OLD ENGLISH GARDENS

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the back wall was built the tea house, ten feet square, brick walled with stone flooring and rustic red tile roof overgrown with roses and creepers. In both, the garden wall itself formed one or more sides of the houses, and a small tool house 6 feet by 6 feet, built against the north wall of the tea house, made a sort of division between the flower and vegetable gardens. A rockery planted in tall-growing plants further carried out this division.

The main garden walk was laid out in an L, paralleling the east and rear walls of the garden, the corner of the L impinging on the southwest corner of the greenhouse. The space bounded by the east wall, greenhouse, walk and rear wall of the main house was given over to fruit trees and shrubbery; that between the rear wall and the walk forming the leg of the L (some ten feet wide) was filled solid with flowers, from tea house to greenhouse—hollyhocks, digitalis, sweet peas, phlox and violas forming a sloping bank of blooms from wall to walk. The L enclosed a typical English turf, maybe 40 by 30 feet, brilliant green, soft as velvet, and close as finely woven texture. Grass planted as thick as that at home would perish from mere overcrowding, for the roots must form a solid mat with precious little room left for soil.

In the center of this turf was a sun dial, and, where it bordered the L, tall rose bushes and bay trees were spaced, one each in little circular beds, sharp cut out of the sod. The walk passed between the rockery and the end of the tool house, with a little gravel plaza leading out from it to the door of the tea house, and led direct into the vegetable garden. This did not differ greatly from our own at home except for the absence of corn, lima beans, and melons.

There is one characteristic—and beautiful—feature of all English vegetable gardens that at once strikes the visitor’s eye, and that is the presence of the scarlet runner bean. All over England you can spot the vegetable garden by the ranks of poles, crossed or single, gorgeous with the scarlet-orange blossoms of this bean. It grows on poles much as our lima, but not so thick and bushy, but, while our white-lavender lima blossoms are quite inconspicuous, these profuse scarlet flowers flaunting in the breeze, a blazing banner, are as beautiful as anything in the flower garden itself. They and the hollyhocks are the first thing one notices in Anne Hathaway’s garden, where they grow on rows of slender crossed poles like the lodgepoles of an Indian wigwam. The pods of this bean are long, like a very large string bean, and are cooked with the red bean inside.

A great many of the possibilities of English gardens are beyond our reach because of the essential climatic differences of the two countries. Ours is an iron climate; extreme in its summer heat, stern in its winter cold. England’s is soft and moist, never really scorching hot, never hopelessly frostbound. The South American Araucaria flourishes there, attaining to great fifteen-inch trees in all the big gardens of England, as well as being quite common in private grounds. With us it scarce dares venture forth from the greenhouse. Deodars and Cedar of Lebanon grow everywhere outdoors—I saw many from 18 inches to two feet in diameter—while in America they are not hardy north of the isothermal passing through Atlantic City, N. J. While a deodor north of that line often does come through fifteen or twenty winters, sooner or later one of our frightful freeze-ups occurs and it is gone beyond recall. Owing to the moist air in England all the year, moss forms rapidly on brick and stone, and so they have not that long period of garishness to contend with after construction, nor the certainty of all the moss and age being sunburnt off all stone work in midsummer. Nevertheless, with a reasonable attention to shade, a great deal of this can be obviated or modified in our home gardens, and a brick garden wall will go far to temper the winter frosts. With our hot sun and dry air, ten to four o’clock sunlight is ample for plant growth, giving some opportunity to conserve our moisture, wherefore one should be careful about cleaning away too many trees at first, or, if possessed of a plot in bald sunlight, plenty of fruit trees should be introduced to give the needful shade.

As to soil texture, no doubt the English soil has been worked over and enriched through ten long centuries, but our native soil, well tempered with lime and fertilized with manure and phosphates, can be made to equal the best garden soil in England. While a good deal that they do is out of the question at home, it must not be forgotten that we have an abundance of native stock finer than anything on the other side, so that our American “old fashioned” gar-
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den need by no means be a slavish imitation of something seen in England, but rather a home development, with what is good and adaptable to our use grafted on it from the green little island across the seas.

A FOOTNOTE ON GETTING ENGLISH SORTS IN AMERICA.

A good many of the plants I have described in the foregoing can be bought from American seedsmen and nursemen. Cineraria Maritima, which forms the most characteristic plant in the beds of the New Place Gardens of Shakespeare, is a fern-leaved sort in silver-white color and as far as I know, not obtainable in America, what few sorts that we list being of the broad-leaved variety. It can, however, be had from either of the English seed houses mentioned for 6d. a packet by mail. Echeveria is not listed in our seed catalogues, but may be had from several of our large nurseries as a plant. Viola is listed in American catalogues as “hardy Violet” only two colors, blue and yellow being obtainable. Nearly all the Spencer or giant sweet peas including the picotee sorts are listed—in our catalogues, as are all the large bush plants described in connection with the beds. For borders at least three dwarf lobelias are to be had, and in the round bed with ornamental leaves all the plants mentioned can be bought here through one seed house or another. Many of these flower at different times in the year in addition to the ornamental effects of their leaves.

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the home garden be properly appreciated.

“The successful gardener is he who can enjoy his garden when he is alone in it, as simply as though it were a spring meadow round his house. He may have done what he will with nature; but all his labors will seem like nature to him when he rests from them and he will forget that his flowers owe their well being to his skill. As for other gardens, there may be many more beautiful, and he is glad of it, as a poet is glad of all the poetry in the world. But his own garden is not to be compared with them, any more than his own wife with other women. It is there to be enjoyed for itself, without any pride of possession, and as a place to rest from all labors, even from those that have made it beautiful.”

That is a sound summary of what your garden should be to you, and what mine has always been to me. Keep the instinct for competition out of your garden, grudge no better man his triumphs, learn from all who will be good enough to teach, and if you find your plants becoming an anxiety rather than a rest or joy, then look to yourself and change your hobby. Beyond all things a garden is a place to forget your cares, not to breed them. I have known gardens where the owner did the worrying and the gardeners took their ease; but this is to reverse the proper order. For their credit and honor let the professionals be as careful and troubled as possible; it is their duty; but the amateur, if he be satisfied that the paid worker is justifying his existence, must preserve a peaceful mind. Above all, never call yourself “a great gardener,” because, since Adam, the great gardeners have been far fewer even than most other great people, and not one man in a generation is worthy of such praise.

For my part, when kind women tell me that their husbands or brothers are “great gardeners,” I find myself a thought prejudiced against those husbands and brothers, well knowing that were such praise even approximately deserved, the objects of it would possess a knowledge and have acquired a sense of perspective to set their circle of admirers right in this matter. For gardening is like all creative art: the more a workman knows of his subject and the better, after lifelong struggle, he has come to master his medium and learn its capabilities, the less inclined will he be to take any other valuation of his performances than his own. There have been and still exist vain masters in every branch of human achievement; but they are happily rare, for, even in this, our time, modesty continues to be a jewel in the crown of greatness.

“If any one be in rapture with his own knowledge, looking only on those below him, let him but turn his glance upward toward past ages, and his pride will be abated, when he shall there find so many thousand wits that trample him under foot.”

The man who wrote that would have declared it impossible had he learned of the everlasting fame to attend his own genius; yet from him William Shakespeare was very well pleased to borrow both wisdom and humor.

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WITH this book of Mr. Phillpotts before us, it is easy to understand why his novels are enriched by such delightful dissertations on gardens, such charming character sketches of gardeners