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978-1-108-03736-5 - Hortus Veitchii: A History of the Rise and Progress of the Nurseries of Messrs. James Veitch and Sons

James Herbert Veitch

Excerpt

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HORTUS VEITCHII

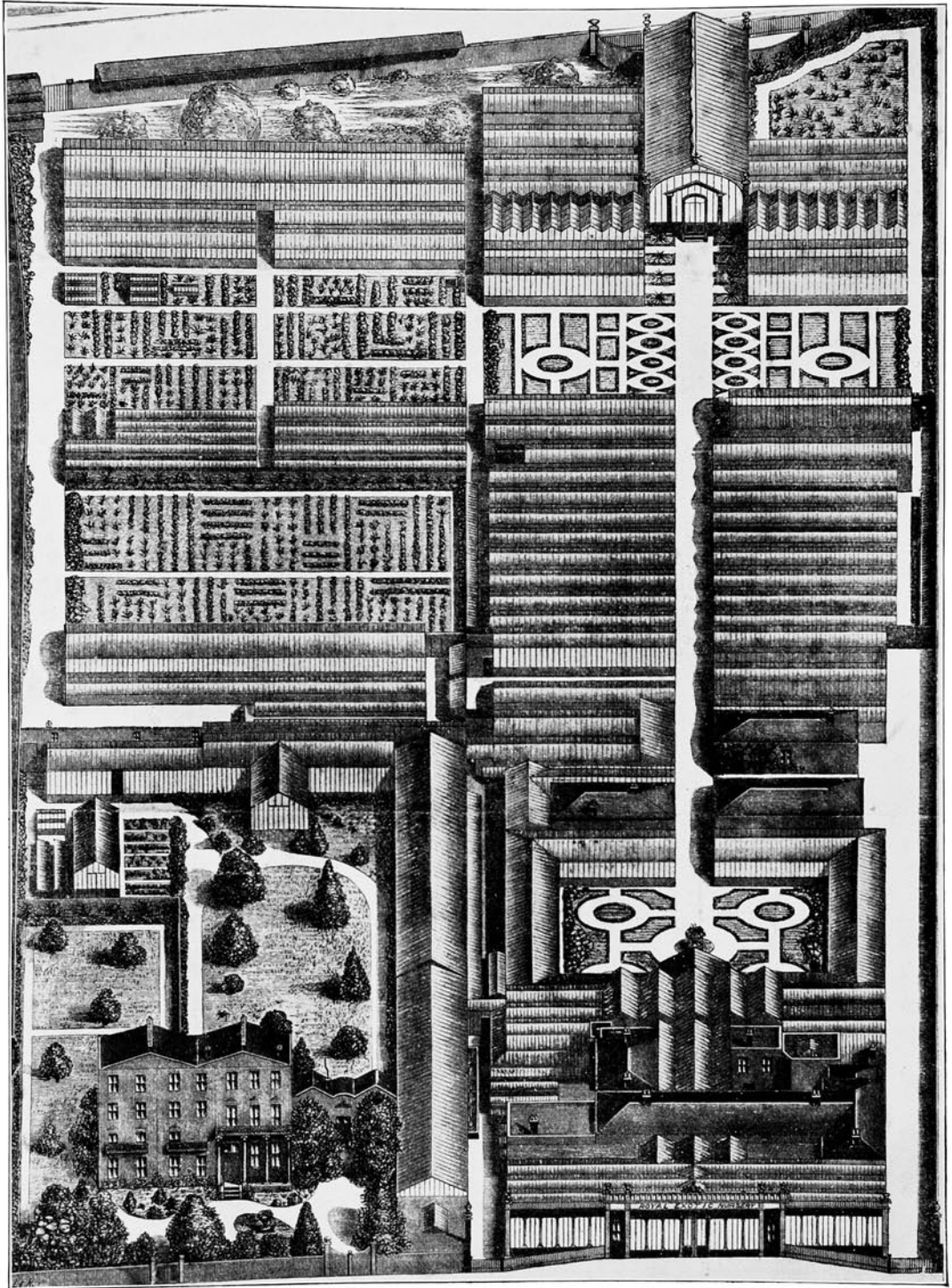
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THE ORIGINAL NURSERY AT CHELSEA

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A HISTORY

OF THE

RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE NURSERIES OF MESSRS. JAMES
VEITCH AND SONS, TOGETHER WITH AN ACCOUNT
OF THE BOTANICAL COLLECTORS AND
HYBRIDISTS EMPLOYED BY THEM
AND A LIST OF THE MOST
REMARKABLE OF THEIR
INTRODUCTIONS

BY

JAMES H. VEITCH

With Fifty Illustrations

London

JAMES VEITCH & SONS LIMITED, CHELSEA

1906

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PREFACE

I AM indebted in this work for help to Mr. Harry J. Veitch, Mr. P. C. M. Veitch, Mr. J. G. Veitch, Dr. Maxwell T. Masters, Editor of the Gardeners' Chronicle, Mr. George Nicholson, the late Curator of the Royal Gardens, Kew, who revised the nomenclature; to Sir William T. Thiselton-Dyer, the late Director of Kew, for permission to photograph various plants in the Royal Gardens, and to Baron Sir Henry Schröder and other owners of large estates for similar kindness; to various members of the staff, past and present, and to my assistant, Herman Spooner.

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INTRODUCTION

THE following pages contain a record of continuous work for over three-quarters of a century in the field of Horticulture by one family,—work which justly may be claimed to have permanently benefited every garden.

