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The innovative gardener and writer William Robinson (1838–1935), many of whose other works are reissued in this series, was sent by *The Times* as its horticultural correspondent to the Paris International Exposition of 1867. As a result of his visit, he produced two books, one on gardening trends in France, and this work of 1869 on the parks and gardens of Paris and its environs (including Versailles), and on the fruit and vegetable farming which fed the famous Parisian food markets such as Les Halles. Robinson admired especially the small planted open spaces, squares and courtyards in Paris, which had no equivalent in London, and which he claimed were 'saving [its inhabitants] from pestilential overcrowding, and making their city something besides a place for all to live out of who can afford it'. This highly illustrated work will interest not only historians of horticulture but also lovers of Paris.

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OF

PARIS

DESCRIBED AND CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO THE WANTS OF OUR OWN CITIES

AND OF

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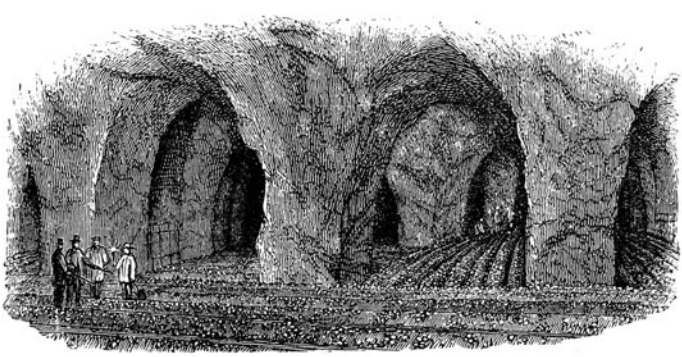
By W. ROBINSON, F.L.S.

CORRESPONDENT OF THE "TIMES" FOR THE HORTICULTURAL DEPARTMENT OF THE GREAT PARIS EXHIBITION.



MUSHROOM CULTURE IN SUBTERRANEAN QUARRIES.

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William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

THE CHAMPS ELYSEES AND THE GARDENS OF THE LOUVRE AND THE TUILERIES 1

CHAPTER II.

THE BOIS DE BOULOGNE AND THE BOIS DE VINCENNES 18
GARDEN OF ACCLIMATIZATION IN THE BOIS DE BOULOGNE 32
WATERING THE PARKS 37

CHAPTER III.

THE PARC MONCEAU 48

CHAPTER IV.

THE PARC DES BUTTES CHAUMONT 59

CHAPTER V.

THE JARDIN DES PLANTES AND THE GARDENS OF THE LUXEMBOURG 68

CHAPTER VI.

THE SQUARES, PLACES, CHURCH GARDENS, ETC. 82
THE SQUARE DES BATIGNOLLES 91
THE SQUARE DE MONTROUGE 95
THE SQUARE DU TEMPLE 96
THE SQUARE DES ARTS ET METIERS 98
THE PLACE ROYALE 99
THE SQUARE DES INNOCENTS 100
THE SQUARE DE LA CHAPELLE EXPIATOIRE DE LOUIS XVI. 100
THE SQUARE DE BELLEVILLE 100
THE SQUARE MONTHOLON 101
THE SQUARE LOUVOIS 101
THE SQUARE VINTIMILLE 103
CHURCH GARDENS AND CEMETERIES 104

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOULEVARDS 112
BATHING 136

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978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE
THE JARDIN FLEURISTE AND OTHER PUBLIC NURSERIES OF THE CITY OF PARIS 139
THE PUBLIC NURSERIES FOR TREES, SHRUBS, AND HARDY FLOWERS . 155

CHAPTER IX.

TREES FOR CITY PARKS, AVENUES, GARDENS, STREETS, ETC. . . . 159
A SELECTION OF THE BEST TREES AND SHRUBS FOR CITIES . . . 165

CHAPTER X.

SUBTROPICAL PLANTS FOR THE FLOWER GARDEN 182
A SELECT LIST OF 100 OF THE SUBTROPICAL PLANTS BEST SUITED FOR USE IN OUR CLIMATE 208
LIST OF THE BEST TWENTY-FOUR SUBTROPICAL PLANTS 208
SUBTROPICAL PLANTS THAT MAY BE RAISED FROM SEED. 209

CHAPTER XI.

HARDY PLANTS FOR THE SUBTROPICAL GARDEN 210
LIST OF HARDY HERBACEOUS AND ANNUAL PLANTS, ETC., OF FINE HABIT, WORTHY OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE FLOWER GARDEN OR PLEASURE GROUND. 237
LIST OF HARDY PLANTS OF FINE HABIT, THAT MAY BE RAISED FROM SEED 238

CHAPTER XII.

VERSAILLES 239
FONTAINEBLEAU, AND THE GLADIOLUS GROUNDS OF M. SOUCHET . . 251
THE GARDENS OF ST. CLOUD 259
MEUDON 260

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PLANT DECORATION OF APARTMENTS 262
REFORM IN THE CONSERVATORY 280
PALMS 296
THE IVY AND ITS USES IN PARISIAN GARDENS 305

CHAPTER XIV.

FRUIT CULTURE: HOW ARE WE TO IMPROVE? 312

CHAPTER XV.

THE CORDON SYSTEM OF FRUIT GROWING 334
THE PARADISE, DOUCIN, AND CRAB STOCKS 355
THE PEAR AS A CORDON 359
THE PEACH AS A CORDON. 366
THE SHORT PINCHING SYSTEM APPLIED TO THE PEACH 369

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Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

CHAPTER XVI.

