

GARDEN-CRAFT.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE THEORY OF A GARDEN.

“Come hither, come hither, come hither ;
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.”

SOME subjects require to be delineated according to their own taste. Whatever the author's notions about it at starting, the subject somehow slips out of his grasp and dictates its own method of treatment and style. The subject of gardening answers to this description : you cannot treat it in a regulation manner. It is a discursive subject that of itself breeds laggard humours, inclines you to reverie, and suggests a discursive style.

This much in defence of my desultory essay. The subject, in a manner, drafts itself. Like the garden, it, too, has many aspects, many side-paths, that open out broken vistas to detach one's interest and lure from the straight, broad terrace-platform of orderly discourse. At first sight, perhaps, with the balanced beauty of the thing in front of you, carefully parcelled out and enclosed, as all proper

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gardens are, the theme may appear so compact, that all meandering after side-issues may seem sheer wantonness. As you proceed, however, it becomes apparent that you may not treat of a garden and disregard the instincts it prompts, the connection it has with Nature, its place in Art, its office in the world as a sweetener of human life. True, the garden itself is hedged in and neatly defined, but behind the garden is the man who made it; behind the man is the house he has built, which the garden adorns; and every man has his humours; every house has its own conditions of plan and site; every garden has its own atmosphere, its own contents, its own story.

So now, having in this short preamble discovered something of the rich variety and many-sidedness of the subject, I proceed to write down three questions just to try what the yoke of classification may do to keep one's feet within bounds: (1) What is a garden, and why is it made? (2) What ornamental treatment is fit and right for a garden? (3) What should be the relation of the garden to the house?

Forgive me if, in dealing with the first point, I so soon succumb to the allurements of my theme, and drop into flowers of speech! To me, then, a garden is the outward and visible sign of man's innate love of loveliness. It reveals man on his artistic side. Beauty, it would seem, has a magnetic charm for him; and the ornamental display of flowers betokens his bent for, and instinctive homage of beauty. And to say this of man in one

grade of life is to say it of all sorts and conditions of men ; and to say it of one garden is to say it of all—whether the garden be the child of quality or of lowliness ; whether it adorn castle, manor-house, villa, road-side cottage or signalman's box at the railway siding, or Japanese or British tea-garden, or Babylonian terrace or Platonic grove at Athens—in each case it was made for eye-delight at Beauty's bidding. Even the Puritan, for all his gloomy creed and bleak undecorated life, is Romanticist here ; the hater of outward show turns rank courtier at a pageant of flowers : he will dare the devil at any moment, but not life without flowers. And so we have him lovingly bending over the plants of his home-garden, packing the seeds to carry with him into exile, as though these could make expatriation tolerable. “ There is not a softer trait to be found in the character of these stern men than that they should have been sensible of their flower-roots clinging among the fibres of their rugged hearts, and have felt the necessity of bringing them over sea and making them hereditary in the new land.” (Hawthorne, “ Our Old Home,” p. 77.)

But to take a higher point of view. A garden is, in many ways, the “ mute gospel ” it has been declared to be. It is the memorial of Paradise lost, the pledge of Paradise regained. It is so much of earth's surface redeemed from the scar of the fall :

“ Who loves a garden still keeps his Eden.”

Its territories stand, so to speak, betwixt heaven

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and earth, so that it shares the cross-lights of each. It parades the joys of earth, yet no less hints the joys of heaven. It tells of man's happy tillage of his plot of ground, yet blazes abroad the infinite abundance of God's wide husbandry of the world. It bespeaks the glory of earth's array, yet publishes its passingness.*

Again. The punctual waking of the flowers to new life upon the ruin of the old is unfavourable to the fashionable theory of extinction, for it shows death as the prelude of life. Nevertheless, be it admitted, the garden-allegory points not all one way; it is, so to speak, a paradox that mocks while it comforts. For a garden is ever perplexing us with the "riddle of the painful earth," ever challenging our faith with its counter-proof, ever thrusting before our eyes the abortive effort, the inequality of lot (two roses on a single stem, the one full-blown, a floral paragon, the other dwarfed and withered), the permitted spite of destiny which favours the fittest and drives the weak to the wall—ever preaching, with damnable iteration, the folly of resisting the ills that warp life and blight fair promise.

