CHAPTER XI

GERMANY AND THE NETHERLANDS IN THE TIME OF THE RENAISSANCE
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WHEREVER the German language is spoken the history of garden art has been varied and irregular, but interesting. There was a miscellaneous collection of workers in this field, just as there was in all the other departments of study and culture that flourished at the time of the Renaissance. Side by side were princes, burghers and learned scholars. In many ways the division of labour and interests was a check on the development of large standard types. Hitherto we have found this development working outward from individual important centres. In Italy one great town handed over the leadership, so to speak, to another; in France, England and Spain everything was concentrated at one royal court and in the nobility that was so closely connected therewith; but in Germany a peaceful uniform progress was out of the question. True, the stream of Italian art breaks through with much force at the end of the fifteenth century, but it is at once dissipated in a multitude of different channels whose fructifying work disappears only too often from our sight. Therefore we get the surprise of some work of art suddenly appearing, apparently in no connection with anything else that is going on; and we cannot feel (as we so strongly felt in France, and even in England) that foreign influence is simply food for what is indigenous to the soil; because these separate creations for the most part seem to fade away, leaving no real successors.

Almost at the same time that Charles VIII. took his adventurous journey through Italy to Naples, a German prince, Duke Eberhard von Württemberg, made his way across the Alps. He travelled modestly, like a tourist, with only a small retinue, among whom was the learned Reuchlin. Lorenzo de’ Medici received him as his guest in Florence, and showed him his garden, among his other treasures, with great pride. The duke, like his learned friend, admired everything immensely, but his own estate was too small to allow of his making anything similar at home. His journey must be counted among those numerous travels for purposes of study that were taken by learned men of his day. The result was not so much that they gave a strong impetus to effective art at home as that they imbied at the great universities that interest in botany which was now flourishing in Italy, and caused it to spread rapidly in Germany from the first years of the sixteenth century. An accurate knowledge of medicinal virtues was in great demand, and almost all the plants then known were used in medicine. From this point of view most foreign plants were introduced, even in the first half of the sixteenth century, and the earliest botanists were physicians: they were the men who made botanic gardens in their own country when they came back from their travels in Italy. For the most part they were burghers of wealthy flourishing towns, and they had the means for indulging their tastes. These learned students maintained intercourse eagerly with one another. Their gardens
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were worth seeing and attracted visitors from abroad. There is no doubt that in the first intention they were laid out for botanical purposes; but as soon as educated persons had returned from Italy, where they generally spent years, and had assimilated the art and skill they desired, it was natural that, in those early days when utility and ornament had gone hand in hand, the chief honour should be given to utility.

All the important scientific workers at botany in Germany were the owners of large gardens. As early as 1525 Henricus Cordus started a garden in Erfurt after he had taken a doctor's degree at Ferrara, and therewith added a new title of honour to the town: at that time it was already called the Garden of the Holy Roman Empire because of the extensive gardens there. When, five years later, Cordus left for Marburg as professor, one of his first acts was to lay out a garden. His son Valerius, like himself a learned botanist, was a close friend of Conrad Gesner, the well-known physician and man of varied learning at Zurich, who devoted his entire life to science, and died in 1565 at the age of forty-nine of the plague, which he was attempting to combat a second time in his native city. Gesner was the centre of all botanical study in Germany and far beyond. At Zurich he owned a lovely garden, he travelled a great deal, and in his writings he has left behind the names of the well-known gardens of his time, with information about them. These gardens, belonging at first to private scholars, soon became attached as academic properties to the universities. After the Italian botanic gardens founded at Padua, Bologna, and Pisa about the middle of the century had shown how helpful they were for medicine, for plant production, and for the acclimatisation of foreign herbs, Germany and the Netherlands were the first to follow the lead. In 1577 there was founded a botanic garden at Leyden, in 1580 another at Leipzig, and in 1597 another at Heidelberg, to mention the most famous; but soon there were smaller ones in nearly all the universities.

The interest in botany in German countries was now so much in the foreground that it gave a certain scientific character even to the private gardens of important and educated owners. Erasmus, in his Convivium Religionum, makes the guests walk before their meal into a well-kept garden, a square with a wall round it. “The place is dedicated to the honourable pleasures of rejoicing the eye, refreshing the nose, and renewing the spirit.” Only sweet-scented herbs grow therein; the plants are set out in the most perfect order; every species has its own place, and each one has its own vextillum with its name and special virtues. Thus for example speaks the marjoram: “Keep away from me, swine; my scent is not for you,” for although this plant has a sweet smell, swine cannot endure its scent. Thus the owner has talking plants, not dumb ones. The individual beds are enclosed with palisades, in one place striped with green, and in another with the complementary red. The whole garden is divided in two by a brook, which flows into a basin of stucco on whose base one sees beasts of all kinds and colours, and plants mirrored in the clear water. Round about the place there are covered halls, two stories high, making a shady border to the house. The lower story, made with stucco columns, is painted all over, and the pictures portray a second garden with animals and flowers.

