

A HISTORY OF GARDENING IN ENGLAND

CHAPTER I.

“ Forsitan, et pingues hortos quæ cura colendi
 Ornaret, canerem,”
 VIRGIL, *Geor.*, iv. 118.

THE history of the Gardens of England follows step by step the history of the people. In times of peace and plenty they increased and flourished, and during years of war and disturbance they suffered. The various races that have predominated, and rulers that have governed this country influenced them in a marked degree. Therefore, as we trace their history, we must not lose sight of the people whose national characteristics or whose foreign alliances left a stamp upon the gardens they made.

Nothing worthy of the name of a garden existed in Britain before the Roman Conquest. The Britons, we know, revered the oak, and held the mistletoe sacred, and stained their bodies with woad,* but of any efforts they may have made for the cultivation of these or any other plants we know nothing. The history of Horticulture in this country cannot fairly be said to begin before the coming of the Romans. In this, as in other sciences, the Romans were so far advanced that it was centuries before they were surpassed, or even equalled by any other nation.

* Mr. Baker points out that woad is not wild in Britain.

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They cultivated most of the vegetables with which we are still familiar. At Rome, said Pliny the Elder, "The garden constituted of itself the poor man's field, and it was from the garden that the lower classes procured their daily food." The rich indulged in luxury and extravagance in the garden, and vegetables and fruits were raised at great cost for their use, which were not enjoyed by the community at large. But most of the vegetables which are still in general use were common to all classes, and many of these plants were brought by the Romans to this country. Some of them took so kindly to this soil, and were so firmly established, that they survived the downfall of the Roman civilization. A curious example of this is one species of stinging-nettle, which tradition says was introduced by the Romans as an esteemed pot-herb.

Tacitus, writing in the first century, says that the climate of Britain was suitable for the cultivation of all vegetables and fruits, except the olive and the vine. Before long, even the vine was grown, apparently with some success. It is generally believed that the Emperor Probus, about the year 280 A.D., encouraged the planting of vineyards in Britain. Pliny tells us that the cherry was brought in before the middle of the first century. Perhaps this was some improved variety, as this fruit is indigenous in this country.

We cannot suppose that the Roman gardens in Britain were as fine as those on the Continent. Gardens on such an elaborate scale as that at Pliny's Villa, or at the Imperial Villas near Rome, with their terraces, fountains, and statues, could scarcely have been made in this country. But the remains of Roman houses and villas which have been found in various places in England, so closely resemble those found in other parts of the Empire, that doubtless the gardens belonging to them were laid out as nearly as possible on the same lines as those of Italy and Gaul. The South of England could afford many a sheltered spot, where figs and mulberries, box and rosemary, would grow as well as at "Villa Laurentina," seventeen miles from Rome. A "terrace fragrant with the scent of violets," trailing vines and ivy; or enclosures of quaintly-cut trees in the forms of animals or letters filled with roses, would not there seem out of place. If the

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Roman gardens in Britain were like this—and why should it be doubted when we see the remains of villas, mosaic pavements, baths, roads, and bridges left by that nation?—it was fully a thousand years before anything as beautiful was again seen in our Island.

The fall of the Roman Empire, and the invasions of barbarians, struck a death-blow to gardening as well as to all other peaceful arts. During the stormy years which succeeded the Roman rule in Britain, nearly all knowledge of horticulture must have died out. Only such plants as were thoroughly naturalized and acclimatized would be strong enough to continue to grow when not properly cultivated.