And yet while this is so, the annual spectacle of spring's fresh repair—the awakening from winter's

* Think of "a paradise not like this of ours with so much pains and curiosity made with hands"—says Evelyn, in the middle of a rhapsody on flowers—"eternal in the heavens, where all the trees are trees of life, the flowers all amaranths; all the plants perennial, ever verdant, ever pregnant, and where those who desire knowledge may taste freely of the fruit of that tree which cost the first gardener and posterity so dear." (*Sylva*, "Of Forest-trees," p. 148.)

trance—the new life that grows in the womb of the tomb—is happy augury to the soul that passes away, immature and but half-expressed, of lusty days and consummate powers in the everlasting garden of God. It is this very garden's message, "the best is yet to be," that smothers the self-pitying whine in poor David Gray's *Elegy* * and braces his spirit with the tonic of a wholesome pride. To the human flower that is born to blush unseen, or born, perchance, not to bloom at all, but only to feel the quickening thrill of April-passion—the first sweet consciousness of life—the electric touch in the soul like the faint beatings in the calyx of the rose—and then to die, to die "not knowing what it was to live"—to such seemingly cancelled souls the garden's message is "trust, acquiesce, be passive in the Master's hand: the game of life is lost, but not for aye—

. . . "There is life with God
 In other Kingdom of a sweeter air :
 In Eden every flower is blown."

To come back to lower ground, a garden represents what one may call the first simplicity of

* "My Epitaph."

"Below lies one whose name was traced in sand—
 He died, not knowing what it was to live ;
 Died while the first sweet consciousness of manhood
 And maiden thought electrified his soul :
 Faint beatings in the calyx of the rose.
 Bewildered reader, pass without a sigh
 In a proud sorrow ! There is life with God,
 In other Kingdom of a sweeter air ;
 In Eden every flower is blown. Amen."

DAVID GRAY ("A Poet's Sketch-book, R. Buchanan, p. 81.)

external Nature's ways and means, and the first simplicity of man's handling of them, carried to distinction. On one side we have Nature's "unpremeditated art" surpassed upon its own lines—Nature's tardy efforts and common elementary traits pushed to a masterpiece. On the other side is the callow craft of Adam's "'prentice han'," turned into scrupulous nice-fingered Art, with forcing-pits, glass-houses, patent manures, scientific propagation, and the accredited rules and hoarded maxims of a host of horticultural journals at its back.

Or, to run still more upon fancy. A garden is a place where these two whilom foes—Nature and man—patch up a peace for the nonce. Outside the garden precincts—in the furrowed field, in the forest, the quarry, the mine, out upon the broad seas—the feud still prevails that began as our first parents found themselves on the wrong side of the gate of Paradise. But

"Here contest grows but interchange of love"—

here the old foes have struck a truce and are leagued together in a kind of idyllic intimacy, as is witnessed in their exchange of grace for grace, and the crowning touch that each puts upon the other's efforts.

The garden, I have said, is a sort of "betweenity"—part heaven, part earth, in its suggestions; so, too, in its make-up is it part Nature, part man: for neither can strictly say "I made the garden" to disregard the other's share in it. True, that behind all the contents of the place sits primal

Nature, but Nature “to advantage dressed,” Nature in a rich disguise, Nature delicately humoured, stamped with new qualities, furnished with a new momentum, led to new conclusions, by man’s skill in selection and artistic concentration. True, that the contents of the place have their originals somewhere in the wild—in forest or coppice, or meadow, or hedgerow, swamp, jungle, Alp, or plain hill-side. We can run each thing to earth any day, only that a change has passed over them; what in its original state was complex or general, is here made a chosen particular; what was monotonous out there, is here mixed and contrasted; what was rank and ragged there, is here taught to be staid and fine; what had a fugitive beauty there, has here its beauty prolonged, and is combined with other items, made “of imagination all compact.” Man has taken the several things and transformed them; and in the process they passed, as it were, through the crucible of his mind to reappear in daintier guise; in the process, the face of Nature became, so to speak, humanised: man’s artistry conveyed an added charm.