PAGE
TRAINING 373
THE PALMETTE VERRIER 373
PYRAMIDAL TRAINING OF THE PEAR TREE 378

CHAPTER XVII.

FIG CULTURE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF PARIS 395
PRESERVING GRAPES THROUGH THE WINTER WITHOUT LETTING THEM HANG ON THE VINES 405
THE CULTURE OF THE VINE AT THOMERY 412

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE IMPERIAL FRUIT AND FORCING GARDENS AT VERSAILLES . . . 424
THE NEW FRUIT GARDEN OF THE CITY OF PARIS IN THE BOIS DE VINCENNES 433

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PEACH GARDENS OF MONTREUIL 440

CHAPTER XX.

THE MARKET GARDENS OF PARIS 462

CHAPTER XXI.

MUSHROOM CULTURE 472
„ „ IN CELLARS AND IN THE OPEN AIR 484

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CULTURE OF SALADS 489

CHAPTER XXIII.

ASPARAGUS CULTURE 501
PREPARATION OF THE GROUND 506

CHAPTER XXIV.

OBSERVATIONS ON SOME OF THE VEGETABLES OF THE PARIS MARKET . 515
CULTURE OF THE SMALL CARROT 520
THE CARDOON 522
FORCING THE CAULIFLOWER 524
THE SWEET POTATO 525
EARLY POTATOES 527
OLEANDER CULTURE 528
CULTURE OF THE ORANGE 531
SHOWING ROSES IN FRANCE 535
FORCING THE WHITE LILAC 537

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CAMBRIDGE

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978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

CHAPTER XXV.

PAGE
FLOWER, FRUIT, AND VEGETABLE MARKETS 539
LIST OF PLACES IN WHICH THE MORE INSTRUCTIVE FEATURES OF PRACTICAL HORTICULTURE MAY BE SEEN 545
THE CLIMATES OF PARIS AND LONDON COMPARED 548

CHAPTER XXVI.

HORTICULTURAL MACHINES, IMPLEMENTS, APPLIANCES, ETC. . . . 551
TRANSPLANTING LARGE TREES 551
CARRIAGE FOR TRANSPORTING ORANGE TREES 561
TRUCK FOR TUBS OR VERY LARGE POTS 562
TUBS FOR ORANGE TREES, ETC. 563
GARDEN CHAIRS AND SEATS 563
GRAFTING MASTIC 565
IMPROVED FRUIT SHELVES 566
DRYING FRUIT ROOMS 566
THE PANIER 567
PLOUGH-HOE 568
THE BINETTE 568
FRAMES FOR FORCING 568
MATS FOR COVERING PITS AND FRAMES 569
THE NUMEROTEUR 572
THE SECATEUR 574
THE RAIDISSEUR 576
MATERIAL FOR TYING PLANTS 579
PROTECTION FOR WALL AND ESPALIER TREES 582
SHADING FOR CONSERVATORIES 586
ATTACHING WIRE TO GARDEN-WALLS, TRELLISING, ETC. 587
EDGINGS FOR PARKS, PUBLIC GARDENS, SQUARES, DRIVES, ETC. . . 593
THE CLOCHE 596

CHAPTER XXVII.

NOTES OF A HORTICULTURAL TOUR THROUGH PARTS OF FRANCE . . . 600
LYONS 600
L'ECOLE REGIONALE DE LA SAULSAIE 604
DIJON 609
ANGERS 610
NANTES 613
ROUEN 614
TROYES 619
BOURG-LA-REINE 623
SCEAUX 628
CHATILLON, FONTENAY AUX ROSES 628
SUISNES 628
BRUNOY 633

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978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

FIG.		PAGE
1.	Evening concert in the Champs Elysées	6
2.	Circus in the gardens of the Champs Elysées	7
3.	Avenues radiating from the Place de l'Étoile	8
4.	L'Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel	9
5.	Plan of small gardens in the Place Napoleon III.	10
6.	Statue of Winter in the Tuileries gardens	12
7.	The Rhone and the Saone in the Tuileries gardens	14
8.	Group in the Tuileries gardens	15
9.	One of the small lakes in the Bois de Boulogne	19
10.	Grand Cascade in the Bois de Boulogne	20
11.	Winter scene on the lake in the Bois de Boulogne	21
12.	Cisterns for receiving heavy rains from the drives of the Bois de Boulogne	30
13.	Ostriches in the Jardin d'Acclimatation	32
14.	Streamlet in the Jardin d'Acclimatation	33
15.	Conservatory in the Jardin d'Acclimatation	34
16.	Restaurant in the Bois de Vincennes	35
17.	Section of perforated self-acting hose on wheels	39
18.	Hose on wheels with double row of perforations	39
19.	Hose on wheels for watering roads, etc.	41
20.	Details of the preceding figure	42
21.	Hose allowed to play on the grass, etc.	46
22.	Plants isolated on the grass	52
23.	Plants isolated on the grass	53
24.	" " "	54
25.	Plan of garden	64
26.	Conservatories and Museums in the Jardin des Plantes	68
27.	Aquatic birds in the Jardin des Plantes	69
28.	Animals in the Jardin des Plantes	69
29.	Cedar planted by Jussieu in the Jardin des Plantes	70
30.	Plan of the Jardin des Plantes	71
31.	The Amphitheatre in the Jardin des Plantes	76
32.	Plan of the Luxembourg garden as recently altered	78
33.	Portion of the plan of a Parisian square	82
34.	Portion of the plan of a Parisian square	91
35.	The Square des Batignolles	93
36.	The Square du Temple	97
37.	Children at play in the Square des Arts et Métiers	98
38.	The Place Royale	99
39.	Square and Fountain Louvois	101
40.	View in the garden of the Palais des Thermes	102
41.	The Square and Church of St. Clothilde	105
42.	The Cemetery Montmartre	109
43.	The Catacombs	110
44.	Paris seven hundred years ago	118
45.	View on the old exterior Boulevards	119
46.	Avenue Victoria, near the Hôtel de Ville	121
47.	End view of the Boulevard Richard Lenoir	122
48.	Place du Trône	123