The few Saxon names of plants which can be traced to the Latin seem to identify these hardy survivors, or at any rate show that the Anglo-Saxons were well acquainted with many of the Roman plant-names. The following list, given by Mr. Earle in *English Plant Names*, clearly shows their Latin origin:—

<i>Latin.</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon.</i>	<i>English.</i>
Amigdala	Magdula treow	Almond
Beta	Bete	Beet
Buxus	Box	Box
Cannabis	Hænep	Hemp
Caulis	Caul	Kale
Coliandrum	Celendre	Coriander
Chærophyllum	Cerfille	Chervil
Castanea	Cisten beam*	Chestnut
Cornus	Corn treow	Cornel
Crotalum	Hratele	Yellow rattle
Cuminum	Cymen	Cummin
Cerasus	Ciris beam*	Cherry
Febrifugia	Feferfuge	Feverfew
Ficus	Fic beam*	Fig
Feniculum	Finul	Fennel
Gladiolum	Glædene	Gladden
Lactuca	Lactuce	Lettuce
Laurus	Laur beam*	Laurel
Linum	Lin sæd	Linseed
Lilium	Lilige	Lily
Lubestica	Lufestice	Lovage
Malva	Mealwe	Mallow
Morus	Mor beam*	Mulberry

(* Beam = the living tree, as Ger. Baum.)

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<i>Latin.</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon.</i>	<i>English.</i>
Mentha	Minte	Mint
Napus	Naep	<i>Tur-nip</i>
Papaver	Popig	Poppy
Persica	Persoc treow	Peach
Petroselinum	Petersilie	Parsley
Pirus	Pirige	Pear
Porrum	Por leac	Leek
Prunus	Plum treow	Plum
Radix	Raedic	Radish
Rosa	Ro-sē	Rose
Ruta	Rude	Rue
Sinapi	Senap	Mustard
Unio	Yul leac	Onion
Ulmus	Ulm treow	Elm
Vinea	Win treow	Vine

It may be that some plants, such as the cherry, cabbage, lettuce, leek, onion, radish, rose, and parsley, continued in this country; although many species which were in cultivation in Britain, in Roman times, had to be re-introduced into England at a later date, having been entirely lost during the years of Teutonic invasion. On the Continent, the same state of things followed the dissolution of the Roman Empire, and horticulture only revived with the spread of Christianity and the establishment of monasteries after a lapse of centuries.

In this country the revival was due to the same cause, and in the early years of England's history undoubtedly the monks were better skilled in horticulture than any other class of the community. The lines in which their lives were cast tended to maintain this superiority. They were left quiet, and, to a great extent, undisturbed by wars; and when other property was destroyed and plundered, that of the monks was respected. Many of them were men of skill and intelligence, and they were able to learn, not only from books, but from their intercourse with the Continent, both what plants to grow and how to grow them.

The earliest records of gardens on the Continent (after Roman times) date from the ninth century. In the list of Manors of the Abbey of Saint Germain des Près, Saint Armand and Saint Remy, in the time of Karl the Great,

mention is made of various gardens.* At other places, as at Corbie, in Picardy, and at St. Gall, near the lake of Constance, there remains more than a mere mention of the existence of a garden. At Corbie the garden was very large; either divided into four, or else four distinct gardens, and ploughs, which had to be contributed annually by certain tenants, were used to keep it in order; while other tenants had to send men from April to October, to assist the monks in weeding and planting.† At St. Gall, the “hortus” is a rectangular enclosure, with central path leading from the gardener’s house and shed for tools and seeds situated at one end, with nine long and narrow beds of equal size on either side. The “herbularis,” or physic garden, is smaller, with a border of plants all round the wall, and four beds on either side of the central walk; and the plants contained in each of these beds are carefully noted.‡

In England we have not such an exact description of any garden, and it is only by carefully examining the records of the various monasteries that the existence of gardens or orchards in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and a few of even earlier date, can be proved.

A garden was a most essential adjunct to a monastery, as vegetables formed such a large proportion of the daily food of the inmates. Therefore, as soon as monasteries were founded, gardens must have been made around them, and these were probably almost the only gardens, worthy of the name, in the kingdom at that time. Still, the number of plants they contained was very limited, and probably many of those grown on the Continent had not found their way into this country. The monks may have received plants from abroad, as some connexion with religious houses on the Continent was kept up; and in bringing back treasures for their monasteries or churches the garden would not be forgotten. But plants were chiefly brought for medicine, and we may infer that they were imported in a dry state, as our word “drug” is simply part of the Anglo-Saxon verb “drigan,” to dry.