The good fortune to usually find the right assistants for both home and foreign service, and the signal loyalty and capability of those selected, largely contributed to success, and the names of several are well known to all with any knowledge of plants.

To the representatives seeking unknown plants at one period or another in almost every clime, fortune has not invariably been kind, but the work of such men as Thomas Lobb, William Lobb, the late John Gould Veitch, Charles Maries and E. H. Wilson, has been a gain in every way; whilst the efforts in hybridizing and selecting of John Dominy, John Seden, V.M.H., and John Heal, V.M.H., have given a wider interest to all cultivators.

It would be strange if results were not forthcoming when such practically virgin lands as California, certain parts of South America, Japan and Central China were offered to men of the calibre of the Lobbs in the early forties of the last century, the late John Gould Veitch in the early sixties, and Wilson but recently; or when such hybridists as those named devoted their life efforts to the improvement of many now well-known garden plants.

It is difficult to realize the gardens of this and other

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countries without many of their now ordinary inhabitants, yet it is within the memory of living men that *Lilium auratum* and *Ampelopsis Veitchii* (*Vitis inconstans*) were unknown, to name but two of many hundreds of plants, and but sixty years since Conifers with certain few exceptions were little more than rarities.

Gardening, as understood to-day, in its broadest aspects, was not possible: the material was not available.

The commencement of the nursery business of the firm of Veitch was on a limited scale, but records exist that Mr. John Veitch, who came from Jedburgh, Scotland, to enter the employ of Sir Thomas Acland at Killerton, Devon, held land, presumably for nursery purposes, in 1808.

His work, as well as that of his son Mr. James Veitch senior, seems to have been entirely in the neighbourhood of Exeter.

There may be read in the *Cottage Gardener* of January 9th 1855 the following notice of Mr. James Veitch, the son of the founder:—

“The history of botany furnishes us with several instances of enterprising men, who devoted a large measure of their means, or personal enterprise, to the enrichment of the botanical collections of this country with the vegetable products of foreign regions. To such men the present generation is greatly indebted; and thus it is that the names of the Tradescants, Peter Collinson, Dr. Anderson, John Frazer, James Lee and the Loddiges are so familiar to the minds and the memories of all true lovers of botanical science.

“For nearly half a century, however, that spirit of private enterprise has, except in a few instances, given way to the united efforts of corporate bodies and government officials; and it was not till the bold and energetic course which has been pursued by a provincial nurseryman of England was

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adopted, that a new era in botanical discovery was begun which has placed the name of 'Veitch of Exeter' among the worthies of science in our own times.

"The father of Mr. James Veitch was a native of Jedburgh, in Scotland, and towards the close of the last century he came to England, where he acted for many years as land-steward on the property of Sir Thomas Acland, at Killerton, and there the subject of the present notice was born on the 25th of January 1792.

"The success which attended the formation of the Killerton nursery was so great, that, in course of time, Mr. James Veitch found the distance of eight miles from Exeter disadvantageous to the interests of the establishment, as it prevented him from competing with those which were nearer the city; and accordingly, in 1832, he purchased that large extent of ground formerly called Mount Radford, but now converted into what is better known by the name of the 'Exeter Nursery,' an establishment which, by the industry and energy of Mr. Veitch and his son, has attained such a position as to be justly regarded as the finest of the kind ever known in England.

"In the year 1837 there were, in the Killerton nursery, two young men named William and Thomas Lobb, who were gardeners, and who were remaining there with a view to improvement in their profession.

"In this same year, Mr. William Lobb was sent by Messrs. Veitch as gardener to Stephen Davey, Esq., of Redruth, in Cornwall, and after remaining there for three years, he was appointed by Mr. Veitch to proceed to the Brazils as a botanical collector, and he accordingly left England in 1840.

"The singular success which rewarded his researches is, perhaps, unparalleled in the history of botanical discovery;

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the labours of David Douglas not even forming an exception. In the first parcel sent home were those two justly popular plants, *Dipladenia splendens* and *Hindsia violacea* ; and from these, down to the later arrivals, including the wonderful *Wellingtonia gigantea*, what a mass of interest and beauty has been added to the gardens of Great Britain !

“ About three years after Mr. William Lobb left, his brother, Thomas Lobb, who was then in the Exeter nursery, was sent by Mr. Veitch to Java, and the success which attended his efforts were not short of that of his brother.

“ In the first parcel he sent home was that magnificent orchid *Phalænopsis grandiflora*, not before known in England, *Vanda suavis*, and numerous others.

“ To enumerate all the plants that these gentlemen have discovered, or which Mr. Veitch has been the means of introducing, would occupy more space than we can afford to devote ; but we shall furnish a list of some of the most remarkable of these introductions, showing to what an extent the country is now indebted to the enterprise of Mr. Veitch.

“ It may be worth recording that all these new introductions, whether in the shape of seeds or living plants, are on their arrival taken under Mr. Veitch’s care. He sows all seeds with his own hands, watches and tends them, and it is not until they are beyond all danger that they are committed to the management of others.

“ In April 1853 the old establishment of Messrs. Knight & Perry, of the King’s Road, Chelsea, being about to be relinquished, was offered to Messrs. Veitch & Son of Exeter, who shortly afterwards became its possessors ; and now in this wonderful establishment may be seen one of the most extensive and valuable stocks of exotic plants which is to be met with in any private establishment in this country.