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978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

FIG.		PAGE
49.	Avenue de Breteuil: the artesian well of Grenelle, and the Invalides	125
50.	Interior of a floating bath on the Seine	136
51.	Glass-covered corridor between the plant-houses in the Jardin Fleuriste	143
52.	Plan of glass-houses in the Jardin Fleuriste	144
53.	Propagating house in the Jardin Fleuriste	145
54.	Propagating pot used in the Jardin Fleuriste	146
55.	Small cutting-pots under bell-glass in the Jardin Fleuriste	146
56.	Shelves for storing bedding plants in the Jardin Fleuriste	147
57.	End view of bedding-plant houses in the Jardin Fleuriste	149
58.	Plan of the bedding-plant houses in the Jardin Fleuriste	150
59.	Caves under the Jardin Fleuriste	152
60.	Sophora japonica var. pendula	163
61.	Variegated Agave	186
62.	Aralia papyrifera	187
63.	Asplenium nidus-avis	189
64.	Caladium esculentum	190
65.	Colocasia odorata	191
66.	Canna nigricans	192
67.	Canna atro-nigricans	193
68.	Ficus elastica	196
69.	Monstera deliciosa	197
70.	Nicotiana wigandioides	199
71.	Polymnia grandis	200
72.	Solanum Warscewiczii	203
73.	Solanum robustum	204
74.	Uhdea bipinnatifida	205
75.	Wigandia macrophylla	207
76.	Acanthus latifolius	211
77.	Aralia Sieboldi	213
78.	Bambusa aurea	216
79.	Centaurea babylonica	218
80.	Chamærops excelsa	219
81.	Ferula communis	222
82.	Gynerium argenteum	224
83.	Heracleum flavescens	226
84.	Melianthus major	227
85.	Nicotiana macrophylla	228
86.	Rheum Emodi	230
87.	Anemone japonica alba	233
88.	Yucca pendula	235
89.	Yucca filamentosa variegata	236
90.	Statice latifolia	236
91.	The Tapis Vert, Versailles	246
92.	One of the statues on the upper terrace	248
93.	Temple de l'Amour in the gardens of the Petit Trianon	249
94.	View in the garden of the Petit Trianon	250
95.	Canal in the gardens of Fontainebleau	251
96.	View in the Forest of Fontainebleau	252
97.	The Courtelière	254
98.	The Ver blanc	255
99.	A French ideal of tree-beauty	259
100.	Meudon	260
101.	Maranta fasciata	263
102.	Dracæna terminalis	264
103.	Gymnostachyum Verschaffelti	265
104.	Dieffenbachia seguina maculata	266
105.	Alocasia metallica	267
106.	Æchmea fulgens	268
107.	Caladium argyrites	269
108.	Caladium mirabile	270
109.	Pteris cretica albo-lineata	271
110.	Begonia dædalia	272
111.	Maranta rosea-picta	273
112.	Dieffenbachia Baraquiniana	274
113.	Gesnera cinnabarina	275
114.	Saxifraga Fortunei variegata	276
115.	Maranta vittata	277
116.	Tillandsia splendens	278
117.	Maranta zebrina	279
118.	Pandanus javanicus variegatus	279
119.	Cordyline indivisa	281
120.	Tree Fern for conservatory	282
121.	Polypodium morbillosum	283
122.	Blechnum brasiliense	284
123.	Theophrasta macrophylla	285
124.	Cycas circinalis	287
125.	Asophila	289
126.	Goniophlebium	290
127.	Testudinaria elephantipes	291
128.	Maranta micans	292
129.	Caladium	293
130.	Ananassa sativa variegata	295
131.	Chamædorea latifolia	297
132.	Seaforthia elegans	299
133.	Caryota sobolifera	302
134.	Railings covered with Ivy	306
135.	Ivy edgings in geometrical garden	307
136.	Section of circular bower of Irish Ivy	308

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
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William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

