

A GARDENER'S YEAR

THE GARDEN PAST AND PRESENT

MANY a book have I sat down to commence, all of them with a humble heart, but none that I can remember in quite such earnest fear and trembling as this gardener's diary for the year 1903. For more seasons than I care to count I have been a gardener in sundry lands, following that most ancient craft with a single mind, and not, I hope, without learning some of its mysteries. And yet how much remains to learn, more than ever can be learned by me. My case is not singular, however, and herein lies consolation; at least never yet have I met the man or woman who knew *everything* about gardening, least of all among those who follow it by profession.

These for the most part are good flower-men, or good vegetable-men, or they understand Grapes, or can grow Violets—but fail with Roses and other things. Or perchance, but this is rare, though many there be who swear it, Orchids are their *forte*. (Here I may say at once, speaking as a modest amateur of these last-named lovely plants, rather would I hire a man who had never seen one of them. Of course there are many exceptions, still every grower should pray to be delivered from the new “head” who “understands Orchids.” Better far take a novice who is willing to learn, and train him.)

To sum up, the individual, employer or servant, who is really master of *all* branches of English gardening has

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not been met by me. If he exists, he is as rare as the truly perfect garden that I have seen but once or twice. Pray, then, let it be understood that *I* am not a perfect gardener, but one, in this respect as in others, full of failings, nor is this which I cultivate, a perfect garden. Would that it were.

Still, such as it is, I cannot begin better than by describing it. Some of it is ancient, over a hundred years old, perhaps much more, and it stands high. The soil is a stiff loam upon blue clay. Once when I dug out the bed of the Peach house, I had to remove a quantity of this primeval blue clay, and was surprised at its tenacity and closeness. Pickaxes were needed to get it out, and a tiny square would break up into enough to fill a cart. Yet even in this hard, unpromising material there must be virtue. I know it thus.

With the excavated clay I made a bank about four feet high by six feet or so through at the base. On this bank (after a frost had crumbled it) I planted a Yew fence, perhaps a dozen years ago. To-day it is not by any means all that such a fence should be; but, putting aside the dryness which browns the covering turf and must afflict the roots in summer, for this there are two reasons. Until last year I never clipped it, therefore it is loose in habit; and secondly, for a great part of its length it stands under the shadow of that most beautiful but most poisonous of trees, the Beech. Where they are clear of this upas shade, that is near by the house to which they run, the Yews have, however, done very well. This, I think, shows that there is nutriment to be found even in blue clay, which, I suppose, has not felt the sweet influences of sun and rain for hundreds, or, perhaps, thousands of years.

When first I knew this garden—the summer sun and winter's wild, wet face have looked on it some four-and-twenty times since then—it was small, and, with a lad to help him, managed by one man, now retired to a

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cottage at the gate. Poor lad! he went for a soldier, and, returning at the expiration of his service, took to herring fishing, and was drowned off Lowestoft. To the south-east lay the old tennis lawn, as it does to-day, somewhat hollow in shape ("dishing" is the local term), perhaps because brick earth may have been dug from it when the house was built in generations gone. This is backed by a strip of plantation that screens it from the House farm, and on it stand a copper and two fine green Beeches, one of the latter invariably the earliest tree to burst its buds in all this place. Here, till I drained it, the water stood in pools.

To the south was, and still is, the Flower garden, through which run one wide, central gravel walk and two others. In the turf spaces thus inclosed are round, lozenge, and crescent-shaped beds. In those old days there were edgings of evergreens on either side, but they are gone now, that on the left looking south having become an open border, and that to the right a Rose bed, between which and the ancient, leaning, red-brick wall runs one of the paths. Not far from the foot of this bed, by the round, arched doorway that leads to the other parts of the garden, over which white Clematis trails like snow in summer, stand seven ancient Elms. Very beautiful they are, bare or leafed, but sometimes they shed their great limbs without warning, as is the fashion of this dangerous tree.

Beyond this again was, and still is, the Back lawn, stretching to the top of the steep slope above the river Waveney, but now, on the further side of a sunk path of which no one knows the origin (it may have been part of a moat, or perhaps it was but a humble ditch), a double tennis court has been stolen from this field and inclosed with railings. Here, when they have nothing else to do, the red-poll'd cattle love to stand chewing the cud, either because they take an interest in croquet or tennis, or, more probably, in expectation of the sweet

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cut grass which is thrown to them from the mowing machine.

Passing the arched door, the well, and an ancient Mulberry tree that grows out as far as it can from the shadow of the Elms, to the right, backed by another wall, in those old days stood a forty-feet Vinery. It ended in the tool house and what afterwards became the potting shed, while to the left, beyond an iron gate, and inclosed with a fine Hawthorn fence now done away with, lay the Kitchen garden proper. As I have given up growing Grapes in favour of more flowers, this Vinery, a low-fronted, old-fashioned structure, glazed with little panes of glass, has now been converted into two greenhouses. Of these greenhouses, which have a south-easterly aspect, that to the south, nearest the boiler, which is set in a pit behind the back wall, has the most pipes, and is given up to the growth of plants that need a certain amount of warmth. These I will describe more particularly in due course. Its northern end, divided from the rest by a glass partition and a door, where there are only sufficient pipes to keep out the frost in very cold weather, I devote to the hardier flowers such as Primulas, Cyclamen and Auriculas.