Special excuses are given to justify these pictures, and here also the scientific interest in foreign fauna and flora preponderates, in contradistinction to the upper halls, which, lighted from windows on the outside, are painted with serious religious pictures. One gets there directly from the gallery which is beside the house in front of the library. At
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the end of these corridors there are little summer-houses where one can rest and look out over the kitchen-garden. This comprises the vegetable-garden, which is called “the woman’s kingdom”; and the medicinal-garden, which contains the useful herbs for home consumption. On the left is the playground, a meadow with a quickset hedge, and a summer-house in one corner where people can take meals, and which can also be used as an isolation house in case of infectious disease. On the right of the vegetable-garden is the orchard, where more foreign trees are grown; at one end is the apiary, and by the pillared walk of the flower-garden a bird-house is approached by a flying bridge, which perhaps had water under it for the sake of water-fowl.

All the features that characterise the garden of Erasmus are entirely of the northern type—the two-storied corridor in the flower-garden which is laid out with a botanical intention, the bright stream enclosed in a basin, the special meadow playground with hedges round it—all showing the style of the North, one might say the style of the townsman’s garden, belonging to the well-to-do scholar; and it is quite likely that Erasmus had in his mind some particular garden of a gentleman’s family at Basle.

Germany succeeded earlier than any country of the North in winning a place for the town garden. As a fact, the flourishing towns of Upper Germany, and Augsburg ahead of all, felt the influence of the new art sooner than princes at their homes, because of the trade carried on with Italy. The gardens of the Fugger family play a great part in the history of the town, and when Charles V. visited them in 1539 he was astonished at their splendour. A year later Beatus Rhenanus writes enthusiastically about them, and sets them above the French gardens at Blois. Towards the end of the century these gardens have become so extensive that townspeople complain in 1584 that they are
encroaching on their living space. When Montaigne sees them on his journey to Italy, he has much to say about their water-tricks and devices. Drawings of a somewhat later date (Fig. 356) show a great number of notable gardens at Augsburg, founded in the sixteenth century, as many inside the town as outside the walls. There is as a rule an oblong strip, with leafy paths all round, and beautiful flower-beds. But the botanical interest always reigned supreme. In the year 1560 the famous botanist Clusius went on a travelling expedition with the heir of Count Anton Fugger to collect new plants for his gardens, because everyone showed the utmost eagerness to be the first in introducing a new plant into his own garden. It was a wonderful claim to honour and glory when Councillor Johann Heinrich Herward of Augsburg flowered the first tulip in 1559, its bulbs having been sent to Augsburg by the hand of Busbecq the imperial messenger. Thither went Conrad Gesner, and had a woodcut made for his book De Hortis Germaniae. These flowers were destined to develop to such effect as to influence greatly the history of Dutch trade.

Other towns were not much behind Augsburg, for travelling scholars carried the fashion to all parts. As early as 1489 a garden belonging to the Canon Marienstütt on the cathedral island at Breslau was talked about; and this one, as well as the garden of the physician Woyssel (which was flourishing between the years 1540 and 1560), belongs naturally to the class of private botanical gardens, though the descriptions of Erasmus have taught us that such places were not wanting in style and artistic skill. In the last third of that century there was another doctor at Breslau, Laurentius Scholz, and a picture of his garden reminds us strongly of what Erasmus says. Scholz had studied in Padua, leaving there in 1579. Six years later he returned to his native town, and as his means increased so also did his delight in the garden: he felt that the care of it was a patriotic duty, and its reputation soon spread outside Breslau. Like the garden of Erasmus, that of Scholz was a formal square, and was divided into four sections by crossing paths. A Latin inscription was chiselled on the chief gate: "To the praise and honour of Almighty God, to the glory of my native town, for the use of friends and students of botany, also for my own delight, I have established this garden, long neglected heretofore, at my own expense, and have furnished it with indigenous and foreign plants."

The first section, reached from the main gate, was the flower-garden, which was laid out in beds, perhaps enclosed with a palisade, and planted with flowers which were used for wreaths and nosegays. Doctor Scholz took great pains that we should know what the plants were; not only was he a useful medical writer who was always pleased to go beyond his own garden, but after the fashion of his day he had his plants faithfully drawn by a nature artist of Breslau. The chief constituents of his garden were still the old native plants: in spring, snowdrops, violets, crocuses, primulas, auriculas, and crown imperials; in summer, columbines, snapdragons, cornflowers, poppies, and lilies, but during the last thirty years tulips had come from the East, and were shown with great pride in this garden. To the doctor and botanist, however, the second section, the real medicinal-garden, was more important. Here there were 385 kinds, and among them many foreign plants, which the doctor had procured through his connection with Spain, Italy, and Austria. They were planted in beds, and here also for each kind there was a separate bed. By the side of the medicinal herbs (just as we know them by the Capitulare and the cloister plan of St. Gall) there are found the aromatic plants of Italian gardens, such as basil, marjoram, balm, hyssop, rosemary, and dittany. But certain novelties also flowered here,
FIG. 377. THE GARDEN OF CHRISTOPHER FELLER, NUREMBERG
which Portuguese seafarers had brought from India, such as canna and balsam, and best of all the hitherto unknown potato.