FIG. PAGE
137. Variegated Ivy in suspension basket 309
138. Ivy screen for the drawing-room 310
139. Young line of self-supporting Pear Trees. 333
140. The Apple trained as a Simple Horizontal Cordon 334
141. Tree with horizontal branches 335
142. The Simple Horizontal Cordon 336
143. The Cordon on wall of plant-house 337
144. Young Cordon of the Lady Apple 338
145. The Bilateral Cordon . . 339
146. Reinette du Canada trained as a Cordon 340
147. Edging of simple Cordons . 341
148. Grafting by approach to unite the points of horizontal Cordons 342
149. Another mode of grafting to unite the Cordons . . . 343
150. The horizontal Cordon trained as an edging 344
151. Border in front of fruit wall with two lines of horizontal Cordons 353
152. Peach wall and border with five lines of Cordons . . 353
153. Double espalier of Pears with three lines of Cordon Apples on each side . . 353
154. Simple wooden support for Cordon. 354
155. Iron support for Cordon with ratchet wheel at top . 354
156. Iron support for Cordon let into stone 354
157. Pear Tree trained as a vertical Cordon 359
158. The Pear as a simple oblique Cordon, 1st year . . . 360
159. Oblique Cordon Pear, 2nd year 360
160. Oblique Cordon Pear, 3rd year 361
161. Oblique Cordon Pear, 4th year 362
162. The Pear as an oblique Cordon 363
163. Pear tree trained in U form 364
164. The spiral Cordon against walls 365
165. The spiral Cordon . . . 366
166. Peach tree trained as an oblique Cordon, 1st year . . 367
167. Peach tree trained as an oblique Cordon, 2nd year . 367
168. Peach tree with three branches, a different variety grafted on each . . 369
169. Peach shoot of the current year bearing a number of secondary shoots . . . 370
170. Portion of shoot of Peach tree 371
171. Result of pinching the stipulary leaves 372
172. The Palmette Verrier, 2nd pruning 375
173. The Palmette Verrier, 3rd pruning 375
174. The Palmette Verrier, 4th pruning 375
175. The Palmette Verrier, 5th pruning 376
176. Palmette Verrier with weakly outer branch completed by grafting . . . 377
177. Pyramidal Pear tree . . . 379
178. Pyramidal Pear tree, first pruning 380
179. Top of young Pear tree . . 380
180. Pyramidal Pear tree, second pruning 381
181. Leading shoot of Pear tree . 381
182. Old leading shoot barked and used as a stake . . . 382
183. Pruning to obtain properly placed leading shoot . . 382
184. Incisions made to regulate shoots 382
185. Pyramidal Pear tree, third pruning 383
186. Grafting by approach, to cover bare spaces on pyramidal trees 384
187. Grafting by approach as applied to wall and Espalier trees 384
188. Pyramidal Pear tree, fourth pruning 385
189. Pyramidal Pear tree, fifth pruning 386
190. Figure theoretically indicating the mode of forming a pyramidal Pear tree 387
191. Young pyramidal Pear tree 387
192. Pyramidal Pear tree with bent branches 388
193. Pyramidal Pear tree, regrafted 389
194. Wall Pear tree regrafted . 390
195. Pear tree trained in the columnar form 391

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

FIG.		PAGE
196.	Pendulous training of wall Pear tree	392
197.	Grafting of fruit buds and shoots	393
198.	Grafting of fruit buds and shoots	393
199.	Grafting of fruit buds and shoots	393
200.	Grafting of fruit buds and shoots	393
201.	Grafting of fruit buds and shoots	393
202.	Proper mode of cutting shoot	394
203.	Shoot cut too long	394
204.	Shoot cut too low	394
205.	Pear shoot properly pinched	394
206.	Pear shoot pinched too short	394
207.	Result of over-pinching	394
208.	Another result of over-pinching	394
209.	Pinching of the bourgeon anticipé	394
210.	Stipulary buds forced to start	394
211.	Branch of Fig tree	396
212.	Fig tree growing on level ground	397
213.	Section showing Fig tree growing on level ground	398
214.	Mode of burying Fig trees cultivated on level ground	399
215.	Fig tree planted on sloping ground	400
216.	Section showing Fig tree planted on inclined ground	401
217.	Fig tree planted on sloping ground, buried for the winter months	401
218.	Stem of Fig the sixth year after planting	402
219.	Fig branch with young fruit	402
220.	Branch of Fig tree after the gathering of the crop	403
221.	Branch of Fig tree after the gathering of the crop	404
222.	Thomery mode of fixing bottles for preserving Grapes through winter	407
223.	Ferrières mode of fixing bottles for preserving Grapes through winter	407
224.	Portion of upright used in Grape-room at Ferrières	407
225.	Interior of Grape-room	409
226.	Wall of Chasselas at Thomery	413
227.	Rose-Charmeux's system of vertical training	414
228.	Vines trained vertically with alternated spurs	414
229.	Low double Espalier	415
230.	Sections of top of wall at Thomery	415
231.	Sulphur distributor employed at Thomery	416
232.	Pruning to obtain the two arms of the Cordon	416
233.	Low Espalier of Vines trained vertically	417
234.	Layer of Vine raised and planted in basket	417
235.	Moveable scaffold used for thinning the Grapes	418
236.	Shade to protect Grape-thinners from strong sun	419
237.	Frame for carrying baskets of Grapes to store-rooms	419
238.	Mode of Grafting the Vine at Thomery	420
239.	Mode of Grafting the Vine by approach at Thomery	420
240.	Gouge used in grafting the Vine	420
241.	Small pit used for forcing the Vine	421
242.	Small span-roofed house for forcing the Vine	422
243.	Trellis for Pear trees	427
244.	Double trellis for Pear trees	429
245.	Section of protection used for Espalier trees at Versailles	431
246.	Side view of protection to double line of Espaliers	431
247.	Border of superimposed Cordons at Versailles	432
248.	Section of preceding	433
249.	Plan of fruit garden	434
250.	Galvanized iron bracket for supporting temporary coping	436
251.	Fruit tree in the vase form	437
252.	Pear trained in vase form	438
253.	Early spring aspect of Peach wall in the garden of M. Chevallier	441
254.	Leaf of Peach tree attacked by the Cloque	442
255.	Peach shoot attacked by the Cloque	442
256.	Small wooden coping to protect young Peach trees in spring	443
257.	Second pruning of fruiting Peach branch	444
258.	Mode of shading the stems of fruit trees	445