I remember hesitating long before I could make up my mind to cut out the Black Hamboro' grapes, especially as in past years I had remade the border with a proper rubble drainage bed and retaining wall and reset the Vines, their predecessors being worn out. But this garden produces a good deal of fruit of one sort or another, and Grapes on a small scale are nowadays far cheaper to buy when needed than to grow, while, on the other hand, no one can have too many flowers—that is if, like myself, he chances to be a flower-lover. So the Grapes were sacrificed, somewhat to the grief of my old gardener, he who is now retired, for, like most of his class and generation, he loved a few Vines, and understood their management very fairly. Indeed, he grumbled at the decree, and

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assured me that flowers would not thrive in this steep-roofed structure where those on the back stage must stand some way from the glass. In this, however, he was mistaken, as they do well.

To the south of the old Vinery, and separated from it only by a narrow path, is a glasshouse of more modern make, measuring eighteen feet in length and ten or eleven in breadth. I put it up some twenty years ago when I did away with the brick flues of the Vinery, and, as it had ample pipe heat, used it to grow stove plants. My success with these tender subjects was, I remember, but moderate, for in those days we did not understand the scientific use of fumigation, or of syringing with X L insecticide, so that they became much infested with foul blight of various degree. Also, the leading idea of most old-fashioned gardeners with reference to a hothouse was that it should be hot, and so mine kept it as hot as mediæval fancy painted a certain region where flowers are not supposed to thrive. Therefore I gave them up and grew Cucumbers instead.

Now the place is once more transformed, for it has become a Cold orchid house, fitted with the excellent lath shades that work on iron runners raised about eight inches above the level of the roof. But little heat is admitted here, except in severe weather, and in it *Masdevallias*, *Cymbidiums*, and *Odontoglossums* flourish exceedingly. Indeed, I was much pleased when Mr. Tracy, the well-known orchid grower and dealer, after whom is named that lovely plant *Cymbidium Tracyanum*, informed me a year or two back that my little collection of *Masdevallias* was the best that he had ever seen for its size, and asked to have a photograph of them in bloom to show his customers what could be done with these quaint and radiant-hued flowers.

Leaving this Cold orchid house on the right, we pass a little length of Holly fence, in which I am growing up a tree to give shade to the glass and look cheerful in the

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winter months, and the bed of Christmas Roses at its foot, into the Old kitchen garden that lies to the south-west. This may measure about a quarter of an acre, and is bounded to the south-east by a Yew fence, that must, I imagine, be a hundred years old; to the south-west by the Back lawn, from which it is separated by an iron railing; to the north-west by an old brick wall, whereon grow Pear trees that I planted; and to the north and north-east by a higher wall, which I built.

Against this wall, occupying all its length, stand three glasshouses, also put up in my time. The first of these, counting from the north-west, is a lean-to structure, which was rather difficult to build, as it follows the curve of the wall. It measures about forty feet in length by fourteen in breadth. This has a little boiler of its own built into the brickwork at the end, with pipes attached, named the Loughborough, a contrivance I find to answer admirably when heat is required; also to be inexpensive in the matter of fuel.

All the other houses, by the way, are warmed from a single boiler of moderate power, in which I burn coke. Formerly I used anthracite, that gives more heat, but abandoned it, chiefly on account of its expense.

The lean-to house in question is devoted to Figs and Tomatoes, both of which do admirably there, as from its position it is a veritable sun-trap. Of Figs there are four trees of different kinds trained against the back wall, which they now fully cover, providing us with a quantity of their delicious fruit throughout the summer. The Tomatoes grow in front, some of them running up wires trained along the roof of the house and others tied to stakes. As soon as they are cleared away the Chrysanthemums which have been standing abroad in the garden are moved in to take their place, those of the smallest habit being set forward.

These are arranged in a sloping bank in such fashion as to leave a narrow walk between them and the front of

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the house. For some months past they have afforded a noble show of many coloured bloom, but now, at the beginning of the year, they are being removed, draggled and dying. Indeed, as I write, some of the last of them, large and delicate yellow in hue, stand before me on the table.

Next to the Fig house is the Peach house, an unwarmed structure of about the same length, but somewhat narrower, with a very steep pitch, and low, far too low I think, in front. In this Peach house is a deep tank, which receives the rain water from its own roof and that of the Fig house, where a pump makes it available also. A perfect blessing is this tank in places where so much syringing has to be done, for even in dry times it is rarely empty, since, having so considerable a catchment area, quite a moderate rain suffices to fill it afresh with that soft water which is so necessary to trees and plants.

In this Peach house are five trees, one of them a Nectarine, two trained on a wire framework from the front, and three, of which more presently, upon the back wall. Any room that there is to spare is filled up with Tomatoes planted in the ground—that is, in summer; also plants, such as *Imantophyllums*, are placed to grow here beneath the shadow of the Peaches, until in late autumn they are moved back to their blooming quarters in the Warm greenhouse. In the very beginning of spring, however, we grow salad stuff, to come in for early use, such as Mustard and Cress and Radishes, either in boxes or on the surface of the bed in which the trees are planted.