* *Polyptyque de l'Abbé Irminon*. Ed. by M. B. Guérard. Paris, 1844.

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Archæological Institute Journal*. Vol. V.

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Soon after monasteries had been established in this country, missionary monks set forth to convert their Teutonic kinsfolk on the Continent. It has been suggested by Mr. Earle that some of the German names of plants which resemble old English, are not cognates, but were derived from words used by the Saxon missionaries, who first brought with them the knowledge of the virtues of those plants.*

The old word for garden was "wyrτζerd," a plant yard, or "wyrттun," a plant enclosure. Also the form "ortჯerd" or "orceard," which is the same as our word orchard, though the meaning is now confined to an enclosure planted with fruit trees. "Wyrт" or "wurt" was used for any sort of vegetable or herb, and is the same as the modern word "wort," suffixed to so many names of plants, as "St. John's Wort," or "herb John." Sometimes a special plant filled most of the enclosure, thus the kitchen garden was occasionally called the "leac tun," or leek enclosure. We still speak of an appleyard, the old "appultun," or "appulჯerd," but we say a cherry orchard, while the old word was equally simply "cherryჯerd." † A part of the monastery garden was sometimes called the "cloysterჯerd," and the garden laid down in grass where flowers were not grown was the "grasჯerd."

At this early period, and for many centuries later, gardens were planted chiefly for their practical use, and vegetables and herbs were grown for physic or ordinary diet. Flowering plants were but rarely admitted solely on account of their beauty. But it does not necessarily follow that bright and pretty flowers found no place within the garden walls. Roses, lilies, violets, peonies, poppies, and such like, all had medicinal uses, and therefore would not be excluded.

The beauty of flowers appeals to nearly every one, and even in the most disorderly periods of our early history they may have exercised some softening influence. A pretty story is told of William Rufus, which shows that monarch, as it were for a

* The German for Plantago is "Wegbreit," the A. S. "Waegbræde." The old German for Camomile was "meghede," the A. S. "magede."

† Gardener's Accounts, Norwich Priory.

moment, in a more gentle light than perhaps any other incident during his turbulent reign. Eadgyth, or Matilda, afterwards the wife of Henry I., was being educated at the convent of Romsey, where her Aunt Christina was Abbess. When the child was twelve years old, the Red King wished to see her, and one day the Abbess was distressed to hear him and his knights demanding admission at the convent gate. The good lady, fearing some evil purpose towards the child, made her wear a nun's veil; then she opened to the king, who entered, "as if to look at the roses and other flowering herbs." While the rough king thus inspected her flowers, the Abbess made the nuns pass through the garden. Eadgyth appearing veiled among the rest the king suffered her to go by, and quietly took his leave.* The story was told by the Abbess to Anselm, who narrated it to Eadmer, in whose history this most picturesque scene is recorded.

While the Abbess Christina was adorning her cloister gardens with roses and flowering herbs, other monasteries were being beautified in like manner. The first Abbot of Ely, Brithnodus, was famed for his skill in planting and grafting, and improved the Abbey by making orchards and gardens around it.†

It seems as if there were gardens at Ely earlier than his time (twelfth century), as the following quaint story implies the existence of some sort of garden in the neighbourhood of Ely. It is related among various miracles wrought at the tomb of St. Etheldreda ‡ how the hand of a girl was cured. She was servant to a certain priest, and "was gathering herbs in the garden on the Lord's Day, when the wood which she held in her hand, and with which she desired to pluck the herbs unlawfully, so firmly adhered (to her hand) that no man could pluck it out for the space of five years, by the merits of St.

* Migne, *Patrologiæ cursus completus*, tom. 159-160, sec. xii. "Eadmer," p. 427. • Also D'Achery, *Spicilegium* (Paris, 1723), Vol. II., p. 893. Freeman, *Wm. Rufus*, Vol. II., p. 32.