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

FIG.		PAGE
259.	Fruiting branch of Peach submitted to the third year's pruning	446
260.	Pruning to replace old fruit-spur	447
261.	Result of preceding operation	447
262.	The Napoleon Peach tree	448
263.	Peach trees trained to form their owner's name	449
264.	Spring aspect of fruit garden formed by M. Lepère	451
265.	Mode of pruning to cover bare spaces on the branches of Peach trees, 1st year	452
266.	Result of preceding operation, 2nd year	452
267.	Summer management of the Peach	453
268.	Shoot of Peach	453
269.	Peach tree trained horizontally	454
270.	Disbudding of the Peach, second year	455
271.	Disbudding of the Peach, second year	455
272.	Grafting by approach to furnish bare spaces on branches of the Peach tree	456
273.	Multiple grafting by approach to furnish bare spaces on the stems of Peach trees	457
274.	Details of Figs. 272 and 273	458
275.	Nail basket	458
276.	Peach trained in the double U form	459
277.	Peach trained in the double U form	460
278.	Pump used in the market gardens of Paris	463
279.	Water pot used by the market gardeners of Paris	464
280.	Mouth of Mushroom Cave at Montrouge	473
281.	View in Mushroom Cave	475
282.	Entrance to subterranean quarry	478
283.	Plan of large subterranean quarry	479
284.	Section following the line C D in preceding figure	480
285.	Extracting the stone in subterranean quarries	482
286.	View in old subterranean quarries devoted to Mushroom culture	483
287.	Newly made Mushroom beds	484
288.	Mushroom bed on shelf against wall of cellar	485
289.	Pyramidal Mushroom bed on floor of cellar	485
290.	Mushrooms grown in bottom of old cask	486
291.	Four plants of the Lettuce Petite Noire under the Cloche	490
292.	Sloping bed for three rows of Cloches	491
293.	Diagram showing the different stages of Lettuce culture under the Cloche	493
294.	Figure showing annual earthings given to Asparagus	503
295.	Figure showing mode of planting Asparagus	507
296.	Common mode of forming an Asparagus plantation	508
297.	Preparation for forcing Asparagus	513
298.	Mode of tying-up the Cardoon for blanching	523
299.	Early Potatoes arranged for "sprouting" indoors	527
300.	The flower market at the Madeleine	543
301.	Tree-lifting machine: side elevation	552
302.	Plan of tree-lifting machine	553
303.	Tree-lifting machine: back view	554
304.	Tree-lifting machine: front view	555
305.	Trunk of large tree recently planted enveloped in moss and canvas	557
306.	Small machine for lifting specimen shrubs and Conifers	559
307.	Screw used in preparing specimens for removal as shown in preceding figure	560
308.	Bar of carriage for transporting Orange trees	561
309.	Carriage for transporting Orange trees	562
310.	Truck for moving plants	562
311.	Tub for Orange trees	563
312.	Garden chair	563
313.	Seat with box for climbing plants	564
314.	Seat with tent-like shade	564
315.	Portion of Pear stand at Ferrières	566
316.	Upright for Pear stands	566
317.	Position of fruit on Pear stand	566

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

FIG.		PAGE
318.	Arrangement for using chloride of calcium	567
319.	Panier	567
320.	The plough hoe	568
321.	The Binette	568
322.	Narrow frames used by the market gardeners of Paris	569
323.	Frame for making straw mats	570
324.	Frame covered with neat straw mat	571
325.	The Numéroteur	573
326.	The Sécateur Vauthier	575
327.	The Sécateur Lecointe	576
328.	The common Sécateur	576
329.	The Raidisseur	577
330.	Key of Raidisseur	577
331.	Collignon's Raidisseur	577
332.	Side view of preceding	578
333.	Raidisseur used in the garden of the Exhibition	578
334.	The simplest and best form of Raidisseur	579
335.	Sparganium ramosum	581
336.	Mode of protecting walls	582
337.	,, ,, ,,	583
338.	Double Espalier	584
339.	Wall protected with wide temporary coping and canvas curtains	585
340.	Mode of fixing iron support	586
341.	Lath shade for Conservatory	586
342.	,, ,,	587
343.	,, ,,	588
344.	Mode of arranging wires on walls	588
345.	Wall with galvanized wires	589
346.	Galvanized wire on walls for training Cordons	590
347.	Wall wired for Cordon training	591
348.	Trellis for young trees in nurseries	592
349.	Edgings for parks and public gardens	594
350.	Edgings for parks and public gardens	595
351.	Edgings for parks and public gardens	595
352.	The Cloche	596
353.	,,	597
354.	,,	597
355.	The Cloche in the propagating house	598
356.	Winged Pear tree	617
357.	Plan of preceding figure	618
358.	Name formed by Pear trees	621
359.	Pear induced to emit its own roots	622
360.	Result of preceding operation	622
361.	Plan of fruit garden	626
362.	Pear tree shown at the Exhibition	627
363.	Walk arched over with fruit trees	628
364.	Simple mode of supporting Espalier tree	629
365.	Details of the preceding	629
366.	,, ,,	629
367.	View in fruit garden	630
368.	Plan of Espalier	630
369.	Monogram formed by fruit trees	631
370.	Self-supporting Espaliers	632
371.	,, ,,	633
372.	,, ,,	633
373.	Pear tree from Espalier trained to form the name Nallet	634
374.	Pear tree in crinoline form	635
375.	,, ,,	636
376.	Plan of preceding	636

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

LIST OF PLATES.

