, she invariably brought along sketchbooks and a paintbox (Fig 3), but few examples of her watercolours have survived from these travels. The recent discovery of two albums filled with watercolours painted during these voyages sheds new light on Miss Jekyll's artistic talents and formative design sensibilities.

Turning the leaves of these albums when he was writing his aunt's biography after her death in 1932, Francis Jekyll noted 'Arab cemeteries, chalk-white against the vivid blue of sky or mountains, courtyards

splashed with crimson sprays of *Bougainvillea* (Fig 6), ruins of Roman cities guarded by the sentinel spike of an *Asphodel*, the villa gardens with their riot of scarlet and orange, the changeless types of the Orient against a silhouette of flowering *Aloc* or *Prickly Pear*, the solemn outline of distant mountains against a sunset sky'.

This extraordinary collection of watercolours has been lying in the Surrey Local Studies Library in Guildford, undisturbed for years and long considered lost. The leather-bound albums, probably acquired after the Jekyll family's possessions were dispersed at auction in 1948 and then forgotten, contain dozens of the watercolour sketches so vividly described by Francis Jekyll. Dating from 1866 to 1874, they are all carefully labelled in Miss Jekyll's distinctive hand, but are unsigned. In addition to the Algerian, French and Italian scenes are numerous views of Surrey, such as Bramley House, where she lived as a child, and houses where she stayed on family holidays.

Miss Jekyll made her first lengthy trip abroad in 1863. Barely 20 years old, she

(Left) 1—Fruit shops, Blidah, from the newly discovered album of watercolours painted between 1866 and 1874. (Above) 2—Arab house in the country, with *Iris scorpioides*