"Rex siquidem propter inspiciendas rosas et alias florentes herbas, claustrum nostrum ingressus."

† Gale, *Historiæ Britannicæ*, 1691. "Hist. Elieusis," Liber II., chap. ii.

‡ Dugdale, *Monasticon*, Vol. I., p. 473 (new ed.).

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Etheldreda was cured." The Saint died in 679, and, although of no historical value, surely such a curious legend is worth relating

Few records of a very early date have come down to us, but monastic life did not quickly change, and probably the gardens of the fourteenth century differed little from those of the twelfth. To gain a fuller knowledge of these gardens, we must pass over two centuries to the time when written accounts begin. As we get into the fourteenth century there is more material on which to work. The outlines of the management of these gardens is clear, although the details can only be filled in by imagination.

Each department within the monastery was directed in a regular and orderly way, and was presided over by an officer, with set duties to perform; who had to keep the accounts of his office, and was responsible for its management. There was a Gardener, or Hortulanus or Gardinarius, or Garden Warder, just as much as there was an Almoner, Sacristan, Precentor, or any other officer.

In some instances the accounts of the Hortulanus have been preserved, and further references to gardening matters are scattered throughout various chartularies. Two very perfect series are those of Norwich Priory and Abingdon Abbey,* and they are doubtless fair examples of the Gardener's accounts in the majority of monasteries. There are four accounts at Abingdon, the earliest for the year 1369-70. The Norwich series is far more numerous, there being some thirty rolls, the earliest 1340, the last 1529; the first years of the fifteenth century being well represented.

These accounts show the receipts and expenses of the office, the cost of repairs, the money received from the few products sold, but they throw no light on the processes of cultivation, nor do they particularize the plants which were grown.

Like the other officers, or obedientiars, the Hortulanus had

* Those at Norwich are only in MS. Those at Abingdon are printed by Camden Soc., *Accounts of the Obedientiars of Abingdon Abbey*, R. E. G. Kirk, 1892.

his "famulus" to assist in the work, and was also allowed to employ labourers, and money was forthcoming for their payment from the rent of some small piece of land, or some tenements which belonged to the office. At Ramsey Abbey* there were two "famuli" in the garden, and their payment (circ. 1170 A.D.) was "to each of them fourteen loaves," and two acres of land.† But in spite of various small rents and money received from the surplus garden produce, or grain grown on the lands belonging to the garden office, the accounts do not always show a balance on the right side, and the receipts not infrequently failed to cover the expenses.

In early times the monks seem to have worked better, or at any rate managed more carefully, for the garden paid its expenses; but at Norwich as the years went on, the office got more and more into debt. In 1429 "the expenses exceed the receipts, £8. 2s. 8½d.;" in 1431 there is a deficit of £13. 16s. 8¾d. Then a new plan began, and the garden was let to a certain William Draper, who paid 40s. for the farm of it; ‡ this state of things continued to the end of the period covered by these accounts. The following are transcriptions of some of the rolls, the greater part are translated from the Latin but the words in quotation marks are spelt as they occur in the originals.

The earliest roll, A.D. 1340, is here given complete.

Account of brother Peter di Donewich of the garden in the 14th year of Dan William di Claxton Prior.

Receipts—

Remainder of preceeding account, 73s. 8d.

Of rent of assize that is to say from Adam Gilbirt now holding one shop in Nedle rowe, 18d.—of "fagot" branches and roots, 28s. 2½d.—of rods [of] "osiers," 13s. 4d.—of timber "Stamholt and wrong," 9s. 8d.—of hay, 36s. 10d.—of beans, 15d.—of herbs, 13d.—of garlick, 11d.—of

* *Cartularium Monasterii de Rameseia*, Wm. Hart. List of Monastic officers.

† At Durham monastery the payment was to "Robert Kyrvoir, ortulanus, per annum 5s.," together with a few other small payments amounting to about another 5s. (Surtees Society.)