FIG.		PAGE
1.	The Place de la Concorde	2
2.	The Avenue des Champs Elysées	4
3.	Scene in the Champs Elysées	6
4.	The Champs Elysées near the Palais de l'Industrie	8
5.	The Place du Carrousel	10
6.	The Gardens of the Tuileries	14
7.	Island and Restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne	26
8.	Cascades in the Bois de Boulogne	22
9.	Lake and islands in the Bois de Boulogne	18
10.	Stream and rocks near Longchamps	24
11.	View in the Bois de Vincennes	35
12.	Mode of watering the grass in the parks	40
13.	,, ,, roads, drives, &c.	44
14.	The Parc Monceau	50
15.	Fine-leaved plants in the Parc Monceau	56
16.	Lake and cliffs in the Parc des Buttes Chaumont	60
17.	Bird's-eye View in the Parc des Buttes Chaumont	62
18.	The Gardens and Palace of the Luxembourg	76
19.	Woodwardias in the Conservatories of the Luxembourg Garden	81
20.	View of the Square and Tour St. Jacques	82
21.	The Square and Tour St. Jacques	84
22.	,, ,, Fountain des Innocents	86
23.	View of the Palais des Thermes from the garden	103
24.	Church of the Trinity, with garden and fountain in front	106
25.	The Gardens of the Palais Royal	88
26.	The Cemetery of Père La Chaise	108
27.	The Place du Châtelet	116
28.	View on the Boulevards near the Château d'Eau	114
29.	The Boulevard du Temple	120
30.	,, ,, Montmartre	124
31.	,, ,, St. Michel	126
32.	The Louvre, Institut, and Quais	137
33.	Bambusa falcata	215
34.	The Palace and Gardens of Versailles	239
35.	View from the Tapis Vert	240
36.	Fountains of the basin of Neptune	242
37.	La Toilette d'Apollon	244

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-07596-1 - The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris: Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of Our Own Cities
William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

FIG.		PAGE
38.	The Colonnade at Versailles	247
39.	View in the Gardens of the Petit Trianon	250
40.	The Parterre at Fontainebleau	353
41.	View from the Parterre at Fontainebleau	254
42.	Gardens and Palace of St. Cloud	259
43.	The Peach trained as an oblique cordon	368
44.	Pear tree trained as a Palmette Verrier	374
45.	View in Mushroom Caves under Montrouge	477
46.	The Halles Centrales	540
47.	Interior of the Halles Centrales	542
48.	The Place St. Sulpice	544

MAPS :—

	Bois de Boulogne	28
	,, Vincennes	36
	Versailles et les Trianons	248

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

In Preparation, and will be Published during the present Year,

ALPINE PLANTS.

THIS book will contain an explanation of the principles on which the exquisite flora of Alpine countries may be grown in all parts of the British Islands; illustrations of properly formed rockwork for these plants, with sections showing the wrong as well as the right modes of constructing it; views of the natural homes of the plants, illustrating the Author's tour in the Alps, and a description, devoid of all technicalities, of a choice selection of the more beautiful and interesting kinds, and their successful cultivation.

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William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

INTRODUCTION.

"And let it appeare that he doth not change his Country Manners for those of Forraigne Parts: But only prick in some Flowers of that he hath Learned abroad into the Customes of his own country."

BACON'S *Essay on Travel.*

THE success met with by my little book on French horticulture led me to hope that a work describing the progress of our neighbours in city improvements, and giving a detailed account of the production of the more important fruits and vegetables for the Paris market, might prove useful. Hence the present volume. In my "Gleanings from French Gardens," the question of public gardening was scarcely alluded to; in this book nearly one half is devoted to parks, wide tree-planted roads, public gardens, squares, and similar means of rendering great, ugly, gloomy, filthy human hives fitter dwelling-places for vast hosts of men. A belief that London may, without great sacrifice on our part, be made the noblest city in the world—as fair and clean as wide-spreading and wealthy—and the knowledge that the system of public gardening now pursued by us is not the one calculated to lead to this end, have induced me to give the stay-at-home public, and especially that section of it interested in city improvement, an idea of the efforts that are being made in the capital of France to ameliorate the conditions of life.

There is no need to expatiate on the necessity of a thoroughly good system of public gardening in the great cities of a wealthy and civilized race; nor to describe the want of it in our own case—this is painted but too plainly on the faces of thousands in our densely-packed cities, in

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William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

which the active brain and heart of the country are continually being concentrated. That London is no longer a city, but a nation gathered together in one spot, is a truism: our other great cities are almost keeping pace with it in growth; but in none of them can we see a trace of any attempt to open up their closely peopled quarters in a way that is calculated to produce a really beneficial effect on the lives and health of their workers. Parks we have, it is true; yet they but partially supply the necessities of large cities. They would serve all our wants if the population breathed only as often as they put on holiday attire or have time to walk, it may be several miles, to a park; but, as we are constituted, room for locomotion, room for the ever-cleansing breeze to search out impurities, room for a few trees to steal away the dark and unlovely aspect of our streets—in a word, room for breathing—is a more pressing necessity than parks. The French have their parks and public gardens, and very extensive and well-managed ones, though, like some of our own, embellished in a wasteful and unnecessary manner with costly and tender plants; but their noble tree-planted roads, small public squares and *places*, are doing more for them than parks and pelargoniums — saving them from pestilential overcrowding, and making their city something besides a place for all to live out of who can afford it.

