The pollen which has been stolen from the wings of the bee by the sticky surface of the stigma begins to grow, and sends out a little tube. This makes its way through the surface of the stigma and soon reaches the hollow style. Down through this hollow grows the tube, and soon reaches what is really the nursery of young flowers, the ovary.

The ovary has a wall to protect it, but the pollen tube takes no notice of this. It pushes its way through the wall, for it is searching for something that the ovary contains. If it fails in its search it is doomed to die, so anxiously it continues its work till its mission is accomplished and it has found the ovule for which it is looking.

Inside the ovary are ridges, and on these ridges cluster the little green ovules. These are the forerunners of the seeds, but, unless they meet the pollen tube, like it they are doomed to die. But at the touch of this magic tube new life is born, and they swell and grow, to produce, when the time comes, other flowers like that which gave them birth.

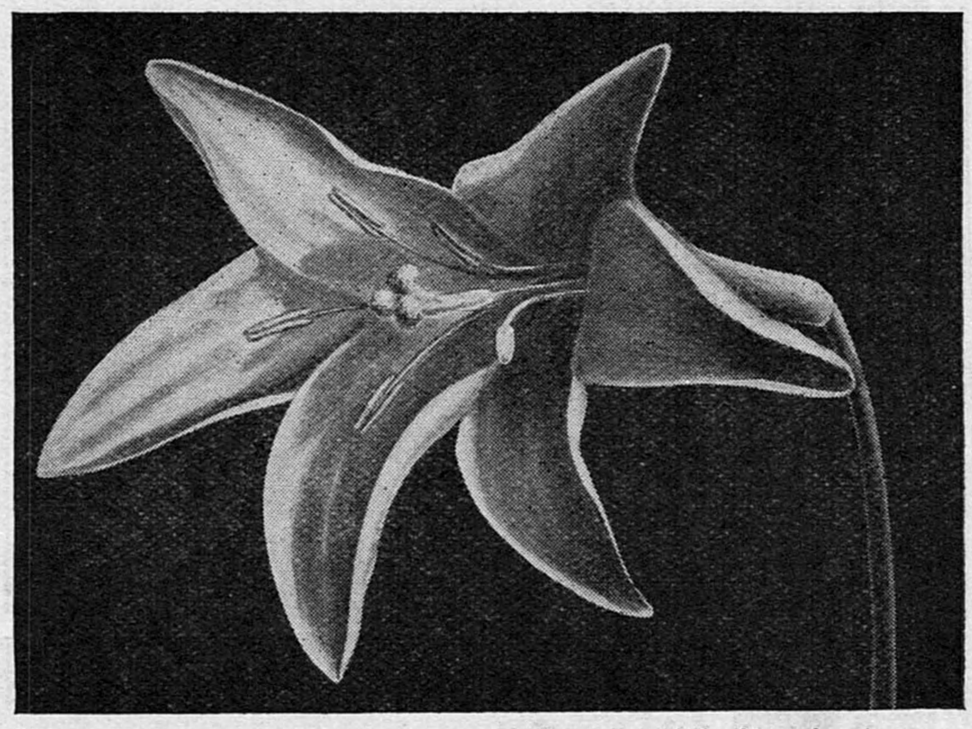
And now the petals of our flower fade and droop, and before long fall to the ground. We may then pluck it and say it is dead ; but we are wrong—it is more alive than it has ever been. It is merely that the beautiful colours have done their work, and so are no longer required. They have attracted the bee with its precious burden of pollen ; the miracle has happened, and within the tiny ovary the delicate ovules which have been reached by the pollen tubes are ripening into seeds.

If we pluck the flower when the petals wither it will indeed die, but if we leave it these seeds will grow and ripen, and at last will burst through the walls of their prison and fall to the ground.

They are like the seeds in the parable. Some may fall upon stony ground where there is no earth to feed them. In all sorts of ways they may be destroyed ; that is why Dame Nature so wisely arranges for each flower to produce many seeds. Some, however, find their way to rich earth, carried there by the wind, and in it they sleep quietly. But at last the spring comes once again, and with it the tiny seed wakes into life, and once more the whole wonderful process is gone through.

