RECRUITING FOR THE SHRUB GARDEN

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 bel ow 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.

* * *

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.
and such learned descriptions of rare and common flowers of the field and garden. We understand why he made Bertram, in “The Joy of Life,” plant the grassy bank to crocuses that with the first sign of spring would announce in purple, lavender and gold that “Loveday is a darling.” Behind this gifted novelist hides a true gardener, a sympathetic grower of flowers, who is brimming with the fascinating lore of bulb, shrub and trees gained by actual work with shovel, spade and pruning knife. His knowledge of plant nature, won by keen observation and experience, is woven into all his books with a most charming thread of humor. We did not know that dry, scientific facts, lengthy names, practical analysis of soil suggestions for winter protection, spring and summer planting, etc., could be clothed in such a charming, readable way. Many people have written learnedly, poetically and sentimentally about flowers, but it has remained for Mr. Phillpotts to write of them as though they were sentient individuals. His description of some few hundred genera with many of their species makes most delightful reading even for people with little or no knowledge of plants. From the first page, when he confesses that, trees being out of the question because of the small space allotted to him, he had fallen back upon shrubs or trees that would preserve shrubby dimensions, “until my concern with them is ended and I go where our ’half hardies’ cease from troubling and the Alpines are at rest,” to the last page, where he insists that “above all, never call yourself a great gardener,” the book is a mine of information and pleasant reading. Who but he could tell us that “Corynocarpus laevigata lives out of doors from May until October, then sneaks into a cold house”; and that “Doryanthes excelsa lives out of doors with protection, but he never does anything more than grow unwell during October, and recovers again by July. His health is the only thing that interests him, and he has no time to justify his existence”?

The illustrations, photographed from his own specimens, are unusually rich and beautiful. Flowers, under the skill of his pen or through the lenses of his camera, are living entities, quite as fascinating and full of character as those that live in his novels. (Published by the John Lane Company, London and New York. 127 pages. 50 illustrations. Price $3.00 net.)