A great many of us Britons are apt to connect real city improvement with autocratic government. One has only to speak of our backwardness, when he is instantly reminded that it is all in consequence of not being blessed with a Napoleon, and that there is for us no chance of amelioration except we can secure a ruler who, after purifying and putting our cities into decent nineteenth century order, will good-humouredly take a month's notice to quit. If the logic of such reasoners were at all in proportion to their abundance, we should move onward but little more progressively than the man-like apes. There is no natural human want or wrong that cannot be remedied by human wisdom and energy; and the most crying evil of this period of change, when the mass of workers are steadily

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William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

deserting the country for the city, is that our towns are still built upon a plan worthy of the dark ages, and barely justifiable where the breath of the meadow sweeps through the high street. Another notion is that the expense of such improvements must always prevent them from being carried out. "No labour," says Emerson—"no labour, pains, temperance, poverty, nor exercise, that can gain health must be grudged; for sickness is a cannibal which eats up all the life and youth it can lay hold of, and absorbs its own sons and daughters." And shall we spare even less in the attempt to provide for the bodily health and happiness of three millions of men closely packed in a city growing faster than the giant bamboo?

The real want is a want of plan; and that it is to be hoped Parliament will soon give us power to obtain. At present this want is glaringly apparent not only in the central and more crowded parts, but all round London, where admirable preparations may be seen for the formation of a mighty cordon of suburban St. Gileses twenty years hence. Next comes the question of expense, and from that neither autocrats nor parliaments can so readily relieve us. Is it too much to hope that a portion of our vast expenditure for arsenals, armies, fleets, and fortifications may some day be diverted to making such alterations in our cities as will render possible in them the rearing of worthy representatives of the English race? Let us hope not; but supposing that we should never see even the dawn of so desirable an era, and that money should still be profusely spent in every way but that of rendering our cities worthy of our time, our knowledge, our civilization, and our race, there yet remains a course by which we may effect some good without increasing the expenditure we bestow on parks and public gardens generally, and that is by a complete alteration in the direction of the outlay.

Our public gardening differs chiefly from that of Paris and other continental cities by keeping itself away from the very parts where its presence is most wanted. We have parks almost prairie-like in their roominess, yet locomotion is scarcely possible in those parts of the city

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William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

where the chief commerce of this great empire is carried on, and square miles of densely packed regions are no more benefited by them than if they never existed. I believe that, by the diversion of all needless expenditure from the parks, and by converting this and all the future money that can be spared, to the improvement of the densely crowded parts, we may effect an admirable change for the better. The parks are now managed on a scale which is quite unjustifiable, if we take into consideration the many miserable quarters of London which are utterly neglected. It must be understood, however, that no imputation is here made against their practical management; but the system of richly embellishing them whilst paying no attention to improvements better calculated to humanize our existence in towns, is unwise in every way.

Everybody conversant with the London parks must have noticed the great display of tender flowers and costly gardening which has been presented in them for some years back. This decoration is of such a nature that it has to be renewed every year; and in every case a set of glass-houses, with all their consequent expense for fuel and labour, must be maintained for each park. On this principle a spot of ground not larger than a table may annually cost several pounds for its embellishment. There is nothing about the system more noticeable and objectionable than its growth. Each park is approaching more and more the character of a costly garden, while for the want of a few hardy trees, a patch of green sward, and a spread of gravel to act as a playground for children instead of the gutter, many close districts of London are so foul and cheerless as to be a byeword all over the world. It is perfectly natural that the superintendents of our parks should each wish to make the one under his charge as attractive as the others, from a mere gardening point of view; and it is even more natural that the authorities should accept the opinions of those officials as the most trustworthy on such matters; but it should be the duty of both to consult the public interest above all things, and that interest points to a complete alteration. It is always unpleasant to reduce an establishment, and doubtless it would be hard for the gar-

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William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

deners to part with their hundreds of thousands of tender flowers or to endure a check in their career of converting our parks into sumptuous gardens; but if they saw that this reduction of expenditure would lead to a more wholesome outlay elsewhere, they would willingly help out its adoption.

No objection could be urged against the costly system alluded to were it not for its expense, which, as anybody may see, is growing under our eyes every day. It is a very good and worthy thing to display much of the beauty of exotic vegetation in our parks and public gardens, provided we can afford it without doing injustice to those who cannot snatch as much time from toil as suffices for an airing in the parks. Span a piece of ornamental park water with a crystal palace, if you will; convert it into a home for the Great Amazonian Water Lily, and fringe it with Palms and the richest tropical vegetation; but first be assured that you are able to afford it, and ask yourself whether the amount required would not do twenty times the good if expended in green grass, and trees, and flowers that endure the open air of Britain. Make, if you will, another ridiculous parterre of stone and water squirts like that at the head of the Serpentine; but first consider whether it would not be wiser to establish a little verdure and freshness in some of the more tumid parts of what Cobbett used to call the "great wen." The new avenue gardens in the Regent's Park, with their griffins and artificial stonework, have certainly cost as much as would have created an oasis in some pestilential part of the East-end. Even the annual expense of keeping up one of these park gardens is equivalent to what would suffice to form and plant a little square like those so freely dotted about Paris during the past dozen years; while the mere conversion of a strip of breezy park into an elaborate garden effects no good whatever from a sanitary point of view.