Beyond this Peach house, and separated from it by a narrow gravel path, occupying all the remainder of the wall and partially shaded until about midday by the tall Elms of which I have spoken, stands a larger house, measuring about thirty feet in length by eighteen in breadth. It is a three-quarter span, its back part resting on the wall some six feet below the coping.

This house was built to my own design, with the

aid of local talent, for the purpose of growing Cattleyas, Lælias, and other Orchids that require an intermediate temperature, whence it is known as the Intermediate house. It has a very large tank in the middle, with small hot pipes running through it, to supply water and keep a nice moisture in the air. This tank, when the rain collected from the roof gives out, can be replenished by water from a pond in the southernmost corner of the Old kitchen garden, whence it is pumped and runs through pipes by gravitation, delivering itself here and in other tanks in the Cold and Cool orchid houses.

Over this large cement tank is the central bed, supported by oak props, and formed of sheets of galvanised iron covered with broken coke. Here live my Vandas and other tall Orchids. On another bed over the hot water pipes, carefully made of cement, and measuring three feet in width, which, except for the door space, runs all round the house, stand the Cattleyas, whereof many more specimens are suspended from the roof or, with other Orchids, are placed upon the hanging shelves.

As I trust that my readers will become acquainted with them in the course of this year's journey, these I will not now stay to describe. Of the house itself, however, speaking with the pardonable pride of its architect, I may say that it has proved a great success, although by one expert at least I was told that I had built it too high for the liking of Orchids. This, if I may judge from the results, has not proved to be the case.

So much for the glass in the Old garden. For the rest it is a productive piece of ground, except to the south-east, where the Elms shadow it. Cut them as I may, the roots of these great trees, passing beneath the Yew fence and the gravel path, continually force their greedy tentacles into the manured soil and suck out its goodness. In this section of it, indeed, I have ceased to try to grow vegetables, but use it, first for a line of Dahlias, which do well here, and beyond them for Sweet-

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peas. Then come a row of Gooseberry bushes, a patch of Raspberry canes, and two lines of Gooseberries which I am growing upon my own principle, that is, trained to wires in such a fashion as to make thin hedges easily protected from birds. Gooseberries grown thus will bear enormously if properly pruned, nor is the fruit difficult to gather.

Along the edges of the gravel walks by which this garden is divided, some fifteen or sixteen years ago, knowing no better in those days, I planted a number of espalier Apple trees in succession to other worn-out espaliers, which I rooted up. Indeed, there is now no fruit tree in the garden which stood there when first it came into my care. Nothing, however, would induce me to plant another espalier, as they require an enormous amount of attention, and, owing chiefly, I believe, to the too severe pruning to which they are subjected, are very apt to canker or otherwise go wrong. Pyramid trees on the Paradise stock are, in my opinion, much better in every way.

Such, described very briefly, is the Old garden, which, if I may judge from the stories that I hear of it and its amazing productiveness, must indeed have been a wonderful piece of ground forty or fifty years ago. Perhaps it was, or perhaps no such vegetables grow nowadays as grew in our youth! Also of the latter the ordinary household did not consume so many as it does to-day.

In those times, when the Old garden was in its glory, beyond the Hawthorn fence which is now replaced by the new wall, lying between the stables and the back premises of the dwelling-house, lay a stretch of grass, perhaps half an acre in all. This was divided into two portions by the stable drive, and about it were dotted a few trees, among them an Oak and a Walnut of half a century's growth or so. Also there were two clumps of very tall Elms, one standing at the north end of the

stables, and one near to the kitchen. These, after considering them for some years, although I hated the task sorely, I made up my mind to cut down, since I saw that otherwise a gale would surely blow that must bring them on to the buildings to the destruction of these, and mayhap of folk within them. Well was it that I did so, for it proved that of those clumps of Elms there was scarce one that was not rotten in trunk or root. I am convinced that if I had left them until the hurricane of 1897 most, if not all, of them, would have snapped or been torn up, with results that I do not like to contemplate.

When they were gone the place looked bare, and I planted the grass with standard Apple trees, which came from a firm recommended to me in France. Afterwards I went further and determined to add this land to the garden. On either side of the stable drive I made four-foot wide flower borders, protected by iron railings, that to the left going towards the stable being planted with bush and standard Roses, and that to the right with various perennials. They have proved successful, and now that the Roses have grown into good-sized bushes look very pretty in the summer.

Of the French Apple trees ultimately I grubbed up all but six, of which four, now well-grown standards, remain in that strip of the New garden where the Rose border is, and two in the other strip called the Stable garden, that is bounded to the north-east and north-west by a tall fence of split oak pales, along one part of which is planted a Filbert hedge, to break the force of the cold spring winds. The ground, which may measure something over half an acre in all, and is of sound quality though rather stiff, was thoroughly trenched, and now, after twelve or thirteen years of working, is very productive, although somewhat shaded by trees to the north-west. For the rest it was divided into beds of suitable size separated by rather broad