Next to the flower-garden was the tree-plantation, and then the orchard; and there grew flowering shrubs, such as laburnum, snowball, and Turkish elder. In the shade of covered walks there were many kinds of amusements. In the last section was the labyrinth, its winding ways overgrown with espaliers and all kinds of climbing plants, and farther on the rose-garden with its nine sorts of roses brought from the East, and various vineyards. The middle of the sections is adorned with fountains, and one is overshadowed by a tree of life, the largest, finest, and also the oldest that Silesia can boast of. The Arbor Vitæ was brought by Francis I. from Canada to Paris, and thence spread very rapidly over Europe. On the west the garden was bounded by a winter-house for bays, pomegranates, oleanders and myrtles, and its walls were presumably painted with Italian scenes. There were two aviaries, and a decorated ice chamber, and in a grotto among other pieces there was a Polyphemus hurling his rock, who was much admired. In the middle of the garden was a summer-house which was open on four sides, and contained pictures, works of art, and musical instruments. It was reserved for merry parties.

This famous travelled physician, who also owned a room full of “excellent rarities” of art, held festivals inspired by the true antique spirit. His friends, men and women, were assembled here to a cheerful feast, for song, for recitations, or for conversation, and here they crowned themselves and their goblets, just as people had done on the shores of the Mediterranean. And the people of Silesia, always fond of poetry, were grateful to their fellow-townsman for the joys of garden and feast: Scholz collected no fewer than seventy poems praising his work. What a ray of sunshine we have here in a country whose flowers are so soon to be crushed under the iron heel of the Thirty Years’ War!

After Breslau, Nuremberg and Frankfort could boast of fine gardens at an early date. Eobs Hesse sang the praises of Nuremberg gardens as early as 1532 in a Latin poem, and Hans Sachs speaks of them in his smooth words. Towards the end of the century the garden of Camerarius, the doctor and botanist, won widespread fame. A picture by Sander shows the garden of a gentleman of Nuremberg, the wealthy Christopher Peller, in the state it was in about the middle of the seventeenth century, when it was still almost unaltered. The main fabric stands round a court, which is enclosed with a very fine balustrade ending in two gates flanked with obelisks. In the court people amuse themselves with all manner of ball-games and ninepins. The garden, of which only half appears in the drawing (Fig. 357), is in four rows of beds edged with stone, each bed made in the old way to contain only one kind of plant. Round the beds, which are joined together in groups of three, there are lower stone borders with ornamental pots set on them: these contain plants of many kinds, with orange-trees and other costly foreign plants that have to pass the winter in a hothouse. To right and left one sees into the tree-gardens, which are separated off by pretty wooden palisades.

Finer than this, which is really a simple garden, is one of the same date belonging to Johannes Schwindt (Fig. 358), a burgomaster of Frankfort who loved display. In this case the enclosure is made of green lattice-work with pillars, windows, and gates. In the windows are pots of flowers; the pillars have little obelisks on them, and busts. One walks into a fine parterre with geometrical patterns marked out in box, and little trees at the corners; round the encompassing hedges there are again benches with flower-pots.
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The wide middle path leads into the flower-garden behind, introduced by two huge statues, a Hercules and a Hermes, and flanked by two obelisks at the end, where there is another parterre. Round the second and third sections alleys covered with green lattice and foliage follow the line, with entrance gates and windows. At the sides there are fountains and statues, and the eye passes over the scene into other gardens.

A very charming picture is shown of the garden at Ulm made by the architect and private gentleman Joseph Furtenbach at the side of his pretty house (Fig. 359) after his return from Italy. The garden is certainly small, “but so arranged that an ordinary private person can get all the pleasures he desires.” Because of its situation, which looking to the south enjoys “the blessed sun,” it was able to produce an abundance of flowers. The order of the beds as described in 1658 recalls, with their simple walled divisions, the same idea as the garden of Erasmus at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and also is like the garden of Schols at Breslau. But the flowering bulbs give a greater diversity of colour. The little garden is enclosed by arboured walks on the side of the house, and between these stands the chief pride of the architect educated in Italy—the grotto, a small erection in rustic with pretty ingenious devices. Also behind this grotto, quite cutting off the garden from the house, there is a summer-house, thought of as a dining-room, “where the master, if ever he is tired and weary from his daily work, can enjoy his slice of bread with his companions in bona caritate, and has a good opportunity of there thanking God for it.”