Let us illustrate the matter in a less general way. Last year a number of Bay-trees in tubs were placed in Trafalgar Square; and it need hardly be added that these require frequent attention both in summer and winter—a storehouse during the latter season—while the wooden tubs in which

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William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

they are placed insure by rotting a perpetual, if trifling, expense. These proved that any kind of tree may be placed in the streets of London as safely as in any other city; but they also showed the very short-sighted, disheartening nature of the whole scheme of our public gardening. Not one single thing could these costly green toys do for our streets or open spaces that could not be effected infinitely better by hardy trees, requiring no attention after planting; and when one thinks of the vast areas of this world of London, that are almost impenetrable, miserable is the only term that can be applied to such remedies as this! It is simply doctoring a wart while a horrid abscess is sapping away the life of the patient. And ascending from contemptible things of this tree-in-tub sort, the same reasoning holds good with much of our higher public gardening.

Who would not forego the trifling gratification of seeing large portions of our parks so elaborately decorated as to require almost as much attention as a drawing-room, if the small sacrifice were accompanied by the knowledge that tenfold greater good was being carried out where the want of it was the blackest spot on our social condition? Are not the materials of nature in our own latitudes good enough for us? See what is done by a few materials in her own gardens; reflect what privileges we have in being able to cull her varied riches from the plains and mountains all over the temperate and cold and alpine regions of both hemispheres; and then consider whether it is wise to spend the public money for glass-houses and the annual propagation and preservation of multitudes of costly exotics. A better and a nobler system than that which is at present the rule in our parks I have endeavoured to point out at pages 22 to 29.

The purposes to which the greater portion of our future expenditure in city gardening ought chiefly to be devoted are the making of wide tree-bordered roads and small simple squares, open to the public at all reasonable hours. The squares should not be embellished in a costly way; but if the persons to whose care their design may be entrusted

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William Robinson
Frontmatter
More information

could not make them beautiful and grateful to the eye of taste by the use of hardy materials which require no costly annual attention after planting, they should be considered unworthy of their posts. Where space could not be afforded for a little expanse of the ever-welcome turf, even a spot of gravelled earth with trees overhead, and a few seats around, would be a real improvement. The Parisian system of managing squares, described in Chapter VI., is infinitely superior to ours, and must sooner or later be adopted with us. Of course its adoption need not necessarily interfere with the private squares, but it should be tried on a small scale at the earliest opportunity.

In connexion with small squares, we may consider the city graveyards; and nothing can be more ill-considered than the mutilations that have in several cases been considered necessary before making gardens of them. Every churchyard can be embellished, without uprooting bones, removing headstones, or anything of the kind.

In the creation of tree-planted streets in the more crowded parts both of London proper and the suburbs, they should not as a rule be formed on the site of old and much frequented streets, but, so far as possible, pierced between them, leaving the largest and most populous thoroughfares of the present day to become the secondary ones of the future. As is pointed out in the chapter on trees suitable for cities, properly selected kinds grow perfectly well in all parts of London. Indeed I know of no city where I could find finer examples of old trees, chiefly in ancient private gardens and half-hidden squares, where they never received any attention after planting. The excellent system of planting trees on every available spot practised to such a great extent in Paris, should be commenced and carried out as far as possible in our cities. It must be long before we can attempt anything like the magnificent boulevards of our neighbours, but let us insert the thin end of the wedge here and there, and perhaps some day we shall have streets to be proud of. In beginning, it is of the highest importance that we avoid as far as possible the meanness and narrowness characteristic of our style of making street, road, and footway,

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Frontmatter
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even in places where want of room is not a drawback. If I am not misinformed, the footway on the land side of the road that is to run alongside the Thames Embankment, near the Houses of Parliament, is to be sixteen feet wide, and probably some of that will be taken up with the proposed line of trees. In this magnificent position, to which any in Paris is insignificant, we are to have a footway that would be considered half a dozen feet too narrow for a second-class boulevard or avenue in Paris!

Whether our general scheme of city gardening be changed or not, we may carry it on with greater economy and much improvement by the adoption of a system resembling that of the public nurseries of Paris—as pointed out in the chapter on these. It is impossible to have greater need for economy than exists in this matter of public gardening; yet the public, in supplying its great London parks, does what hundreds of landed proprietors would be foolish to do, in buying its own evergreens and common nursery stuff! Our parks are already so vast that the sums required for planting must alone form a heavy item, nearly all of which could be saved by a judicious system of public nurseries. At present, too, there is growing up in each park a nursery of glass, an expensive affair—certain to annually increase in cost if a check be not applied. All this is really unnecessary. With a sensible reduction of our expensive system of bedding out, or even as matters are at present arranged, great saving might be effected by having all the tender plants for the park gardens raised in one establishment. If the true and great principle of variety—the advantages of which as applicable to public gardening are treated of at p. 28—were adopted in earnest, this concentration of the expensive glass-house work would be all the more convenient and advantageous.

Another great improvement might be effected by a rigid exclusion from the plantings of every subject that is not likely to thrive healthfully under the influences of London smut. Many specimens of fine evergreen trees and shrubs have been planted in our parks during the last few years, though the only fate that awaits them therein is a lingering

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