‡ Examples of the entries:—

1471. Receipts "From the great garden demised to John Plomer for the term of 20 years this being the sixth, 25s."
 1487. "From Robert Castyr for the farm of the great garden, demised to him for the term of 10 years this being the second, 26s. 8d."

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apples & pears, 13s. 4½d.—of "Sandice" (*Sandal wood?*), 5s. 6d.—of eggs, 14s.—of "hempsede," 1d.—of wax, 9s. 7d.—of "forage," 2s.—of "lapp," 3s.

Sum of receipts, £8. 19s. 6d.

Of 1 cow, 3 bullocks, 27s.—of calves, 8s. 2d.—of milk, 65s. 9d.—of the farm of 1 cow demised to farm, 2s.—sum, 102s. 11d.

Sum of whole receipts, £17. 16s. 1¼d.

Expenses—

In the wages of servants, 13s.—in their stipends, 10s.—in the wages of the "garcionem," 14s. 11d.—in stipends, 2s.—also given to the same of favour, 20s.—given to a certain "pageto" by the year, 2s. 3d.

Pensions and Contributions—

In the O of the gardener, 26s. 8d.—in oblations of servants and certain men of the Court, by favour, 2s. 11d.—in alms, 2s. 2½d.—to the Scholars of Oxford, 2s.—to the Sub-Prior for the cloister, 2s.—to the cellarer for the cutting of herbs, 2s.—to the Almoner for the tithe of the garden, 12s.—in one tenth to the Lord the King, 1½d.—to the Cardinals, ¼d.—in oblations and "flaunis," 13d. (= *flaun* = *custards*, or *pancakes*, at *rogations*)—to the reapers of the Lord Prior, 6d.—to John de Leverington, 6d.—to the Carpenter of John de Berney, 6d.—to the "boscar" (= *woodman*) of the Lord Bishop, 6d.—in gloves, 7s.—sum, 60s. ¼d.

Mowings and other things—

In the mowing of the meadow for both crops and of the court and paths, 3s. 5d.—in peas for pottage of the convent and servants, 3s. 3d.—in mustard seed, 3s. 3d.—in beans, 2s. 2d.—also in beans and butter in the convent, 15d.—in cherries, 8½d.—in milk, 16d.—in forage, 12s. 11d.—sum, 28s. 3½d.

Weeding and Hiring—

In weeding and "aids," 30s. 2d.—in the stipend of Ralph Brenetour and others working upon the bank and cleaning the ditch in the meadow for 12 days, 8s.—taking by the day, 8d.—in their drinks and other expenses, 12d.—in the stipend for one carpenter carving timber and mending other divers things, 2s.—in one tiler roofing with tiles and doing other things, 3d.—sum, 41s. 5d.—in "Pikerell" and roach for stock, 2s. 5d.—in lard, tallow and candle, 8d.—in iron spades and fixing "bills," 3d.—in mending an "axes" and in one new "Hachet," 7d.—in "skalurons" (? *escallions* = *scalions*—*small onions*), 1d.—In dung, 3s. 3d.—in keys, 4½d.—in "Juncis" (= *rushes*) for the Infirmary, 10d.—in 2 "tribul" (= *sieves* or *rakes*), 2 spades, 2 dung forks, new ironed, 12d.—in 1 scythe, 1d.—in "moles," 1d.—in a wooden measure, 3½d.—in 2 "clayes" for the bank, 10d.—in the "dentation" of a scythe [handle], 1d.—in cord (or string), 1d.—in one earthen pot, 1d.—4350 tiles with carriage, 10s. 2d.—in pasture allowed from the Lord Bishop, that is to say "le hundhill," 2s. 2d.—in three "limours cenonette" (= *whitewashers*), 11d.—given to the "raton" (= *rat-catcher*), 1d.—in parchment, 1d.—Sum, 24s. 5d.—in boots of the gardener with repairs, 2s. 6d.—in wine sent to the Lord