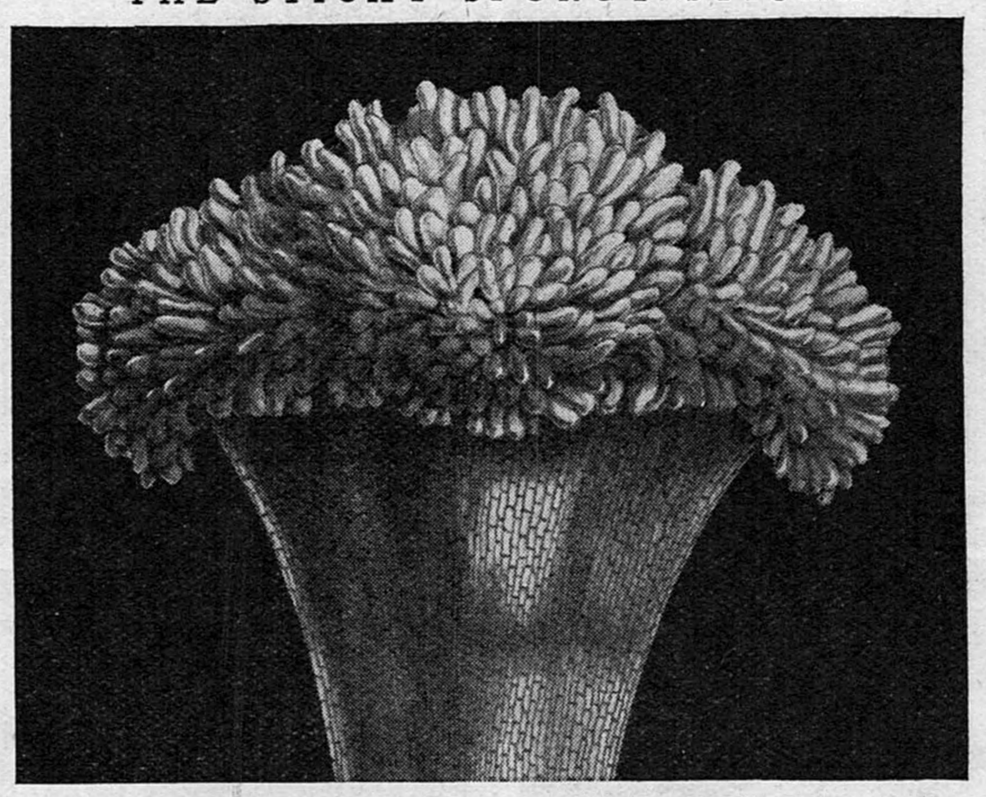
The splendid partnership of flowers and insects goes on, with the wind lending its help in this most wonderful work of Nature. Sometimes, too, as if envious of the beautiful blooms that this co-partnership scheme produces, nectar-carrying birds take a hand in the distribution of the pollen, and even snails are known to do a small but useful part in adding to the gay wardrobe of flowers.

THE BEAUTIFUL BERMUDA LILY



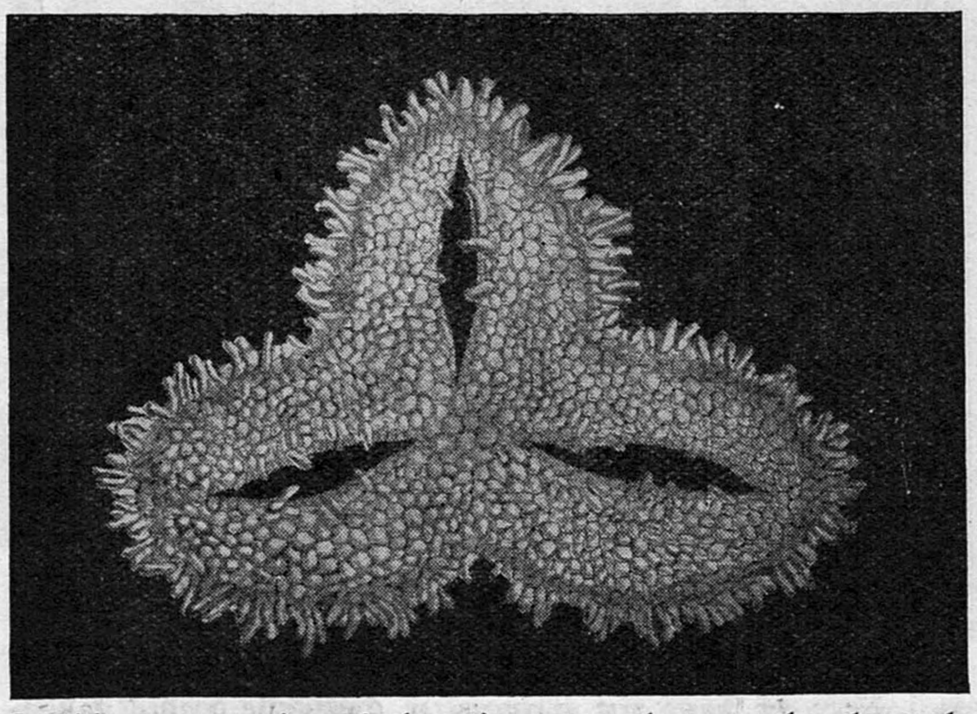
Here you see the fully-formed flower with its six leaves, three inside and three outside. The outside leaves are called sepals, and those inside petals.

THE STICKY SPONGY STIGMA



This picture shows the stigma, which catches the pollen grains, and the style, which holds it in a good position for gathering the grains.

A CROSS-SECTION OF THE STIGMA



In this cross-section of the stigma can be seen the channels through which the pollen grains send down their tubes with the material to make the ovules into fertile seed.

contained in the Easy Reference Fact-Index at the end of this work