Judged thus, a garden is, at one and the same time, the response which Nature makes to man’s overtures, and man’s answer to the standing challenge of open-air beauty everywhere. Here they work no longer in a spirit of rivalry, but for the attainment of a common end. We cannot dissociate them in the garden. A garden is man’s transcript of the woodland world: it is common vegetation ennobled: outdoor scenery neatly writ in man’s small hand.

It is a sort of twin-picture, conceived of man in the studio of his brain, painted upon Nature's canvas with the aid of her materials—a twin-essay where Nature's

. “primal mind
 That flows in streams, that breathes in wind”

supplies the matter, man the style. It is Nature's rustic language made fluent and intelligible—Nature's garrulous prose tersely recast—changed into imaginative shapes, touched to finer issues.

“What is a garden?” For answer come hither: be Fancy's guest a moment. Turn in from the dusty high-road and noise of practical things—for

“Not wholly in the busy world, nor quite
 Beyond it, blooms the garden that I love”;

descend the octagonal steps; cross the green court, bright with great urns of flowers, that fronts the house; pass under the arched doorway in the high enclosing wall, with its gates traceried with rival wreaths of beaten iron and clambering sprays of jasmine and rose, and, from the vantage-ground of the terrace-platform where we stand, behold an art-enchanted world, where the alleys with their giddy cunning, their gentle gloom, their cross-lights and dappled shadows of waving boughs, make paths of fantasy—where the water in the lake quivers to the wind's soft foot-prints, or sparkles where the swallows dip, or springs in jets out of shapely fountain, or, oozing from bronze dolphin's mouth, slides down among moss-flecked stones into a deep dark pool, and is seen anon threading with still foot the careless-careful curved

banks fringed with flowering shrubs and trailing willows and brambles—where the flowers smile out of dainty beds in the sunny ecstasy of “sweet madness”—where the air is flooded with fragrance, and the mixed music of trembling leaves, falling water, singing birds, and the drowsy hum of innumerable insects’ wings.

“What is a garden?” It is man’s report of earth at her best. It is earth emancipated from the commonplace. Earth is man’s intimate possession—Earth arrayed for beauty’s bridal. It is man’s love of loveliness carried to excess—man’s craving for the ideal grown to a fine lunacy. It is piquant wonderment; culminated beauty, that for all its combination of telling and select items, can still contrive to look natural, debonair, native to its place. A garden is Nature aglow, illuminated with new significance. It is Nature on parade before men’s eyes; Flodden Field in every parish, where on summer days she holds court in “lanes of splendour,” beset with pomp and pageantry more glorious than all the kings’.

“Why is a garden made?” Primarily, it would seem, to gratify man’s craving for beauty. Behind fine gardening is fine desire. It is a plain fact that men do not make beautiful things merely for the sake of something to do, but, rather, because their souls compel them. Any beautiful work of art is a feat, an assay, of human soul. Someone has said that “noble dreams are great realities”—this in praise of unrealised dreams; but here, in the fine garden, is the noble dream and the great reality.

Here it may be objected that the ordinary garden is, after all, only a compromise between the common and the ideal: half may be for the lust of the eye, yet half is for domestic drudgery; half is for beauty, half for use. The garden is contrived “a double debt to pay.” Yonder mass of foliage that bounds the garden, with its winding intervals of turf and look of expansiveness, it serves to conceal villadom and the hulking paper-factory beyond; that rock-garden with its developed geological formation, dotted over with choice Alpine plants, that the stranger comes to see. It is nothing but the quarry from whence the stone was dug that built the house. Those banks of evergreens, full of choice specimens, what are they but on one side the screen to your kitchen stuff, and on the other side, the former tenant’s contrivance to assist him in forgetting his neighbour? Even so, my friend, an it please you! You are of those who, in Sainte-Beuve’s phrase, would sever a bee in two, if you could!

The garden, you say, is a compromise between the common and the ideal. Yet nobility comes in low disguises. We have seen that the garden is wild nature elevated and transformed by man’s skill in selection and artistic concentration—wild things to which man’s art has given dignity. The common flowers of the cottager’s garden tell of centuries of collaboration. The flowers and shrubs and trees with which you have adorned your own grounds were won for you by the curiosity, the aspiration, the patient roaming and ceaseless research of a long